

Group Homes in Lincoln

Lincoln Housing Commission, Affordable Housing Trust, Lincoln Foundation

1. Introduction

This document is intended to inform the Lincoln Community on the subject of Group Homes.

The Housing Commission, the Affordable Housing Trust and the Lincoln Foundation have been working together for more than six months to thoroughly investigate Group Housing in Lincoln. We became interested in Group Housing because it helps us achieve our goal of 10% affordable housing, it helps provide diversity to Lincoln, and it helps solve a critical shortage of housing to meet the special needs of our disabled citizens.

In order to encourage development of special needs housing, the State allows communities to add to their Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) by counting each bedroom in a Group Home as one unit.

We have been working with State-funded agencies that manage group homes for people with mental retardation or mental illness. We have encouraged these agencies to develop plans to establish group homes in Lincoln. We are prepared to use some of the affordable housing funds which the Town already has available to enable these agencies to purchase homes in Lincoln.

2. 40B and SHI

Chapter 40B is a state statute, which enables developers to design and build housing that bypasses local zoning requirements if at least 25% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions.

The goal of Chapter 40B is to encourage the production of affordable housing in all cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. The standard is for communities to provide a minimum of 10% of their housing inventory as affordable.

Once a town has met the 10% goal of affordable housing a town can turn down a 40B proposal and the developer cannot appeal the decision. In effect the zoning bypass provisions are no longer in effect.

Additional reading:

- A slightly dated but good overview of the basic 40B law is at:

http://www.chapa.org/40b_fact.html

- A comprehensive discussion of issues around 40B is at the League of Women Voters site:

<http://www.lwvma.org/AffordableHousing/Affordable%20Housing%20Study%20report%205-Chapter%2040B%20The%20Comprehensive%20Permit%20Law.doc>

Lincoln's Affordable Housing Inventory

Lincoln currently has over 10% of its housing as affordable units.

This percent is calculated as the number of affordable units (numerator) divided by the total number of housing units (denominator) in Town.

List of affordable units in town:

Lincoln Woods 125
Battle Road Farm 48
Old Concord Turnpike (Rt. 2) 2
Tower Road Rental Units 2
Codman Farmhouse 2
Pierce House 1
Sunnyside Lane 4
Greenridge Condominiums 1
Minuteman Commons 6
Deaconess Rental Units 30
Total 221

Shortage

The denominator (total housing units) is always from the latest census - in this case 2000 - while the numerator (affordable units) has been steadily increasing over the decade as the state approves projects (such as the three additional units at Sunnyside Lane).

At present the proposed 30 units of affordable rental housing at the Deaconess Project (off Rt. 2) count in the numerator but the full number of units for the project have not been added into the denominator.

In mid 2010, when the next census is completed and the Deaconess units and other recently built homes will be added, we estimate Lincoln will be 15 to 20 affordable units short of meeting the 10% goal. If we can add this number of units, we will be protected until 2020.

3. Neighborhoods

A Group Home in Your Neighborhood

The goal of a residential group home program is to support the residents becoming vital, productive, and independent members of their communities. Most group homes are standard, single-family houses adapted to meet the needs of the residents. Except for features such as wheelchair ramps, group homes are virtually indistinguishable from other homes in the surrounding neighborhood.

The residents in a group home consider themselves a family, and are considered such by their birth families, the staff, and under Massachusetts law.

Neighborhood Concerns

Unfortunately, group homes sometimes receive initial opposition from neighborhoods where they are located. Concerns over personal security, a decline in property values, or a generalized threat to the neighborhood's quality are relatively common. Research shows that community concerns decrease with time as community members become familiar with group home residents, staff, and programs.

The group homes being discussed for Lincoln are homes for developmentally delayed adults, none of whom have a history of violence or drug abuse. None of the agencies we are working with provide housing for individuals with histories of violence or drug abuse.

By law, group homes cannot be treated differently from other homes in a neighborhood, and neither can their residents. If a resident in a group home were to create a problem, whether for safety or security reasons, or by causing a disturbance in some other way, that resident would be subject to the law exactly the same as any other resident.

Property Values

The most commonly expressed concern, lower property values, is not borne out in neighborhoods where there is a group home. Study after study shows no difference in property values between neighborhoods with a group home compared to those without. Details of these studies can be found in the article referenced below.

Both the agencies we are working with, CMARC and Edinburg, are committed to maintaining their properties at least as well as their neighbors. Lawns are mowed, bushes trimmed, houses painted and maintained properly at all times. These agencies see themselves as long term community members and want their homes to blend in with the neighborhood.

Safety

The second most commonly stated concern is that homes for people with disabilities increase crime in nearby areas. However, research has consistently demonstrated this not to be the case. As shown in one study, when the crime rate for the general public was 112 for every 1000 people, the crime rate for disabled people living in group homes was 3 for every 1000 people.

Traffic

Another commonly expressed concern is about increased traffic. Since homes are staffed 24 hours per day, there may well be increased traffic during shift changes and at other times. Family visits on weekends are also common. When a house is considered for purchase as a group home, traffic is taken into consideration. Sufficient parking space and separation of parking areas from neighbors are highly valued in the selection process.

These concerns have all been discussed with the agencies we are working with. The Lincoln housing groups who have interviewed them believe that when concerns are raised, they will be heard, understood, and acted upon to minimize neighborhood disturbance.

Articles of Interest:

Department of Justice, Fair Housing Act, http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/housing/final8_1.htm

- “Why Affordable Housing Does Not Lower Property Values,” <http://www.habitat.org/how/propertyvalues.aspx>
- “Community Relations: A Resource Guide,” Michael Dear and Robert Wilton, http://www.bettercommunities.org/document/files/Community_Relations_Resource_Guide.pdf
- “Good Neighbors, Healthy Communities,” Tennessee Fair Housing Council, <http://www.state.tn.us/mental/ohpd/pdfs/goodneighborsR.pdf>

4. Group Homes – Definition

Group Home Defined

A group home is a private residence that serves as a home for unrelated persons. The term commonly is used to refer to homes designed for those who need specialized care.

Since the 1970s, there has been an effort to move people out of institutions and into communities, where they can live in safe, supportive family settings, and take part in the communities in which they live. Residents are encouraged to take an active part in their home, such as helping with meals, cleaning, and other activities, as they would in any other family.

There are many types of group homes, and a wide variety of needs that are met. The three organizations in Lincoln who have been researching the possibility of bringing a group home to Lincoln (the Housing Commission, Affordable Housing Trust, and the Lincoln Foundation) have limited their negotiations to agencies which provide homes for developmentally disabled adults. These individuals are supported by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, the Department of Housing and Economic Development, Division of Medical Assistance, and Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. The following description is limited to homes with such individuals.

The group homes proposed for Lincoln will have between 4 and 5 people living in them. The individuals are cared for by a staff of trained professionals, who are with them 24 hours per day. Depending on the needs of the residents, there are two or more staff on duty at all times. Minor modifications to the home may be required in order to provide maximum mobility and safety. Such modifications may include building a ramp, widening doorways, or adapting a bathroom.

Residents will typically have their own bedroom, and will share laundry and bathroom facilities. Kitchen and other living areas are common, and shared in the same way as any family would share common spaces.

Residents typically leave the home on weekdays to work, or to take part in other specialized activities. They also take part in daily exercise, meal preparation, cleaning, and other household chores. Family visits are common on weekends, and some residents may leave to spend the entire weekend with their families. There are also planned activities, which may include visits to local parks, engaging in sports, and other types of outings.

Living in a community means more than just having a house. The expectation is that group home residents will become members of the community.

All residential services are certified and monitored through the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR).

Articles of interest:

- A Peek Inside: Dinner With The Group Home Next Door (from a home in New York) <http://www.queenspress.com/archives/features/2003/0718/feature.htm>
- New York Times article. Published in 1986, but still relevant. Note that the article speaks of homes with 14 adults; those we are considering would have a maximum of 5.
<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A0DE6DB1238F937A15750C0A960948260&sec=health&spon=&pagewanted=2>
- Lincoln Journal, “Town may look at group homes for affordable housing,”
<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lincoln/archive/x1632297437>
- Lincoln Journal, “Housing officials visit group homes in Andover, Tewksbury,”
<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lincoln/archive/x317105899>
- Lincoln Journal, “Housing Groups Look at Group Housing,”
<http://www.wickedlocal.com/lincoln/news/x194402240/Housing-groups-look-at-group-housing>

References:

- Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_home

- Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, <http://www.mass.gov/dmr>

5. Agencies

The State of Massachusetts, through the Division of Mental Retardation (DMR), provides residential long term care for needy individuals through private, generally nonprofit agencies. The housing groups in Lincoln have investigated a number of these agencies and have settled on two for continued negotiations in establishing group homes in Lincoln. The Edinburg Agency actually purchased a home in Lincoln before we were aware of their program and the housing groups are negotiating with them to see how we may best work together. The CMARC Agency needs to establish a group home for an established group that has to leave their present rental residence (due to its sale) in Waltham. They explored several houses in Lincoln but could not find one that could be ready to meet their time constraints.

CMARC

Mission

For more than thirty years, CMARC's mission has been to support people with disabilities as they direct their own lives and destinies.

CMARC in Lincoln

CMARC, a more than 30-year-old organization out of Woburn, works with people with disabilities to provide housing, transportation, day habilitation, behavioral and clinical services, and training, placement, and employment services. CMARC would consider Lincoln an ideal community for a group home but the market price for homes is expensive compared to neighboring communities. Lincoln has been in discussion with CMARC about the possibility of contributing to the purchase price of the home to make it affordable to CMARC in exchange for a long-term deed restriction, limiting the use of the house to people with disabilities. A CMARC home in Lincoln would receive credit for housing units for as many bedrooms for residents as are in the home (usually 4 or 5).

For its residential programs, CMARC buys a home in a traditional neighborhood and does some retrofitting to make the home handicapped accessible, provide 4-5 bedrooms, and dedicate one room to an exercise room. The homes are staffed 24 hours a day, throughout the night with two staff, and are meticulously maintained. Residents leave the home during the day for jobs and/or activities and, when they return, follow a detailed schedule which includes cooking, cleaning, activities (art, movies, entertaining, etc.) and exercise. On the exterior, homes are well maintained, lawns are mowed, and fences installed if necessary for safety or privacy.

Vetting CMARC

Members from the Housing Commission, the Lincoln Foundation, the Housing Trust, and the Finance Committee investigated the history, reputation, and financial stability of

CMARC with the idea of CMARC locating one of its homes in Lincoln in partnership with the town. CMARC has a strong reputation with DMR (the Department of Mental Retardation). Localities, neighbors, and families of the individuals in other CMARC homes spoke glowingly of their attention to detail, and their ability to manage family-setting group homes and serve the residents and the communities in which the homes are located.

Four members from the organizations listed above visited two houses owned and run by CMARC for autistic adults in Tewksbury and Andover. Both homes were regular homes in suburban neighborhoods, well maintained, with a homey and comfortable feel inside. They both housed five adults, a mix of men and women. In these homes, each bedroom was decorated individually; there were fresh flowers, fruit in a bowl, and holiday flags at the door for appropriate seasons. The exteriors were in good shape and, in one home, the manager had a reputation for maintaining the lawn of the circle of the turnaround, in addition to the home itself.

Description by the agency

Since 1968, we've helped more than 3000 people lead more independent lives. Today we're a leading provider of programs and services for people with disabilities, serving more than 200 people every day and employing a staff of eighty.

Over the years we've expanded the scope of our programs to meet the changing needs and desires of the people we serve. These programs form a continuum of services that make it possible for people to access assistance no matter where their needs fall. The people we serve learn through "hands on" experiences in our training programs, at job sites in the community, and from our Vocational, Day Habilitation and Residential programs.

Since our employment programs began, hundreds of people have moved into independent employment and no longer require the support of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Over 90% of the people we've helped to find employment remain employed, and the people who work in on-site with CMARC have more than doubled their production rates - and therefore their paychecks.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that the people we serve have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become vital, productive members of the larger community.

Residential services

Living in the community means more than just having a house. We help our residents turn houses into homes, and we support them in becoming vital, productive and independent members of their communities. We provide:

- A variety of residential options, including 24-hour staffed homes and apartments;

- Support to meet individual needs;
- Ongoing, individualized training in community living and safety skills;
- Financial and money management;
- Health and nutrition education;
- Relationship development;
- Recreation;
- Advocacy and case management;
- Medical case management;
- Clinical consultation.

Referrals for residential services come from family members and advocates, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) and the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH). Services are funded through DMR and DMH contracts as well as private pay options.”

Link to website:

<http://www.cmarc.org>

Contact information:

CMARC
 147 New Boston Street
 Woburn, MA 01801
 (781) 935-7057

The Edinburg Center

Mission

The Center's mission is distinguished by our longstanding belief that all persons have the potential to learn, the capacity for change, the ability to grow and actively contribute to the community. Our mission is to provide an array of innovative services which promote and enhance the quality of life of persons with mental illness, emotional disorders, addictions and/or mental retardation. The Center maintains a specific commitment to providing services to persons whose complex and challenging needs have typically been barriers to successful community living. The core values and guiding principles which govern The Center's service delivery are:

All persons must be treated with dignity, their human, civil and legal rights protected and their diversity respected

Individuals receiving services must be provided with the opportunity to actively participate in their goal development and service plan

- Services must be individualized and based on a person's unique history, experiences, strengths, needs and choices

- Services and support must be provided in an environment which fosters independence and maximizes an individual's potential
- Services must be provided within an integrated, coordinated and accountable system of care
- Service provision must be goal-oriented, based on current research and use outcome data
- Systematic review, evaluation and changes in service delivery must occur to ensure that the highest quality clinical services are provided in the most efficient and cost-effective manner

Overview of Organization

Driven by the challenge to meet the diverse needs of persons with psychiatric and developmental disabilities, The Edinburg Center was established as a private nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation in January of 1977. Agency operations began with a community Board of Directors, one staff person in a basement office at Metropolitan State Hospital and a budget of less than five hundred thousand dollars. Since 1977, The Center has grown into an agency providing eight distinct services to more than twenty three hundred persons each month. These services consist of: 24-hour psychiatric emergency services, residential and respite services for individuals with psychiatric and developmental disabilities, intensive community support services, PACT (Program for Assertive Community Treatment) services, clubhouse and day treatment services and community support and outpatient services provided to both persons with psychiatric and developmental disabilities and substance use disorders. With major sites in Waltham and Lexington, The Edinburg Center serves nineteen communities west of Boston which include Acton, Bedford, Belmont, Boxborough, Burlington, Cambridge, Carlisle, Chelmsford, Concord, Lexington, Lincoln, Littleton, Maynard, Somerville, Stow, Watertown, Wilmington and Winchester. The Center additionally provides some services in the cities of Cambridge and Somerville.

Edinburg in Lincoln

Upon completion of renovations, four men with developmental disabilities will be moving to 15 Bypass Road. These individuals have lived together on Drury Lane in Waltham for many years. Two have lived together for approximately 20 years while the other relative newcomers have lived in the current home for approximately 13 years. All four men are non-verbal. They range in age from 38 - 54 years old. All four men attend day programs during the workweek during the hours of approximately 8:00 a.m. thru 4:00 p.m. All four men are involved in activities on the weekend. These activities may include shopping, going to area parks, walks in their neighborhood, visits with families, eating out at local restaurants, and attending local concerts in the park.

Residential staffing support for these individuals consists of twenty-four hour staffing, seven days per week. An administrator is also always on-call during this same time period. Two members of our staff have worked with these men and have been a stable force in their lives for twenty years. The majority of the remaining staff have worked with these individuals for 10-12 years.

Link to website:

<http://www.edinburgcenter.org/>

Contact information:

The Edinburg Center
1040 Waltham Street
Lexington, MA 02421
Phone: (781) 862-3600

6. Conclusion/Summary

We believe that Group Homes will add to our Town's diversity and fulfill a regional need and provide essential housing for disabled persons. We also believe that group homes are a cost effective way for us to meet our requirement of 10% affordable housing in Lincoln.