



Strategic Plan 2022–2025



Artwork courtesy of George Mason.

In 2022, George Mason donated this piece to Bath Housing. George puts his work in unlikely places to provide opportunities for “an utterly fresh response.” He works with plaster, clay, burlap, pigment, casein paint, and encaustic. This piece, ***Procession***, is color, texture, and contrast in conversation – where together they emerge as collaborators. This represents Bath Housing’s collaborative spirit and focus for the coming years.

Vision

Bath Housing has a vision that our region is vibrant, resilient, and inclusive – and that everyone who works here, grew up here, wants to stay here or wants to come here has a reasonable opportunity to live here.

We envision local policies that support diverse housing opportunities because a range of housing options can meet the varied and changing needs of an economically and increasingly racially diverse population (including current residents and newcomers alike).

We hope our communities will engage in an examination and analysis of existing and potential regulations to ensure compatibility with the stated housing goals.

And finally, our vision is that housing efforts will be approached collaboratively, with regional partners including neighboring community members, municipalities, non-profits and for-profit developers.

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Introduction

Bath Housing is committed to being a leader in finding solutions to the critical housing issues facing Maine right now.

Having a home provides stability. The concept of home connotes feelings of security and belonging. Unfortunately, stable housing is either not affordable or not available for many people. The housing market is changing at a rapid pace with staggering increases in the median sale price of homes and the median rents in the region. The COVID pandemic has created more demand for housing, as many people can now work from home, providing them with the ability to live anywhere. Maine has become a desirable location for them, as well as for the many people seeking asylum from troubled areas around the world. While this increase in population is exactly what is needed, the lack of appropriate housing has created an emergency.

Although people with limited economic resources are most affected by the problems of availability and affordability, the problems cut across socio-economic levels and age groups. Workers offered jobs at BIW and other businesses in the region can't find places to live within reasonable commuting distance. Seniors who want to live in smaller, more accessible homes can't find suitable options to downsize. Families who want to move here are outbid for every house in their price range. Investors are coming into the market. These problems affect our entire community. We cannot grow economically if new people cannot find places to live. We will not have a healthy community if a sizable portion of our population does not have stable or appropriate housing.

These problems are not new nor are they unique to this region. The shortage of housing is at a critical point throughout the state and, as a result, recent legislation has been passed at the state level that seeks to change zoning regulations that restrict the number and types of residential units allowable on parcels of land. New zoning regulations are also being addressed at the local level as well. These changes have the potential of easing our statewide housing shortage but they will take time.

Going forward, Bath Housing will pursue new strategies to keep people housed. This will require us to collaborate in new ways with organizations and government at the local, regional, state and national levels.

Bath Housing is known for properties that are well-managed, well-maintained, and considered assets in their neighborhoods and this will always be our top priority. This level of quality would not be possible without our outstanding staff. It is their skills and dedication that embody the work of Bath Housing and breathe life into our mission.

This strategic plan reflects our priorities for the next three to five years, with a continued focus on: Relationships, Solutions, Advocacy and Capacity Building.

Strategic Plan 2022–2025

Bath Housing is committed to finding housing solutions so people from all backgrounds and income levels can live, work, and thrive – a critical component to maintaining well-rounded communities.

We use Bath Housing as a shared brand of Bath Housing Authority and Bath Housing Development Corporation. These sister organizations are affiliates; they are incorporated separately, governed by separate boards, maintain separate financial records, and file taxes separately. But they share the same mission and do business with each other. Both organizations serve the greater Bath region, including all of Sagadahoc County.

Methodology

This strategic plan provides long-term, overarching guidance for the next three to five years and will be used to make decisions regarding resources and direction. It was originally developed in 2019 with considerable input from the boards and staff, who provided valuable perspective regarding the organization and the needs of current and prospective residents.

In 2020, Bath Housing engaged in a year-long process to update its Housing Market Summary, outline a vision statement, and identify best practices to promote the vision statement.¹

This was followed by a strategy session in early 2022 to further articulate strategic direction to meet the vision. Since the original plan was developed in 2019, two key accomplishments were realized.

- First, Comfortably Home has been used as a model by HUD for a national home modification program.
- And second, Bath Housing Authority successfully repositioned its portfolio through the Streamlined Voluntary Conversion Process, transferring its properties to Bath Housing Development Corporation.

Additionally, beginning in March 2020, Bath Housing's efforts pivoted to serve its residents during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This strategic plan is an update to the 2019 plan given these circumstances. Like before, the plan will be supported by annual action plans developed by the management team and staff to make, track, and report on progress. The strategic plan and annual action plans are reviewed at least annually by the combined boards.

¹bathhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Bath-Report-2.10.2021.pdf

Priorities and Strategies

I. Relationships

As an organization devoted to housing solutions, **we rely on relationships—both internal and external.** These relationships depend on developing trust over time through consistent, credible actions and interactions. External relationships are needed to attract funding, create effective policies, develop properties, and forge new solutions. Strong and positive relationships among our team are essential to achieve our mission. And finally, the well-being of the individuals we serve depends on their sense of relationship to Bath Housing. Do they feel that their needs are important? Do they feel a sense of community? Have we embedded equity and inclusion into every aspect of our work? In short, relationships are the foundation for much of our work. The strategies below are intended to strengthen our relationships in key areas: residents, staff, and external stakeholders.

Strategies

- A. To provide extraordinary customer service for current and prospective **residents of Bath Housing** properties, we will:
 - 1. Treat each person with courtesy, compassion, and respect, regardless of circumstances.
 - 2. Be sensitive to the changing needs of residents.
 - 3. Provide residents with information important to them in a timely manner.
- B. To enable the **Bath Housing team** to deliver outstanding service, we will:
 - 1. Foster a culture of wellness, appreciation, equity, inclusion, and sense of team.
 - 2. Strive to be competitive in wages and benefits.
 - 3. Prioritize internal communication, e.g., enable staff to respond to resident questions, anticipate and organize work, and know about developments and issues related to responsibilities.
- C. To understand the needs and suggestions of **external stakeholders**, we will:
 - 1. Maintain and deepen communication with key funders, regulators, and investors, e.g., HUD, MaineHousing, banks, and others.
 - 2. Seek collaborative, solution-oriented discussions with developers.
 - 3. Seek observations and suggestions from municipal and community representatives including elected officials, landlords, first responders, general assistance, health providers, educators, and others.

II. Solutions

Because individual needs vary widely, **establishing secure and stable homes is a complex undertaking**. The strategies below reflect the reality that one size doesn't fit all. With assistance, some individuals can remain in their own homes. Others need extensive support services wherever they live. Meeting the needs of such a diverse population often requires collaboration with other groups, and new public policies and revenue streams.

Strategies

Bath Housing will rise to the significant need for housing of all types through three key approaches:

- A. Quality property management;
- B. Development and preservation of housing, using the Bath Housing Development Corporation or working with development partners depending on the nature of the opportunity; and
- C. Embrace the continued operation of *Comfortably Home*, which assist low-income seniors to safely age in place.

III. Advocacy

Creating housing options involves an extensive and varied array of stakeholders, regulations, policies, and funding. Our priority is to work with the public and private sectors to develop the policies, funding, and coalitions necessary to make substantial progress. We also will work to build awareness of the importance of stable, affordable housing to the social and economic vitality of communities.

Strategies

A. **To improve public policies** leading to more and better housing options, we will:

- 1. Continue to foster a close, positive working relationship with funders and regulators, MaineHousing and HUD.
- 2. Maintain and grow relationships with municipal officials in our service area, with attention to a wide range of strategies including zoning changes, short-term housing ordinances, disposition of municipally owned properties, tax incentives, etc.
- 3. Seek opportunities to provide information and respond to requests from public officials—at all levels of government.

B. **To build awareness** of the importance of housing in creating a vibrant, stable community, we will:

- A. Work to build a landlord network to increase and enhance voucher utilization.
- B. Promote and share Bath Housing's efforts around housing navigation.
- C. Seek opportunities to emphasize the centrality of housing to improve educational achievement, health and wellness, employment, substance use, and other major social indicators.
- D. Develop the internal structure and capacity to be effective in external communication.

IV. Capacity Building

A principal area of focus is to **align growth with capacity**. A number of capacity building strategies are included in other sections of this plan, including staff development and the cultivation of external resources. The items below relate primarily to the operational areas of forecasting, funding, financial systems, and technology.

Strategies

- A. To support staffing needed to meet current and future demands, we will:
 - 1. Carefully identify best mix of in house versus outsourced labor.
 - 2. Cross-train staff within departments.
- B. To maintain a sound financial position and high financial accountability, we will:
 - 1. Implement and maintain a comprehensive capital assessment of all assets.
 - 2. Prioritize financial reporting and cash flow management tools to effectively monitor finances.
- C. To support efficient operations and ongoing process improvements, we will:
 - A. Identify specific internal process areas on which to focus on our annual action plans.
 - B. Maintain a responsive, user friendly, efficient, and affordable technology system.