

# TOWN OF SUFFIELD

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## The Suffield Observer First Selectman's Column September 2021

I hope this article finds your family rejuvenated and healthy after an unprecedented year and an uncharacteristically wet and stormy summer. This month I focus on **Affordable Housing**, a term that unfortunately takes on multiple meanings, concerns residents, and is not well understood.

The State of Connecticut mandates (Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 8-30g) that 10% of each municipality's housing stock meet State affordability criteria. To count toward a town's 10% minimum, housing must be financed by government programs or *deed restricted to remain affordable for 40 years*.

### Connecticut Affordability Criteria Defined

(Source: Planimetrics Consulting, Conditions and Trends Related to Housing, Briefing Booklet #2)

- Housing is considered 'affordable' if the occupants spend less than 30% of their income on it.
- Based on households earning 80% or less of 'area median income' (which for Suffield is the Hartford metropolitan region).
  - 80% of **Suffield's** area median income:
    - 1 person = \$54,544
    - 5 people = \$84,154
  - 30% for rent:
    - 1 person = \$1,364/month for rent
    - 5 people = \$2,104
  - 30% for home:
    - 1 person = \$196,089 maximum home sale price
    - 5 people = \$254,609

The State also requires municipalities to complete an Affordable Housing Plan every five years detailing how a town intends to increase affordable housing options. (Conn. Gen. Stat. Sec. 8-30j). Suffield's plan is due in June 2022. As a first step, we sought resident feedback through the recently completed Affordable Housing Survey, which yielded 565 responses. The big takeaway? The need for more understanding about what affordable housing means in Suffield and why the plan is important to Suffield.

To begin the discussion, let's break up a few of the components of affordable housing under 8-30g.

### **Affordable Housing Land Use Appeals Procedure (the "Procedure")**

- Towns are subject to the Procedure when less than 10% of housing stock meets State Affordability Criteria
- Provisions for qualifying housing developments include:
  - Affordable units as part of a development
  - Developer **DOES NOT** have to comply with local zoning regulations
  - Developer can be denied by the municipality **ONLY** if public health/safety materially affected

**In essence, by failing to plan for and maintain an affordable housing stock, a town opens the door for a developer to use 8-30g to determine the town's future instead of the community deciding for itself.**

- Two ways community not subject to the Procedure
  - 1 or more 4-year moratoria
  - Exemption due to town increasing current housing units to meet State's 10% affordability requirement

In 2019, Suffield proactively applied for and was granted a four-year moratorium from the requirements of 8-30g providing more time for our public safety/emergency services and public school system to adjust to the 84 unit Brook Hill Village development (Phases 1 & 2) completed in 2019, plan for housing choices, and decide what we, as a town, need and want in Suffield.

### **Suffield Stats**

- 6.7% of housing stock currently considered to meet State Affordability Criteria (less than 10%)
  - 218+ more affordable housing units needed in Suffield to meet 10% minimum
  - Phases 3 & 4 of Brook Hill Village will add another 21 affordable units when built
  - After Brook Hill Village completion, Suffield needs 197 units to meet 10% minimum
- 35% of Suffield's housing stock has appraised values at or below \$254,609 (Hartford metropolitan region maximum sales price to be affordable) but does not count toward 10% State threshold because units not deed restricted for 40 years
  - 1,947 houses/condos at or below \$254,609 out of 5,601 total housing units also not deed restricted and do not count

### **Housing Needs in Suffield**

"People's housing needs and desires change over the course of their lives and providing for a assorted mix of housing helps ensure that people of all ages and characteristics will be able to

find housing in Suffield to meet their needs.”

(Source: Planimetrics Consulting, Planning for Housing Choices, Briefing Booklet #1)

Anecdotes from Suffield friends and neighbors, illustrating these needs:

- A lifelong resident raises five boys, suffers the loss of her husband, and realizes her family-sized house is just too much home now. She seeks a manageable, affordable option within Suffield.
- A Suffield first responder looks to relocate to Suffield given his job’s requirement to quickly respond to emergencies. He’s in search of an affordable option that stretches his housing dollars and is comparable to surrounding towns.
- After losing her Mom and requiring a nursing home for her aging Dad, a daughter finds herself responsible for her disabled brother. He needs an affordable option within Suffield so she can continue to protect his safety and well-being. She hopes to find assisted housing without a long wait list. (Currently, the Suffield Housing Authority wait list averages 30 people).
- First time homebuyers wish to return to their hometown to raise a family with the support of grandparents, still residing in town. They look for affordable starter home options.
- A son returns home after graduating college. While he loves his parents dearly, he’d like the independence of living on his own/with friends within the salary of his entry-level budget. He’s open to any affordable option – and his parents will gladly help him look and move out!
- A single parent wants to stay in-town and remain actively involved with his/her family following a recent divorce. He/she needs an affordable option, but with room for when the kids stay over.

### **Suffield’s Affordable Housing Plan Process To-Date**

- Planning & Zoning Commission took lead on plan as component of Town’s Plan of Conservation and Development also in revision with input from representative stakeholders: Board of Selectmen (BOS), Social Services Commission, Economic Development Commission, Suffield Community Aid, Suffield Housing Authority
- Grant received from CT Department of Housing to hire consultant, study existing conditions and develop plan
- BOS ultimately adopts plan
  - BOS will appoint formal committee to advise on proposed strategies and policies

Results of the survey and the resources noted are available on the Capital Project page at [www.suffieldct.gov](http://www.suffieldct.gov). There will be additional opportunities for feedback, including upcoming Public Hearings. Please stay informed - be part of the plan to grow Suffield for the future.

At this writing, I am cautiously optimistic that I will welcome our community at my office hours at Suffield On The Green on September 11-12. Please stop by. I’ve missed you!