

Norwell Community Housing Trust

Wildcat and Carleton/Lincoln Street Town Parcels FAQs

Who is the Norwell Community Housing Trust (CHT)?

The CHT is a 7-member, volunteer, Town committee appointed by the Board of Selectmen. We are your neighbors and share the same desire to do what is best for our town. One of our responsibilities is to increase affordable housing in Norwell. Please visit our Town webpage to learn more: [Community Housing Trust | Town of Norwell MA](#).

The CHT has spent several years working with third party professionals on what housing priorities meet the needs of Norwell residents and employees. The [2019 Norwell Housing Production Plan](#) (HPP), which was approved by all the Town Boards and the State, summarized the Town goals as follows:

- *Provide affordable housing alternatives to meet the range of housing needs*
- *Promote diversity and the stability of individuals and families living in Norwell*
- *Strive to meet state 10% affordability goal*
- *Preserve the existing affordable housing stock*
- *Leverage other public and private resources in the preservation and production of affordable housing to the greatest extent possible*
- *Ensure that new housing creation is harmonious with the character of the existing community*
- *Plan within the context of Norwell's long-term development objectives*
- *Encourage the integration of smart growth principles in the development of housing*

Why is the CHT proposing housing on Town-owned land on Wildcat and the Carleton property/Lincoln St?

*The **state mandates** that Norwell reach a 10% affordable housing stock. When we are below that threshold, Chapter 40B allows developers to build without having to conform to Norwell's normal zoning rules. By not developing our own affordable housing the town is forced to accept large scale developments (current examples include: Simon Hill - 126 units, High Street – 56 units, Stetson – 48 – 64 units) outside our normal zoning rules.*

Norwell ended 2020 at [4.9%](#) with a total of 180 units counted towards our 10% goal.

Developing smaller scale housing throughout the community protects us from unfriendly 40Bs and allows us to continue to have a say in what housing development looks like in our Town.

What has the Town voted on so far?

*In 2004, a Town Meeting Article unanimously passed authorizing the Board of Selectmen to make the 2 Town-owned parcels of land on **Wildcat** available for affordable housing. The [2005 Norwell Master Plan](#) further established the need to “support the creation of affordable housing compatible with town character” and revived the Norwell Housing Partnership (a predecessor to the current CHT) with a charge to lead affordable housing planning including the use of Town-owned property.*

*In 2020, a Town Meeting Article to transfer ~8.9 acres of the ~124 acre **Carleton/Lincoln St.** property to the CHT for affordable housing received a majority favorable vote, but did not meet the 2/3 threshold required. Town Meeting asked the CHT to come back to Town Meeting in 2021 with a concept for housing on this parcel. We are doing this.*

What would be developed on the Wildcat and Carleton parcels?

We are in early stages of development on both parcels. For the Wildcat parcels, the CHT has been working on a draft Request for Proposal “RFP” to solicit developer partners and concepts for the land. The CHT previously engaged engineering and wetland experts to characterize the property. The draft RFP has not been finalized and the CHT is listening to community members. Abutters concerns have been considered and some have already been incorporated. The RFP is being updated to include the neighbors’ desires to leave a large tree buffer behind the Highfield Lane homes and incorporate walking trails. Downsizing the concept in the RFP is under consideration. In addition, a conservation restriction for protecting in perpetuity the 2+ acres of wetlands can be put in place.

For the Lincoln St/Carleton parcel, the CHT has had perc tests performed that confirmed the parcel has ample septic capacity. An architect was recently engaged to develop concepts and the CHT’s current preference is 5 large homes set on ~3-4 acres that would include a total of 20 apartments. This would meet the minimum threshold to qualify for one year of “safe harbor” (see #5 below). The concept maintains a stone wall and tree buffer along the street with only two of the buildings directly visible from a few homes on Lincoln St. The Main Street vista remains unchanged. If Town Meeting agrees at the May 2021 Town Meeting to transfer this parcel to the CHT, we will start working on an RFP.

All residents continue to be welcome to attend all CHT meetings which are posted with agendas on the Town website.

Both the Wildcat and Carleton properties are specifically identified in the HPP for affordable housing.

What is the Process for the Wildcat and Carleton/Lincoln St projects?

*Prior to the creation of the CHT in 2012, the Town did not have a committee that could move forward in earnest to pursue Town Meeting’s goal to develop affordable housing on the **Wildcat** site. Over the past 9 years they have worked diligently to carry out the Town’s wishes by engaging engineering, environmental and wetland consultants in 2014 to evaluate the land for development. Two different architectural concepts were developed for the land. The project was put on the back burner for three years when the CHT turned its attention to creating the affordable senior/veteran apartments (Herring Brook Hill) at the 40 River St. site of the former police station. The CHT is now finalizing an RFP to engage a professional developer/sponsor who is qualified to assess the financial feasibility of site development. Once selected by the Town, the developer will go through a rigorous process which includes additional stakeholders’ input/approvals. Included in the process will be the Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Commission, Board of Health, Police/Fire Chiefs, etc. Traffic, septic, wetlands protection, safety, scenic road designation and other concerns will all be addressed through this process. These meetings are all open to the public.*

*The process for the **Carleton/Lincoln St.** project will follow the same process beginning with development of an RFP if Town Meeting votes to transfer this land to the CHT at the May 8, 2021 Annual Town Meeting.*

Who would live in these small developments?

*Without having a development sponsor to partner with and an agreed to concept, the income restrictions and unit mix is TBD. At **Wildcat**, the CHT would require a minimum amount of the units (25%) be deed restricted in order for ALL of the units to be included in our affordable housing inventory count. At **Carleton** all of the units would be deed restricted as affordable. This is required because the land was purchased with Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds. At both locations a minimum of 20 units would need to be developed in order to grant the Town one year of "safe harbor." Although we would not yet be at the 10% threshold, during the period of safe harbor, the town would be able to block unfriendly, large scale development in Town for one year.*

The CPA defines community or low- and moderate-income housing as housing that serves households at or below 100 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI). Norwell's AMI for a family of 4 is \$119,000. To put this salary in perspective, a recently posted position for a Norwell Firefighter EMT-P working 42 hours a week had a salary of \$60,492.66. A Conservation Agent scheduled for 37.5 hours + after-hours meetings was recently posted at a salary of \$59,557 - \$79,901. The average teacher salary, as reported by the Department of Education, in Norwell is \$85,328. Modern affordable housing is often referred to as "workforce housing".

Seniors are also a likely group to be interested in this type of housing. Many Norwell seniors would like to stay in town without being burdened with the responsibilities of home ownership. This would be likely for both the affordable units and Wildcat's 75% market rate homes. There was, and continues to be, a waiting list for the over age 55 apartments at the 40 River St. development.

One of the great benefits of a Town led development, in addition to having a voice throughout all aspects of the design, is we can work with the sponsor/developer to have a local preference for any units that are deed restricted affordable. As an example, at 40 River Street, 70% of the units were set aside for Veterans/Norwell Residents or employees of the town. What this means is that the majority of your new neighbors in any deed restricted unit would likely already be a "Norwellian". This is a big mitigant to the common fear of impact on resources (in particular schools); if the majority of the residents are already utilizing Town resources there would not be a material impact.

How do we control our own destiny to avoid unfriendly 40B's?

By doing smaller CHT projects—often with not-for-profit developers—a Town can strategically meet "safe harbor" with as few as 20 rental units per year. By sequentially timing these developments to coordinate with commercial 40Bs, the Town has the opportunity to maintain safe harbor for several consecutive years.

FACTS vs. MYTHS

MYTH: The Wildcat development would clear cut the ~6 acres of land on the two parcels.

FACT: *Approximately 2 acres of wetlands plus a 50-foot buffer would NOT be cleared and could be protected in perpetuity with a conservation restriction. The current concept does not require clear cutting the rest of the land. A prior design with ten cottages was abandoned, in part because it utilized the full upland acreage.*

MYTH: An architect was improperly engaged to develop the concept being included in the Wildcat RFP.

FACT: *As is customary with public sector projects, architects and engineers were engaged—at two different times—by the CHT to develop a concept for the property. The second was engaged in 2018 and the CHT worked with this subject matter expert to help design a concept that would further the Town’s housing goals as approved in the [2019 Norwell Housing Production Plan](#). This was all done in compliance with state procurement laws. We expect that he may work with a developer who wants to respond to the RFP, but will have no advantage in the selection process. At both the new Library and the CHT’s 40 River St senior/veteran affordable housing project, the architect that designed the pre-RFP concept was not selected for the project. The Town has and always will follow the state’s mandated competitive procurement processes.*

MYTH: The Town invested \$3.8M in additional taxes to acquire the Carleton Property.

FACT: *The 123-acre Carleton property purchase was made with Community Preservation Act (“CPA”) funds. Purchase of this property had been a top priority for these funds since Norwell adopted the CPA in 2002. CPA funds are generated by a surcharge on your real estate taxes. The funds are set aside for specific purposes and can only be for specific uses: affordable housing, open space preservation and recreation, and historic preservation.*

Subsequent to the Town vote to acquire the land, the Carleton Committee was established and supported a dual proposal at the 2020 Town meeting to protect nearly 116 acres for conservation and to set aside an 8.3-acre parcel (of which several acres would remain open space). The CHT will be presenting a potential community housing concept at Town Meeting this year. Carefully timed, the 20-unit proposal would be another way to achieve safe harbor and achieve the established goals of the [2019 Norwell Housing Production Plan](#). The Wildcat and Carleton/Lincoln St. parcels are both included in the Production Plan.

MYTH: The Wildcat development would destroy existing walking trails.

FACT: Upon learning of the existing walking/biking trails at **Wildcat**, created and enjoyed by community neighbors, the CHT proposed modifying the RFP to alert any interested developers that public trails should be maintained and worked into their concepts for consideration. The marketing materials for the Wildcat subdivision clearly showed that this land was not a part of the development and its designation for affordable housing was already in place. Well over 100 acres of Wildcat/Donovan conservation land purchased years ago by the Town have many maintained trails. Their accessibility from both Highfield and Bayberry Lanes will not be changed. Those trails connect to the Pathway and sidewalks that extend from Norris Reservation at one end of Town to the NHS and Hanover line at the other.

These conservation lands will also soon connect from the Pathway via the Main St. sidewalk to the 116 acres of the Carleton Property that was acquired three years ago. An additional small parking area is also planned to give access to the land. As noted above, this now connects the Lincoln St neighborhood to the huge amenities of the same trails, Pathway and sidewalks as the Wildcat neighborhood.

MYTH: The Wildcat and Carleton/Lincoln St. parcels should be top priorities for adding more conservation land in Norwell.

FACT: As just explained, these two locations already have direct access to a huge network of trails, the Pathway and Main St. sidewalks. Adding these small parcels to large adjacent conservation land would divert resources from other underutilized conservation areas where trails could be developed.

Per the 2021 Open Space & Recreation Plan, there are 3,213 acres (over 240 parcels) permanently protected in Norwell and an additional 282 acres over 26 parcels for which there is no explicit, permanent legal protection and six acres for which the level of protection is unknown. The Town could proactively be working towards permanent protection of these parcels to achieve conservation goals. The Town has only 3 known town owned sites at this time that could be used for potential housing and to help achieve our state mandated goals: Carleton/Lincoln and two acquired via tax title (including Wildcat).

Norwell has exhibited an overweight in funding and supporting Open Space & Recreation efforts with over 63% of CPA funds being used towards those purposes and less than 15% being used towards community affordable housing. By not working towards our housing goals, we risk larger scale developments destroying even more forested land in town.

MYTH: Other projects already underway in Norwell will achieve the Town's 10% affordable housing goal.

FACT: Norwell ended 2020 at [4.9%](#) with a total of 180 SHI units. Based on town data, Norwell's year-round housing unit count increased to 4006 in 2020 and therefore, pending 2020 Census Data, the number of SHI units required to reach the 10% minimum will likely increase to 401. With the 3-known possible 40B's in town we will NOT achieve our 10% state requirement, but we will be forced to accept 3 large scale developments. It is possible that several other 40B's could pop up in town in TBD locations and we would be faced with even more units coming online.

Utilizing the town designated affordable housing parcels on Wildcat Lane for a smaller scale development with ~20 units (.05% of year-round housing units) would allow us to have one year of safe harbor and block the looming large scale 40B's that have not yet been permitted.

MYTH: The town wants to spend up to \$2M to do work at the Wildcat property after they give it away for free.

FACT: *The CHT does not have access to \$2M in resources to support funding for Wildcat. Any appropriations of funds would require a Town meeting vote. The CHT is open to considering a land donation as a means to make the project financially feasible at both properties. Affordable units cost the same to develop as market rate units, but do not bring in the same rental or sale price income.*

MYTH: The Town could use the Saint Helen's church property as a better site for affordable housing.

FACT: *The Town does not have any control of this large property. Efforts to discuss its future with the Roman Catholic diocese have been unsuccessful. Without maintaining safe harbor or reaching the 10% affordable housing requirement, Norwell could potentially be vulnerable to another large 40B development there that would be abutt several established residential neighborhoods.*

MYTH: The Town has an opportunity to create a 40R Smart Growth Overlay District at Queen Anne's Corner that would provide hundreds of affordable units on land with existing infrastructure.

FACT: *The town explored this opportunity for two years. Unfortunately, after thorough due diligence performed by the Town and the private landowners, a 40R district with housing was found to be infeasible due to wastewater capacity limitations and state drinking water protection standards.*

MYTH: Water from a development at the Wildcat Hill site would harm the South Street wells that provide much of the Town's water supply.

FACT: *According to the Board of Water Commissioners, water from potential development of this site would not impact the South Street wells. Like much of Norwell's housing, both the existing Wildcat subdivision and this potential development are in the aquifer protection district.*

MYTH: Like the Wildcat subdivision, an affordable housing development would require wastewater treatment plant due to unique ecological sensitivities.

FACT: *The potential friendly affordable housing developments on the Wildcat (and Carleton/Lincoln St) parcels would be subject to Title 5. The current Wildcat subdivision needed a wastewater treatment facility due to the configuration of the project, not due to ecological and groundwater issues. In addition, as a development with over 90 bedrooms this subdivision was required to get a Groundwater Discharge Permit from the Department of Environmental Protection. (The existing Wildcat subdivision has 46 homes of 4-5 bedrooms, more than double this threshold.) Any affordable housing project on the Town parcels would fall far below this and require approval by our local Board of Health at public meetings.*