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Housing Navigator Massachusetts Announces the Launch of its Statewide Innovative Affordable Housing Search Tool

The new website allows renters to search for affordable housing throughout Massachusetts, using search filters and explainers to find options that fit their needs. First release includes property listings in 260+ cities and towns.

Cambridge-based, tech nonprofit Housing Navigator Massachusetts, Inc. [HNMI] announced the launch of its affordable housing search tool today, the first website search tool of its kind to be offered in the state. The effort is a public private partnership announced in the fall of 2019, benefitting from the support of the state's affordable housing funders, property owners, and housing advocates.

The innovative, modern housing search platform will raise the experience of searching for affordable housing to be in line with the experience of looking for market-rate apartments on familiar websites like Apartments.com and Trulia.

Renters will be able to use the new website, and its free services, to search for affordable rental housing throughout Massachusetts. The first release includes over 2100 properties and over 160,000 affordable rentals in 260+ cities and towns. There are hundreds more in process. Users may search by their location preference filtering for eligibility, affordability, accessibility, and more. Listings will feature photos, amenities and are mapped to nearby transit.

"Our special sauce has been and always will be collaboration." says Jennifer Gilbert, Executive Director of HNMI, "We would not be here without the early adoption of over 50 large property owners, input from housing advocates, and support of our public sector partners. That puts us in the best place possible for growing impact with more features and property listings. We always have in mind "What else can we do to make this easier and better?"

"The extraordinary divides our state faces in opportunity, housing and technology are more clear today than ever." said Cambridge Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui, "As someone who grew up in two properties listed on the Navigator--Fresh Pond Apartments and Roosevelt Towers-- I know the important role stable housing played in my own life and I wouldn't be who I am today without it. I

look forward to Housing Navigator opening up housing opportunities for everyone across the state.”

The Housing Navigator’s property listings began with data shared from public sector partners. The search tool operates by linking housing inventory data with a user-friendly, modern search interface, which was shaped by consistent input from renters and owners.

An early finding from user interviews was that online information was often not trusted based on out-of-date information, leading renters down time-consuming, fruitless paths. The Navigator will show basic listings where information from public sources has been confirmed. The site’s “verified listings,” noted with an icon, go a step beyond providing renters with additional details supplied by property owners. Additionally, properties newly funded by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, and other partner agencies, will be required to list on the site, keeping the statewide inventory consistently up-to-date. Over 3,000 properties across the state have been identified and are in process.

As of launch, over 400 listings and more than 30,000 affordable units on the site have been verified by property owners including large for-profits such as Beacon Communities, nonprofits like Madison Park Development Corporation, POAH, The Community Builders, Just-a-Start, and several housing authorities such as Cambridge and Chelmsford.

“Part of being a good owner is leveling the playing field for renters. We want more affordable housing options and more choice for renters whether they choose a Beacon community or elsewhere,” said Beacon Communities CEO, Dara Kovel. “Housing Navigator breaks down barriers, fulfilling our commitment to transparency and fair access, and making finding a home easier for everyone.”

Staff at Beacon Communities verified over 7,000 units in the Navigator earlier this summer.

“One of our top priorities has always been, and will continue to be, promoting access to housing equality. So, our participation in the Navigator Housing was a clear decision,” said Karen Fish-Will, Principal & Chief Executive Officer of Peabody Properties and Chair of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board. “This innovative tool will help renters across Massachusetts find affordable housing and that will help us get housing to the people who need and want it.”

“As we continue focusing our efforts as a Commonwealth on building more affordable housing, this important innovation brings a technological solution that improves the way people can find it,” said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Mike Kennealy. “I want to congratulate the team at Housing Navigator and their partners on launching this valuable platform, which will help households find needed housing by removing long-standing barriers and simplifying the search process.”

Lyndia Downie, President & Executive Director of Pine Street Inn, remarked, “Hundreds of people we work with each year will benefit from being able to search, with our staff or on their own. We are especially encouraged by the many listings showing up outside Boston which can keep people housed in the communities where they already have long-term ties.”

Keith Fairey, President and CEO of Springfield-based Way Finders, added “It is unfortunately way too hard to understand what “affordable housing” even means. On top of that, Way Finders serves people in places ranging from Gateway Cities like Springfield to small towns like Monson. We have been part of the Navigator since its planning stages. We are thrilled to be part of this step forward in simplifying housing access for renters across this region.”

Foundations, individuals, agencies and housing owners have financially supported the nonprofit. A recently announced grant from Tufts Health Plan Foundation will support specific work with older adults to bridge the digital divide in digital access and comfort level with online tools.

Going forward, the Housing Navigator will continue to add features to simplify search and resources with deeper information on affordable housing options and the application process. Additional listings will appear on the site as more property owners and managers verify their properties and keep listings accurate and up-to-date.

“The Housing Navigator is an important complement to our work to increase the stock of affordable housing in Massachusetts by connecting residents with available housing,” said Housing and Community Development Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox. “We are proud to support the Housing Navigator’s work, and are thrilled to follow its progress and celebrate its launch. This new tool will help residents across the Commonwealth find affordable housing that meets their needs.”

Founded as a nonprofit in 2019, Housing Navigator Massachusetts, Inc. addresses a glaring digital divide around one of the most important choices we make—where to live. Our user-friendly search tool allows renters to locate affordable rental options that fit their specific needs, working toward a more equitable Commonwealth where every resident has a place to call home.

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Learn more about the effort at <https://www.housingnavigatorma.org/>.

New online search tool at search.housingnavigator.org, (Note site will be password protected until public launch.)