

Ridgefield is looking to add 650 units of affordable housing. What are the possible locations?

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RIDGEFIELD — With its Affordable Housing Plan now approved, the town is looking to answer the question: Where can it put more than 650 units of affordable housing?

[The 33-page plan, called The Home Front 2022, recommends](#) that Ridgefield pursue transit-oriented development, revise its zoning regulations to encourage multifamily housing and promote the “adaptive reuse” of existing buildings into affordable housing, among other suggestions.

The town's Affordable Housing Committee has discussed possible locations, including on Prospect Ridge, Halpin Lane and Bennetts Farm Road and in parts of Georgetown.

Prospect Ridge

The Prospect Ridge location is behind East Ridge Middle School and across from the Winter Garden Ice Arena — and the site is owned by the town.

The town received a grant of \$50,000 from the state Department of Housing to study [whether the property could be developed for affordable housing](#) and has already spent \$3,000 of the funds. Under the grant, the town would determine whether 150 units of new affordable housing could be constructed on about 15 acres of town-owned land.

The location is restricted for use as open space and recreation by a dedication agreement with the state of Connecticut. [Breaking that agreement would require the town to swap land in another location for the same use.](#)

Some residents say any change of use to that land should require a town vote before studies could begin using state grant money.

The Affordable Housing Committee plans to ask the state this week whether it can use the remaining grant to explore other areas in Ridgefield for affordable housing in addition to Prospect Ridge.

Halpin Lane

Another possible location is a site set aside for a group home for adults with mental and physical challenges.

"At the corner of Halpin Lane and Prospect Ridge, there is a half-acre property that the town leased to Ability Beyond about eight years ago, to build a group home," Affordable Housing Committee Chairman Dave Goldenberg said. "It was to build another (Ridgefield) Sunrise Cottage."

The group home would be counted as affordable housing.

However, the home has not been built. "Ability has been doing some planning on this and will be working with (Housatonic) Habitat for Humanity to do fundraising to be able to build the home," Goldenberg said.

For this development, he asked, "How many people can you have living in a single group home?" and "Do they need any kind of variance?"

"It's going to take them a little while to sort this out and make the plans, but they're moving forward and our goal is to help them do it," Goldenberg said.

Bennetts Farm Road

Another prospect for affordable housing is more than 150 acres of land on Bennetts Farm Road at Route 7. It's owned by Eureka, a real estate development firm.

Goldenberg said the property has never come before the Housing Committee. However, it has been [under litigation since 2007.](#)

The defendant, Ridgefield's Planning and Zoning Commission, denied Eureka's application to amend the town's zoning map. The property is zoned as a Corporate Development District, which does not permit residential use, except as "an accessory use to accredited institutions of higher learning," the lawsuit said.

According to the lawsuit, "a primary source of controversy of this appeal concerns Saugatuck Public Water Supply Watershed.

"Sixty-seven acres of the subject property are located in the Saugatuck Watershed. The Saugatuck Reservoir is a public drinking water supply, which is a source of drinking water for a half million people," the case said.

Portions of Georgetown

Goldenberg later mentioned the possibility of development in Georgetown, but the challenge there is sewers. "We're really limited in the density we could add because there's no sewer down there. Adding sewer could be very expensive," Goldenberg said.

He added, however, that the infrastructure is under development, with new sidewalks and new lights on the way.

But there's not a lot of publicly owned property in Georgetown, Goldenberg said, and anything that's developed there would probably have to be done privately.

Recently approved

In October, the addition of affordable housing units was among a handful of special conditions approved by the town Planning & Zoning Commission for a mixed-use commercial and residential building at 34 Bailey Ave.

Although the applicant was not required to include affordable housing in the building, [they volunteered to put in two units](#) that would be considered affordable.

Town's official plan

The Affordable Housing Plan aims to meet the requirements of a state statute that encourage towns with less than 10 percent of its housing stock considered "affordable" to develop more. Affordable housing is defined as costing less than 30 percent of the income of a household earning 80 percent or less of the area's median income.

Under 8-30g, the town of Ridgefield needs an additional 656 units of affordable housing. That would mean 10 percent of the town's housing stock would be designated as affordable. It now has 3 percent of units as affordable housing.

Ridgefield has a poverty rate of [2 percent](#) or 180 households out of 9,000 and has [286 low-income restricted housing units](#).

"We're being very, very careful in identifying potential development sites at this point," Goldenberg said. He said they'll be identified if the state allows the Housing Committee using the grant money to expand the scope of the feasibility study.

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