

**CPA FUNDING:
SPECIAL APPLICATION**

PROJECT TITLE: PHASE TWO Emergency Rental Assistance Program

PROJECT LOCATION: Town of Belmont

CONTACT PERSON: Betsy Lipson and Rachel Heller

ORGANIZATION: Belmont Housing Trust

MAILING ADDRESS: % Town of Belmont Community Development Department

SIGNATURE: 

DATE: August 25, 2020

CPA CATEGORY: Community Housing

AMOUNT REQUESTED: \$100,000

TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$100,000

SPECIAL APPLICATION PHASE TWO EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Belmont Housing Trust is submitting a Special Application for Community Preservation funding in the amount of \$100,000 to continue the Emergency Rental Assistance Program that was funded using CPA funds approved by Town Meeting in June 2020.

According to the Community Preservation Act Plan, the Belmont Housing Trust meets the following project criteria to justify a Special Application for an Emergency Rental Assistance Program:

1. The Belmont Housing Trust was unaware of the opportunity to undertake the project prior to the deadline of the relevant application cycle. The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting unemployment that impacts household income and the ability to pay rent began in March 2020. Although we were able to repurpose previously awarded funds, we were not aware of the scale of the need for additional funding.
2. The project is supported by the Belmont Housing Trust.
3. Failure to secure CPA funding will create a high likelihood that the project will not be able to be carried out to the benefit of the Town because the opportunity is of very short duration. The need for funding this program is immediate. Unemployment remains high, the federal enhanced unemployment benefits program ended July 31, 2020, the new unemployment benefit program has not yet been implemented, and the eviction moratorium is scheduled to end in mid-October. Without this assistance, the housing stability of many renter households in Belmont may be in jeopardy.
4. CPA funding is essential to the success of the project. Belmont has no other state or federal resources to dedicate to a program to provide emergency rental assistance.
5. The Belmont Housing Production Plan states that 44% of renter households are cost-burdened. With the loss of employment due to the pandemic, many moderate-income renters have fewer resources to maintain their current housing.

GOALS:

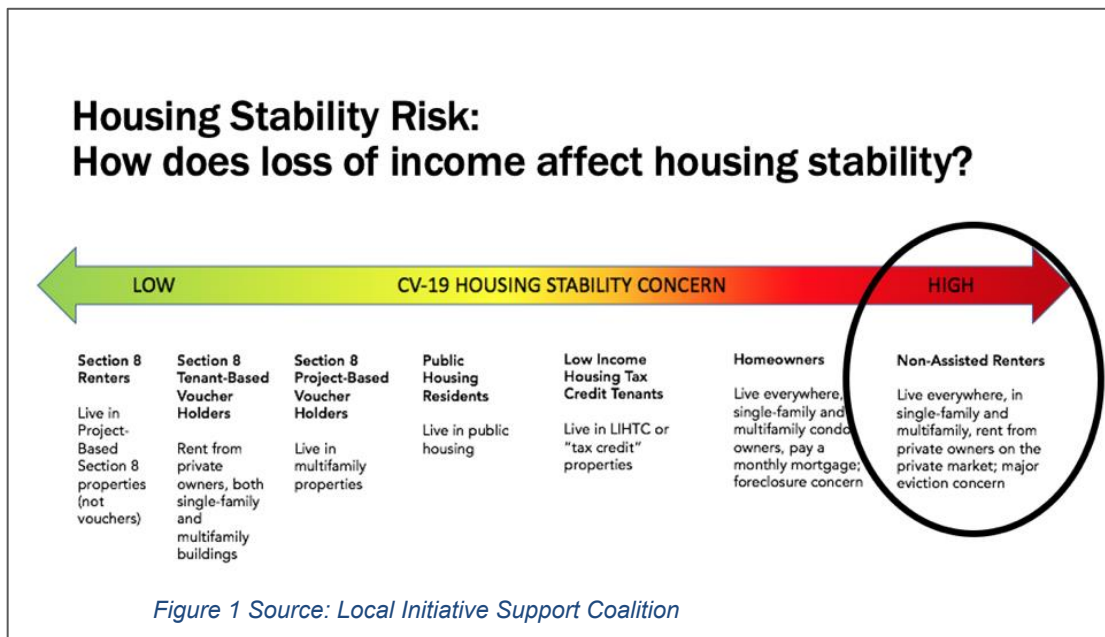
At Town Meeting in June, the Belmont Housing Trust proposed creating an emergency rental assistance program using CPA funding that will provide rental funds to 60-80 Belmont households that suffered a loss of income due to the pandemic. At the deadline for submitting applications for this first wave of the program on August 14, Metro West Collaborative Development (MWCD), our administrative agency, had received 69 applications. Most of the applications were from households with three or more members, and 60 of the 69 households were in 2- and 3-bedroom apartments. Although final eligibility for these households has not yet been determined, it is possible that the CPA funding of \$250,000 approved in June will not be adequate to fund all these applicants. Applications are still being received.

Because this program is accessed via an online application, households need internet access and the ability and know-how to scan and upload documentation. With additional funding for program continuation (Phase 2), we will hold a drive-up event to provide in-person assistance to applicants. MWCD also received additional applications after the deadline and has added these names to a waiting list. The requested additional funding of \$100,000 would provide temporary rental assistance for approximately another 25-30 households.

COMMUNITY NEED

Due to COVID-19, the number of those unemployed or with reduced incomes remains remarkably high. Since our program was launched, 60 other town or city emergency rental assistance programs have started, including ones nearby in Lexington, Sudbury, Newton and Arlington.

The Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council reviewed early May unemployment claims for area communities to estimate housing assistance needs per community. For Belmont, the estimate was based on 978 unemployment claims. MAPC projected 195 households would need assistance.¹ A national housing support organization, the Local Initiative Support Coalition, reviewed national data on Covid-19’s impact on household income by housing type and concluded that non-assisted renters in market rate housing are most at risk of housing instability during the pandemic (Figure 1). These are the renters being assisted by the Belmont program.



Reductions in income and job losses are putting significant financial stress on people living in market rate housing throughout the region. The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston estimated that 36% of renters in New England were at risk of not being able to make their rent payments,

¹ Estimated Housing Assistance Need After CARES Act Benefits End. Boston MAPC. Retrieved August 23, 2020. <https://mapc.github.io/HousingAssistanceMap/>

because of lost jobs or decreased income from the COVID-19 crisis. According to the 2018 Belmont Housing Production Plan, 36.5% of Belmont households are renters (approximately 3,500 households) and—at that time— 44% of all renter households were already cost burdened, paying over 30% of their incomes on rent. Belmont’s Housing Production Plan further demonstrates that 705 renter households (51% of renters) with incomes below 80% AMI are considered severely cost burdened and paying more than 50% of their incomes on rent. Renter households with low incomes have less resources available to help them remain stable in their homes if they experience a reduction in their incomes or loss of their jobs.

Using CPA funds to establish a second round of emergency rental assistance will provide support to those households in Belmont in greatest need, helping ensure their housing stability. Phase 2 will expand the number of such households assisted. Now that the federal government’s program for enhanced unemployment benefits has ended, many households find themselves in an even more precarious financial position, choosing which basic necessities they can afford. The Commonwealth has a moratorium on evictions but that is scheduled to end in mid-October.

It is unknown when business will return to normal and when we can expect unemployment to drop. An emergency rental assistance program can help people hold onto their homes during this time of uncertainty.

Using CPA funds to continue this program will help residents remain in their homes, ensuring their landlords can continue to pay their mortgages and local property taxes, supporting our local economy and the health of our community. A recent national review of these programs in an article from the Urban Institute: Housing Matters Initiative pointed out the need to serve low-income renters who live in single-family homes and the “mom and pop” landlords who tend to own them. Tenants in larger buildings may be easier to reach, and owners of these buildings may be better able to weather delayed or missed rental payments—at least in the short term. This seems especially relevant to Belmont, as so many rental units here are in single family and two-family buildings, not large apartment buildings. Evictions and possible foreclosures would be disruptive to our neighbors, our community, and our local economy.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

There have been overwhelming signs of support for this program across town. At Spring Town Meeting, 87% of Town Meeting Members voted to approve the Housing Trust’s expanded use of CPA funds. Once approved, a local business owner volunteered to make over 4,000 copies of the information flyer and letter to landlords, over 15 households helped with the bulk mailing, the Belmont Food Pantry distributed the information flyer to each client, and along with the Town, these organizations and individuals helped to promote the program: Belmont Library, Belmont Light, Belmont Chinese American Association, Belmont Religious Council, Belmont Council on Aging, Belmont schools, Belmont Against Racism, Belmont Helps, Senator Brownsberger, and Representative Rogers. In addition, the program was communicated through Belmont Citizen-Herald and multiple social media platforms.

Please see the Appendix for letters of support.

PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

The Phase Two Emergency Rental Assistance Program will follow the same guidelines that were previously established for the program funded at the June Town Meeting. Participation guidelines will restrict eligibility to Belmont renter households at or below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI) (see Program Parameters on p. 7 for AMI details). Applicants will be required to provide documentation on prior and current income, demonstrating loss due to the coronavirus pandemic. The program will cover about 50 percent of rent for three months and will pay landlords directly. Both eligible applicants and their landlords will be required to sign a participation agreement. Households living in public housing or having a Section 8, MRVP or other housing subsidy will not be eligible for participation, since these households are already entitled to rent reductions through those subsidy programs if income is reduced.

This emergency program will be administered by a local non-profit that will be responsible for accepting applications, determining eligibility, conducting a lottery if necessary, establishing a wait list, entering into agreements with the renter households and landlords, obtaining W-9s, disbursing monthly checks to the landlords, issuing 1099s to the landlords, and reporting to the funding source. Depending on the estimate of administrative fees for this new program, the current administrative agency, MWCD, may continue to run the program based on Town-approved procurement procedures that were followed for their initial selection.

TIMELINE

Once funding is approved at the September Town Meeting, the Belmont Housing Trust will market the program for two weeks. Successful marketing efforts that we intend to replicate include a prominent place on the Town website banner, the library website, and on-line flyer distribution to a variety of community groups including Belmont Helps, Belmont Religious Council, Belmont Against Racism, Human Right Commission, League of Women Voters, and social media platforms, to name a few. We will also request The Belmont School Department to email the flyer to their parent database, as this plus the landlord mailing were noted to be sources mentioned by applicants in the first round of funding. The deadline for applications for this round of funding will be mid-October. Depending on the date of Town Meeting and funding approval, rental assistance could begin as early as November 1.

CREDENTIALS

The Belmont Housing Trust successfully developed and marketed an emergency rental assistance program using \$250,000 in CPA funds. In four months, the Trust developed program parameters, received approvals from the Community Preservation Committee, the Warrant Committee, the Select Board and Town Meeting, procured an administrative agency, and ran a wide-spread marketing campaign. The administrative agency, MWCD, has managed similar rental assistance programs in Newton and Easton.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The additional CPA funding will provide temporary rental assistance to approximately 25-30 additional renter households in Belmont.

BUDGET (based on approximately 25-30 additional enrolled households)

Assistance payments estimate: \$80,000 - \$86,000 (80%-86%). The actual total will depend on the mix of apartment sizes of the enrolled households.

Administration estimate: \$11,000 - \$13,500 (11%-13.5%)

OTHER FUNDING

The Trust will continue to pursue local donors to support the program.

**PHASE TWO EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM PARAMETERS**

ELIGIBILITY

The applicant must occupy a rental property in Belmont and have household income that is no greater than 80% AMI. Preference will be given to households at or below 60% AMI. The program will use current household income (i.e. wages, unemployment, pension, child support, etc.) to determine income eligibility as well as documentation on loss of income (termination of employment, reduction of hours, or furlough, etc.) due to COVID-19 circumstances to determine if a household qualifies for participation in the program. The applicant will also be asked to certify that they do not have access to other resources to cover the rent.

Household income limits are set by HUD for the Boston area and are based on family size, as follows:

	Household Size: 1	Household Size: 2	Household Size: 3	Household Size: 4	Household Size: 5	Household Size: 6
60% AMI	\$53,760	61,440	69,120	76,740	82,920	\$89,040
80% AMI	\$67,400	\$77,000	\$86,650	\$96,250	\$103,950	\$111,650

DURATION

Three months

Payments made directly to Landlord

MONTHLY PAYMENT

1-bedroom unit--\$950

2-bedroom unit--\$1155

3-bedroom unit--\$1440

These amounts are based on 50% of the HUD Belmont Fair Market Rent for Section 8, by bedroom size.

MARKETING

An intense marketing campaign will last for two weeks and include a drive-up application assistance event. Successful marketing efforts that we intend to replicate include a prominent place on the Town website banner, the library website, and on-line flyer distribution to a variety of community groups including Belmont Helps, Belmont Religious Council, Belmont Against Racism, Human Right Commission, League of Women Voters, and social media platforms, to name a few. We will also request The Belmont School Department email the flyer to their parent database, as this plus the landlord mailing were noted to be sources mentioned by applicants in the first round of funding.

FUNDING

The Emergency Rental Assistance Program Phase Two will be funded by the \$100,000 CPA grant. Private fund-raising efforts will also be undertaken.

LOTTERY

The lottery will be held approximately two weeks after the start of the marketing campaign.

BUDGET (based on approximately 25-30 enrolled households)

Assistance payments estimate: \$80,000 - \$86,000 (80%-86%). The actual total will depend on the mix of apartment sizes of the enrolled households.

Administration estimate: \$11,000 - \$13,500 (11%-13.5%)

APPENDIX

Letters of Support

Amy Kirsch, 8 Jason Rd, Belmont MA 02478

8/22/20

Hello CPA grantors,

My name is Amy Kirsch and I'm the founder and lead chair of Belmont Helps. Since March 14, Belmont Helps has been working to help the whole town with Covid-19 needs. What began as a place to share resources quickly sprouted into a more dynamic system matching volunteers and supporting groceries, meals and food needs as we learned more about the individuals and families asking for help.

More and more we received requests to help others financially and with rent, and although we are happy to help with grocery purchases and food needs, we have limited funding and did not have the capability to help with rent. Belmont helps is happy to connect to area resources and have been consistently sharing information about the housing trust rental assistance to those requesting more financial assistance. I couldn't imagine not having a place to point all those needing this backing, as there are more in town that have lost income due to Covid-19. Not just loss of jobs, but loss of businesses. More people need help than we ever imagined, and as a community we need to be able to assist them.

Belmont Helps experience of residents' needs is consistent with the high number of households that have requested rent assistance. Please accept this letter of support for the Belmont Housing Trust Emergency Rental Assistance Fund from Belmont Helps. It is a great need and fills a deep void.

Best & healthy wishes,

Amy Kirsch

Lead Chair

Belmont Helps

belmonthelps.org

belmonthelps@gmail.com

617-306-9279

Belmont Against Racism, Inc.

P.O. Box 649

Belmont, MA 02478

www.belmontagainstracism.org
belmontagainstracism@gmail.com

August 23, 2020

Dear Community Preservation Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Directors of Belmont Against Racism in support additional funding for rental assistance in Belmont. BAR supported the Spring Town Meeting's decision to expand the Housing Trust's use of previously awarded grant funds and BAR supports this Trust grant application for additional funds for the emergency rental assistance program.

As of this writing, Massachusetts has the highest unemployment rate in the country, putting many people at risk of losing their current housing. The federal unemployment from the Cares Act has ended, eliminating additional funding for households. The pandemic has worsened health and wealth disparities, and unfortunately the federal government assistance was, for many people, too little and too brief.

We thank the Committee and Town Meeting for their approval of expanding the authorized use of the Housing Trust's 2018 CPA grant of \$250,000 that enabled the establishment of the rental assistance program. We understand that 100 people inquired about rental assistance and that we have more residents in need than was provided by this first program.

We also understand that those who have applied for this assistance represent diverse groups in the town. Diversity in our community adds to its vibrancy. Providing rental assistance shows our commitment as a community to be inclusive and support residents regardless of their race, ethnicity, physical or mental ability or income. Helping all residents feel safe and stable in their homes is what makes our community strong. Providing assistance for renters also helps landlords by keeping current tenants in place and providing the income they need to pay their mortgages and other bills.

Belmont Against Racism encourages the CPC to approve additional funding to help these vulnerable tenants who have been disproportionately affected by the economic consequences of this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Kathryn Bonfiglio, President, and The Board of Director of Belmont Against Racism