

TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUND (AHTF)

MINUTES
Tuesday, January 20, 2025, at 6:30 PM
Remote virtual meeting by ZOOM.

Members present: Ananda Timpane, Fred Clark, Bill Cooke, Peter Most, Garfield Reed
Others: Chris Rembold, Michael Wise

Mr. Clark called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM, read the governor's meeting requirements, and recited the roll of members present.

Mr. Clark announced that he and Ms. Timpane had been notified that Krystyna Kurzyca had submitted her resignation from the Affordable Housing Trust Fund to the Town Clerk. Mr. Clark thanked her for her years of service, her valuable contributions, and for bringing a unique perspective on affordable housing needs.

Mr. Clark requested a motion to approve the minutes of December 16, 202. The motion was made by Ms. Timpane and seconded by Mr. Cooke. The motion passed unanimously without changes.

Reports

Mr. Clark reported that Habitat was making good progress at Prosperity Way. The deed was transferred to Habitat as previously planned. He said that he will have more to share in February. Ms. Timpane said that with the project transitioning from infrastructure where the town was providing oversight to a Habitat controlled site it is a good time to review the reporting structure and submission dates. We have been receiving reports from Habitat, but we need to formalize the reporting process. There is a development agreement in place that specifies the responsibilities of each party, which will be the basis of the reports. Reports will be submitted quarterly beginning the report in April. Mr. Rembold said that the template used for CPA grants can be repurposed to fit this project.

CPA: Ms. Timpane reported that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC), Town Manager, and Assistant Town Manager all were engaged in the CPA application reviews with diligence and a desire to work through all of the complex and nuanced issues in accordance with the mission of CPA and in the best interests of the town. The AHTF application was the sole affordable housing application which is consistent with the approach to affordable housing funding that we have been advocating. CPC members also indicated that they understood and supported funding affordable housing programs through the AHTF. The CPC funding recommendation to town meeting was \$325,000. Mr. Clark agreed that the discussion was engaging. He said that we should take heed of the feedback and reporting that the CPC would like to see going forward.

Issues and Advocacy

Mr. Wise was recognized to answer the question of whether the adoption of the residential exemption would affect commercial tax rate? He said that the short answer is there would be no change to commercial taxes. He said that the intention is for the residential tax collection is to be balanced within the residential cohort.

In response to a question, Mr. Wise said that all primary homeowners below the break-even point, approximately 90% of all residential homes, would pay less tax. For sample year FY 2025, the break-even point was \$695,000+/-, for FY2026 it is \$825,000+/-.

Mr. Most was asked to summarize the residential tax exemption and draft a letter to the Selectboard indicating that the AHTF endorsed residential tax exemption. The letter and accompanying charts have been circulated to the members. Mr. Cooke made a motion, seconded by Mr. Clark, to support the letter and to send it to the Selectboard and Town Manager.

Ms. Timpane asked about the suggestion that the AHTF would be available to research and draft a home rule petition in support of rental apartments if so desired by the Selectboard. Mr. Most replied that under the proposal renters do not benefit from the adoption of residential tax exemption and he was outlining a way that they could be included in the future.

Mr. Clark recognized James Garzone, North Plain Road to comment before calling for the vote. Mr. Garzone said that it is not addressing the issue of rapidly increasing costs and that it unfairly shifts the burden onto 8% of the rate payers who will have no say. He said that we should be looking for ways to lower costs to the town.

Ms. Timpane said that the 10% of affected homeowners is made up of second homeowners and full time homeowners whose property is assessed above the break-even point. She said that because we have a largely resort based economy that is attractive it has put upward pressure on housing costs. Our area thrives and is a place people want to come to because it is an intergenerational community. If we neglect our schools or other parts of our town we may lose the very things that make this a special place.

Mr. Clark called the vote. The AHTF voted via roll call unanimously to send the letter of endorsement for the residential tax exemption.

The Property Tax Exemption memo was originally sent to the Selectboard in December 2024. The proposal is to reissue the memo with a request that \$70,000 be allocated in the town budget to implement it. The proposal if adopted would allow the town to exempt new affordably rented dwellings for a period of time to be determined. Ms. Timpane made a motion, seconded by Mr. Cooke, to issue the memo with a revised date. Mr. Reed asked where the funds would come from? Mr. Most replied that the funds would come from the general fund. Discussion reviewed the provisions of the property tax exemption letter. The AHTF voted via roll call unanimously to send the letter of endorsement for the residential tax exemption.

Risingdale Ballfield

Mr. Cooke and Mr. Clark will collaborate on a report to the February meeting.

RFP: The RFP will be issued in early February.

ADU: Ms. Timpane asked Mr. Rembold for his comments on how the ADU Pilot worked out. Mr. Rembold said that while it was helpful to have Construct administer the selection process there was still a lot of work for town staff. Going forward, he recommends having a housing

coordinator or similar role handle as much as possible. Ms. Timpane asked that members review the ADU documents and bring comments to the next meeting. The ADU RFP needs to be issued in early March in order to get applicants reviewed and approved by the end of the fiscal year.

Down Payment Assistance

The AHTF has received a Down Payment Assistance application requesting \$23,000 from Camille Stanton to purchase a house on Railroad Street that they have been renting for \$230,000. They are income qualified, have completed the training, and have been approved for a mortgage. Mr. Clark made a motion, seconded by Ms. Timpane, to approve the application for \$23,000. The AHTF voted to approve unanimously via roll call.

Housing Stabilization

We will invite the new Director of Construct, Inc. or other staff to a future meeting to present details.

Trustee Speak

Mr. Clark said that the Selectboard and Town Manager has invited the AHTF come to the February 9. Mr. Clark and Ms. Timpane will represent the AHTF and share with the members at the February meeting.

Ms. Timpane said that in considering applicants to fill the open position on the Trust, it would be valuable to have someone who is a renter on the board.

A subcommittee meeting has been posted for January 22 to prepare for the Selectboard presentation.

Citizen Speak-none

Media Speak - none

Adjournment

Hearing no objection, Mr. Clark adjourned the meeting 8 :01



January 20, 2026

Steve Bannon, Selectboard Chair
Town Hall
334 Main Street
Great Barrington, Massachusetts 01230

RE: Adoption of the Residential Exemption

Dear Mr. Bannon and Great Barrington Selectboard,

At its meeting on December 16, 2025, the Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) received a presentation from Great Barrington resident Michael Wise concerning the residential exemption. Following that presentation, the AHTF voted unanimously to recommend that the Selectboard take the following actions:

1. Adopt the residential exemption at the highest level permitted under applicable state law at its next tax classification meeting; and
2. Allocate \$75,000 in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget to ensure sufficient funding is in place for the program's administration and implementation.

The residential exemption is a local-option tax mechanism authorized by M.G.L. c. 59, § 5C. Each year, at its tax classification hearing, the Selectboard may establish a deduction from the assessed value of properties that serve as the principal residence of a full-time resident taxpayer. This exemption is a fixed dollar amount calculated by reference to the town's average residential property value.

While current state law caps the exemption at 35%, Great Barrington is eligible to adopt the "seasonal community" designation under the Affordable Homes Act (St. 2024, c. 150). Should the Town vote to adopt this designation at the May Town Meeting, the AHTF strongly recommends that the Selectboard exercise this expanded authority to implement the residential exemption at the 50% threshold.

Consistent with its mandate to promote housing affordability, the AHTF found the following points from Mr. Wise's presentation to be compelling factors supporting adoption of the exemption:

- The exemption reduces housing costs for the majority of residents who require financial relief.
- Adoption enables the Town to fund significant capital expenditures (e.g., bridge and high school replacement costs and potential acquisition of the Housatonic Water Works Company) without jeopardizing homeownership for those least able to afford tax increases.
- Data suggests the exemption would lower the property tax bill for approximately 90% of full-time residential homeowners.
- Based on FY 2024 data, a 35% exemption would have saved the owners of a median-value home approximately \$1,200 (20%) on their tax bill. Owners of a "typical" home (the most common value range) would have saved approximately \$1,460 (28%).

Because Great Barrington maintains a single tax rate rather than a split rate, commercial properties will not experience an increase in property taxes as a result of this proposal. The residential exemption is revenue-neutral across the Town's entire tax base; the proposed resulting shift in the tax burden occurs entirely within the residential class. Consequently, the Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property (CIP) classes are unaffected by the proposed shift, as their tax rate remains tied to the Town's standard single tax rate.

While the residential exemption is revenue-neutral for the Town, it does shift the tax burden. Specifically, approximately 10% of full-time residential property owners—those with homes assessed above the \$695,783 “break-even” point in FY 2024—and all seasonal homeowners would see an increase. Notably, half of the properties at or above the break-even point are second homes.

For the Selectboard's reference, we have attached three charts presented by Mr. Wise that informed our decision:

1. Distribution of home values: Illustrates the relationship between “average” home values, “typical” home values, and the break-even point.
2. Tax bill savings: Demonstrates the progressive nature of the shift, showing savings for 90% of residents.
3. FY 2024 Data: Compares tax impacts at the 10%, 35% (current maximum level), and 50% (reflects “seasonal community” designation) exemption levels.

Regarding the \$75,000 budget allocation, Mr. Wise explained from discussions with the prior Assessor that certain “start-up” costs are necessary to identify eligible properties and administer the program. Additionally, while the exemption currently excludes rental properties, the AHTF is prepared to explore a Home Rule petition in the future to extend these protections to full-time rental units, ensuring that renters are not adversely impacted by the shift.

The AHTF believes the residential exemption is a vital and equitable tool to ensure that full-time residents, particularly those on fixed incomes, can remain in their homes as the Town addresses its long-term infrastructure needs.

The Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust Fund is available to explore this proposal further with the Selectboard.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

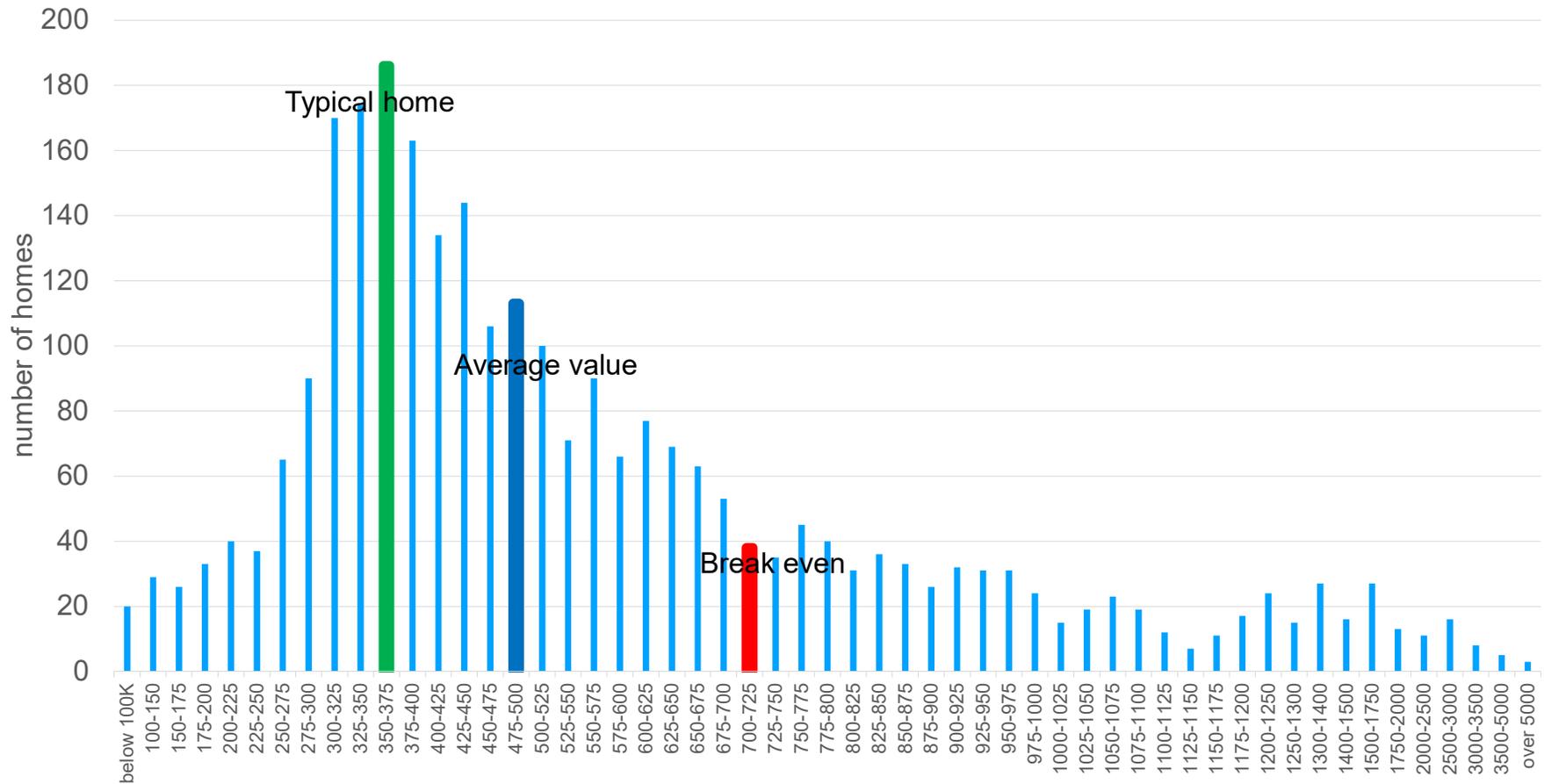
Fred Clark

Ananda Timpane

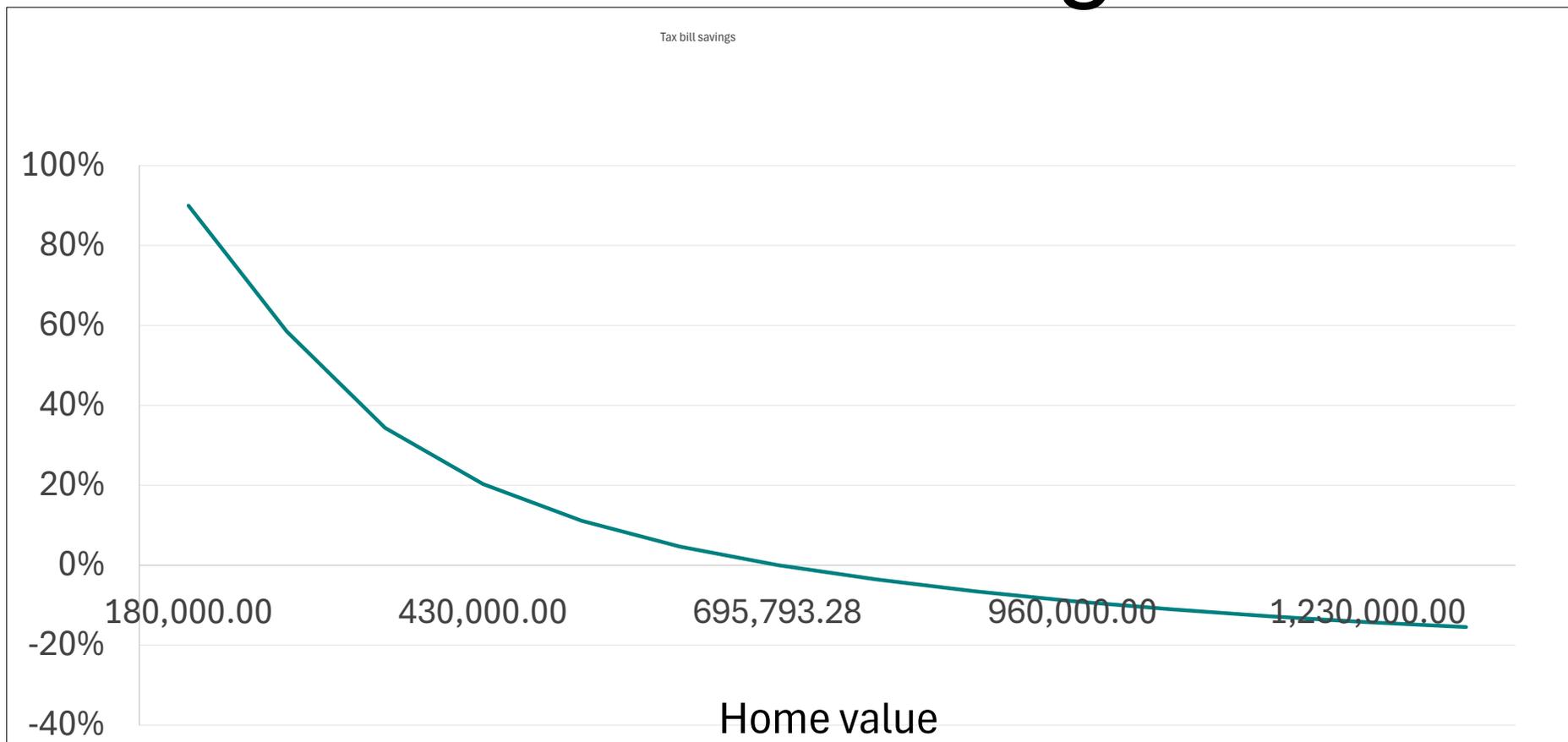
Co-Chairs, Great Barrington Affordable Housing Trust

Cc: Liz Harsgrove, Town Manager
Encls.

Distribution of home values



Tax bill savings



Data (FY 2024)

	Assessed value	Tax with no RE	Tax with 35% RE	Savings	Tax with 10% RE	Savings	Tax with 50% RE (seasonal community)	Savings
Typical	\$375,000	\$5,209	\$3,746	28%	4,868	7%	\$2,776	47%
Median	\$431,600	\$5,995	\$4,790	20%	5,714	5%	\$3,991	33%
Average	\$548,589	\$7,620	\$6,949	9%	7,462	2%	\$6,502	15%
Break-even	\$695,793	\$9,665	\$9,665	0%	\$9,665	0%	\$9,665	0%



December 20, 2024, Reissued January 20, 2026

Steve Bannon
Selectboard Chair

RE: Adoption of the Property Tax Exemption

Dear Mr. Bannon and Great Barrington Selectboard,

The Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) requests that the Selectboard consider the local option affordable housing property tax exemption provided for by Mass. G.L. c. 59, § 50 (“the Act”). Following review, the AHTF concluded that implementation of the exemption will benefit the town by incentivizing the creation of additional affordable housing units in Great Barrington. Voted unanimously 5-0 January 20, 2026.

Based on the criteria set forth below, the Act permits municipalities to exempt property taxes for affordable housing dwelling unit(s) on a property. The AHTF’s proposal provides that applications shall be limited to new dwellings not currently rented on a year-round affordable basis. The program will benefit Great Barrington by encouraging the growth in a housing sector substantially underserved in our community.

Following are a description of (i) the Act, (ii) guidelines for the tax exemption provided by the Municipal Finance Law Bureau (“MFLB”), and (iii) the AHTF’s recommendation to the Selectboard. In addition, STF 50, the form “Application for Affordable Housing Exemption” prepared by the MFLB for municipal use, is attached as Exhibit A.

I. The Act

The Act, signed into law on October 4, 2023, provides that a town or other municipality may establish a property tax exemption for real property classified as Class One residential (i.e., residential property containing one or more dwelling units). The Act sets forth the necessary elements to qualify for the exemption and also provides that a town may include additional restrictions or regulations consistent with the intent of the law and local rules and procedures.

To qualify for the tax exemption, the property must meet each of the following criteria:

- a. Rented at an affordable housing rate, as determined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidance and regulations;
- b. Rented on a yearly basis; and

- c. Occupied year-round by a person or persons whose income does not exceed an amount to be set by the town, provided, however, that said income shall not be more than 200% of area median income (AMI.)

The act requires the following for implementation of the exemption:

- d. The property tax exemption shall be for an amount determined by the city or town, provided, however, that the amount shall not be more than the tax otherwise due on the parcel based on the full and fair assessed value multiplied by the square footage of the housing units rented and occupied by a person or persons whose income is not more than the income limit set pursuant to (c) above, divided by the total square footage of a structure located on the property.
- e. Assessment of property seeking an exemption shall assume fair market rent for all units.
- f. The property owner seeking the exemption shall submit documentation the town deems necessary, including, but not limited to, a signed lease and proof of the occupying person or persons' household income, to confirm the eligibility of the property for exemption.
- g. Once a municipality has approved the affordable housing property tax exemption, it may not be revoked until at least three years after acceptance.

II. MFLB Guidelines for Property Tax Exemption Implementation

The MFLB provided municipalities in its March 2024 release with guidelines for implementation of the affordable housing tax exemption, as follows:

1. Applicants, including the trustees of a trust, must be the assessed owner of the property on which the tax is to be abated on the applicable July 1 exemption qualification date.
2. The property owner applicant does not have to be domiciled on the property to qualify for the exemption unless the municipality adopts a local rule requiring it.
3. Applicants must timely submit STF 50 (Exhibit A, attached) annually to the town's assessor. Applicants must include the items set forth in II.f above and submit the application before the abatement deadline (the first actual tax bill due date).
4. The property tax exemption only applies to residential units, which may include an accessory dwelling unit (ADU).

5. The exemption amount will be determined by the tax due on the parcel, multiplied by the square footage of the qualifying housing unit(s) and divided by total square footage of the structure on the parcel.

By way of example, if the tax obligation on a two-unit home is \$8,000, each of the units is 1000 square feet, and one of the units qualifies for the exemption, the property owner would receive an exemption equal to 1/2 (1000/2000) of the property tax due. In this example, the exemption would be \$4,000 for the unit.

6. There are no age-related criteria for qualifying renters.
7. A municipality should adopt rules to determine the following: (i) the maximum amount of the exemption; (ii) annual occupant household income limit; (iii) affordable housing rate of rent; (iv) domiciliary requirements of the owner, if any; and (v) any additional restrictions consistent with the intent of the law.

III. AHTF Recommendation

The AHTF recommends that adoption of the Affordable Housing Property Tax Exemption with the following provisions consistent with the Act:

1. To qualify, at the time of initial approval of the application, the renter or renters shall earn no more than 100% AMI as calculated by HUD. If during the term of the tenancy the renter or renters earn more than 100% AMI, the dwelling may remain exempt until such time as the renter's or renters' income exceeds 200% AMI.
2. To qualify, the renter or renters shall pay in rent no more than 30% of its or their monthly household income.
3. Applicants need not be domiciled in Great Barrington to qualify for the exemption.
4. To minimize the fiscal impact of the tax exemption on the town, the AHTF recommends that total exemptions in the program in any one fiscal year should be capped at no less than \$150,000. Commencing on July 1, 2025, and on each July 1 thereafter, applications will be time-stamped upon submission, reviewed and approved on a "first come, first served" basis until the exemption ceiling has been met for the fiscal year.
5. If approved at Town Meeting, the program may not be rescinded for three (3) years. Thereafter, the program would need to be reapproved for each successive 3-year period.
6. As the program is intended to promote the creation of new affordable housing rentals, dwellings currently rented on an affordable basis that would otherwise qualify (i.e., renters earning no more than 100% AMI and paying no more than 30%

of monthly household income in rent) are not eligible for participation in the program.

7. To prevent the eviction from any currently rented dwelling, the owner of any currently rented dwelling may not apply for the program earlier than 3-years following the termination of the lease on any the occupied dwelling rental.