

Housing

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Letts wondered if the figures were erroneous.

"This looks to be a terrible mistake," she said.

In COAH's latest municipal status report, dated Aug. 20, Parsippany was credited with 94 units in excess of its obligation.

But according to tables in the regulatory proposal, Parsippany has a surplus production of 353 affordable units. Even after accounting for a rehab requirement of 72 units, that leaves the township 281 units in the black.

Complex calculation

According to the COAH proposal, only Boonton, Butler, Chatham, Dover, Morris Plains, Morristown, Netcong, Rockaway and Victory Gardens must provide additional affordable housing before 2014. The total of units required is 662, most of them in Morristown (341), Dover (139) and Morris Plains (108).

The numbers are derived from a complex calculation that factors in economic growth, vacant land, rental subsidies and zoning commitments to housing not yet developed. The results startled some municipal officials, and the methodology left them mystified.

Letts, who before the COAH rules were made public last Monday said that she hoped the rules would be clarified, said it appeared that what was created was an "incomprehensible puzzle."

Roxbury Councilwoman Sandy Urgo said that towns would still develop affordable housing, in part because of trust funds, financed by development fees, that can only be spent on affordable housing projects. Those funds will remain even after the new regulations are in place, she said.

The calculations involved in crediting to affordable housing units built before COAH came into existence, in response to the 1975 Mount Laurel court decision that led to COAH's creation, has been a prickly issue.

Parsippany, Letts said, built thousands of affordable priced townhouses before 1985 that were not counted by COAH.

The new COAH regulations appear to address that issue, saying that any surplus units can be credited toward a municipality's future obligations.

Paul Christie, executive of the Coalition for Affordable Housing and the Environment, a critic of the new regulations, said it appeared that towns showing a surplus, like Parsippany and most other Morris County towns, would not have to account for any more affordable housing units.

William Dressel, executive director of the New Jersey League of Municipalities, which represents the state's 566 municipalities, disagreed.

State community development commissioner Susan Bass Levin made it clear that under the new rules a municipality would be required to meet all its previous round obligations, he said.

"They are not getting a pass," Dressel said.

Key issue

He said he saw the new rules as an opportunity for towns to work with COAH to develop affordable housing plans. It is perhaps the key issue, he said.

"The fact is that we are running out of space in New Jersey. It is a quality of life issue. We

At a glance

The state Council on Affordable Housing has proposed using three criteria for determining municipal affordable housing obligations: a rehabilitation share, meaning the number of homes needing rehabilitation; any remaining prior round obligation; and growth share.

Here's how Morris County towns fare on the rehabilitation and prior round calculations based on activity from 1987 to 1999. A negative number under the prior round obligation means the town has exceeded its affordable housing obligation in the first two rounds of previous COAH requirements. Combined, those factors determine a municipality's current need.

Municipality	Rehab share	Prior round	Current need
Morris County			
Boonton	35	-10	25
Boonton Twp.	0	-13	-13
Butler	19	-12	7
Chatham	14	0	14
Chatham Twp.	10	-43	-33
Chester	5	-14	-9
Chester Twp.	0	-27	-27
Denville	14	-148	-134
Dover	117	16	133
East Hanover	0	-107	-107
Florham Park	9	-167	-158
Hanover	4	-133	-129
Harding	0	-29	-29
Jefferson	0	-22	-22
Kinnelon	7	-33	-26
Lincoln Park	26	-95	-69
Madison	54	-76	-22
Mendham	4	-28	-24
Mendham Twp.	0	-21	-21
Mine Hill	24	44	20
Montville	8	-320	-312
Morris Twp.	8	-265	-247
Morris Plains	0	108	108
Morristown	86	225	341
Mountain Lakes	0	0	0
Mount Arlington	0	-6	-6
Mount Olive	40	-83	-43
Netcong	7	3	10
Parsippany	72	-353	-281
Long Hill	0	-103	-103
Pequanock	0	-159	-159
Randolph	21	-227	-206
Riverdale	0	-31	-31
Rockaway	10	0	10
Rockaway Twp.	22	-125	-103
Roxbury	23	-404	-381
Victory Gardens	12	2	14
Washington Twp.	2	-97	-95
Wharton	22	-35	-13
County total	687	-2,865	-2,178
Sussex County			
Andover	0	-1	-1
Andover Twp.	0	-29	-29
Byram	16	-9	7
Hopatcong	23	-14	9
Sparta	13	-36	-23
Stanhope	4	-5	-1
County total	201	-95	106
Warren County			
Hackettstown	50	-44	6
County total	223	-582	-359

Note: The rehabilitation share includes homes that have inadequate plumbing or kitchen facilities or have 1.01 or more persons per room in homes built before 1939. The prior round obligation is a calculation based on the number of homes required by COAH minus the number of homes delivered or credited.

— Source: State Council on Affordable Housing

Roxbury was given a 565-unit credit for housing already provided. Combing that with a 161-unit obligation gives the township a surplus of 404 affordable units.

The Aug. 20 COAH report credited Roxbury with 23 units in excess of its obligation.

Urgo said the township had worked hard to develop affordable housing through senior housing, rehabilitation, buy-down programs and other means. The goal, she said, was to create affordable housing through programs that did not necessarily involve new construction.

Urgo said the Roxbury Township Council on Sept. 9 would introduce an ordinance that calls for setting a builder's-remedy lawsuit that could bring a large, very dense housing development to a site between Route 46 and Route 80. Houses could be built with 150 feet of the interstate highway, she said.

The new COAH calculations that show Roxbury has a surplus

council that the housing authority needs to add affordable housing when COAH has declared it has a surplus.

"I think these new rules will sound the death knell for new affordable housing in New Jersey," Riccio said. "To think that a municipality will take the initiative to provide affordable housing for low-income families is, to say the least, naive."

If towns had taken on that responsibility in the past two decades, he said, there would have been no need for COAH.

Riccio said he did not see how the new COAH rules would help the five Morris County public housing authorities find housing for the hundreds of people on waiting lists, all of which are closed and involve waits of up to five years.

COAH, authorized in 1985 to develop guidelines that towns could follow to develop affordable housing, has twice before set rules, each covering a six-year period. This current round of rules was due in 1999. If approved, they will set affordable housing standards until 2014.

In its two previous rounds, COAH allowed towns to use a combination of methods — including rehabilitation, senior housing, new construction, zoning changes and regional contribution agreements — to create affordable housing.

In the new regulations, the agency accounted for the housing created with those methods and used some new methodology — based on updated research and new state policy, to calculate a remaining obligation for all the state's municipalities.

The new figures show that the first two rounds of COAH obligations produced a net 639-unit surplus of affordable housing in the state.

Show a surplus

The same calculations, however, showed that there is also need to rehabilitate 27,684 units statewide.

Fifteen of New Jersey's 21 counties show a surplus of affordable housing, most of them in North or Central Jersey. They are Bergen, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union, and Warren.

Atlantic, Burlington, Gloucester, Monmouth, Ocean and Salem showed a lack of affordable housing. COAH said it included a growth factor in the new regulations in an attempt to match housing growth with job growth. The agency projects the creation of 680,000 jobs statewide in the next decade.

Proportionately fewer of those jobs will be created in the northern regions, the regulations predict, and the region most likely to show job growth is the area that also has a deficit of affordable housing.

Diane Sterner, executive director of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey said the proposed rules "will further dilute New Jersey's ability to meet its constitutional housing obligation and compromise its ability to assist more than a tiny fraction of households who are in desperate need of safe, decent, affordable housing."

COAH has said that nearly 30,000 affordable housing units have been built under its guidelines.

Sterner said that the Community Affairs Department, in its consolidated plan, said that 900,000 units of affordable housing are needed.

Douglas Fenichel, spokesman for K. Hovnanian Cos. one of the state's largest builders, said the

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