



## community development partnership

*Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape*

### The Lower Cape Housing Institute Reimagined

**“We were really the only ones to convene a regional task force to deal with the effects of the virus”**

Andrea Aldana  
Director of Housing Advocacy, CDP

For the past four years the Lower Cape Housing Institute (LCHI) has been one of the spotlight programs in the Community Development Partnership’s housing advocacy efforts. As one of three strategies utilized as part of the Lower Cape Community Housing Partnership, the Institute has been an important component of promoting safe and stable affordable housing for our region.

In previous years, the Housing Institute was structured as an intensive six-week workshop series designed to give town elected officials, committee members, and local leaders a comprehensive understanding of housing issues on the Lower and Outer Cape. Topics covered include financing, zoning to preserve open space, and best practices for development.



A Lower Cape peer group meeting prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Last year staff from the Community Development Partnership felt that it was time to change things up. “We received a lot of feedback that it was too much of a commitment to meet six weeks in a row,” says Director of Housing Advocacy, Andrea Aldana. “We also noticed we were seeing a lot of the same people year after year, so it wasn’t as helpful.”

This year, the CDP planned several opportunities that were spread throughout the year. One aspect of this new strategy was to focus on quarterly peer group meetings, one on the Lower Cape and one on the Outer Cape, where community members and leaders could gather and share updates and resources.

With the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, these quarterly peer group sessions quickly morphed into monthly coronavirus response meetings. “We were really the only ones to convene a regional task force to deal with the effects of the virus,” says Andrea, “There were statewide meetings, but that wasn’t helpful for a lot of people here.”

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Originally, the coronavirus response group planned to convene for three months, before returning to regular quarterly meetings. However, due to the severity and longevity of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the potential effects on housing on the Lower and Outer Cape, the group continued to meet monthly throughout the summer and fall, with each meeting covering a different topic.



An Outer Cape peer group meeting prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

“People responded really well to this format,” says Housing Advocacy Program Manager Pelinda Deegan, “it was really difficult to find a venue that was easy for everyone to reach after work, so moving online really made it easy for people to get involved.”

These meetings led to the formation of a second group that met weekly to address the needs of people struggling to pay their rent who were not covered by other programs. The group successfully created a set of common guidelines for rental assistance programs, to provide rental assistance to those affected by Covid-19. The guidelines were s adopted by several Lower Cape towns.

The group will continue to meet into the new year to evaluate the impact of their program.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the theme for the year was to remain flexible. “We wanted to be able to easily adapt our program to the needs and the interests of the groups that we were working with,” says Andrea.

Despite shifting focus towards peer learning, the CDP still has several housing workshops planned in the upcoming months. This includes a Housing 101 training, which will give newcomers a basic understanding of the housing challenges facing the region. We will also offer a number of more advanced training sessions in collaboration with Massachusetts Housing Partnership, including sessions on Housing Development, Affordable Housing Trusts and the Community Preservation Act.

If you are interested in becoming involved in affordable housing advocacy here on the Lower and Outer Cape, go to [Capecdp.org](https://Capecdp.org) to learn more about our housing peer group schedule and upcoming workshops, or sign up for our housing newsletters.