

\$100 million in affordable-housing grants going up for grabs next week

Developers can apply for a share of the state's seed program starting Monday.

By Kevin Landrigan

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CONCORD — Starting Monday, for-profit and nonprofit developers can apply for a piece of the state's \$100 million affordable housing program, Gov. Chris Sununu announced.

"We need affordable housing to grow (economically) and the good news is here in New Hampshire we have a lot of opportunity," said Sununu at a news conference at the Department of Business and Economic Affairs on Tuesday.

The program will begin less than six months after Sununu first proposed the idea. In his State of the State speech in February, Sununu vowed to use federal American Rescue Plan Act grants for this purpose.

On Thursday, the program will host a webinar to give further detail about the application process. The webinar can be accessed at www.nheconomy.com/about-us/investnh.

For the next two months, the state will accept applications from developers seeking part of \$60 million in capital grants that will cover "hard costs" of a project.

Business and Economic Affairs Commissioner Taylor Caswell said \$10 million of these grants would go to the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

Smaller housing projects will compete for up to \$10 million of the fund, he said.

The demand is expected to be so strong that Sununu decided to abandon plans to award the money in phases. Instead, it will be given out all at once.

"We wanted to go quickly, and we have the skills and the resources to do it," Sununu said. Applications will be accepted beginning July 29 for the other three programs in the fund — \$30 million of housing assistance for cities and towns, \$5 million to overhaul local planning and zoning laws and \$5 million to demolish property on public lands to make way for affordable housing.

Cities and towns can apply for support of up to \$10,000 per housing unit, with a \$1 million limit on how much can go to any community.

A bipartisan group of mayors from Concord, Keene and Rochester attended the news conference in support of the program, as did David Juvet, executive vice president with the Business & Industry Association.

"I have no doubt all of this money will be allocated," Sununu said.

Developers will apply for grants of up to \$3 million and must match that money, Caswell said.

Over the past year, Caswell said many business executives have said a lack of affordable housing for employees is a barrier to their own growth.

"It is directly impacting our economy in a way it has not done before," Caswell said.

Nicole Ward, dining room manager of the Copper Door Restaurant, said she lives in an apartment behind the eatery, and projects like this would help the hospitality industry to thrive here.

"This can really give new employees coming to our state a great incentive to live and work here," Ward said.

Elissa Margolin, executive director of N.H. Housing Action Inc., said that last December her group recommended the state set up a \$100 million fund.

"The workforce shortage we are facing is directly related to our shortage of affordable housing," Margolin said. The vacancy rate for affordable apartments statewide is less than 1%, which Caswell said is an all-time low.

"It's safe to say there is a housing crisis in every county in this state," Sununu said. Democratic candidate for governor Tom Sherman said the Executive Council pressured Sununu to make a firm commitment that most of the new housing would be for low- and moderate-income families.

"While Granite Staters have been struggling for years, Sununu delayed so long in distributing rental assistance funds that nearly \$20 million in federal funds were reallocated to other states," Sherman said in a statement.

Sherman said he would hold Sununu to his pledge to make public all grants provided under this program.

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