

# New England Updates

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## Across the Region

### Ballot Measures

In the November 7 general elections, the New England electorate voted on a number of ballot measures with implications for community development. These are highlighted below. In particular, Maine voters rejected a cap on increases in state spending; New Hampshire voters chose to prohibit the use of eminent domain if the property is to be transferred to another private entity for private development; and Rhode Island voters turned down a proposal to permit a tribal casino but voted to allow the sale of \$50 million in affordable housing bonds over the next four years.

### New England Ballot Measures in November 2006 General Elections

<b>Maine</b>		
Question 1	A bill to restrain the growth in state and local government by imposing expenditure limitations on state and local government and by requiring voter approval of tax and fee increases.	Status: Fail (Yes votes: 45.6%)
Question 2	Initiative Petition Deadlines	Status: Pass
<b>Massachusetts</b>		
Question 1	Sale of Wine by Food Stores	Status: Fail
Question 2	Nomination of Candidates for Public Office	Status: Fail
Question 3	Family Child Care Providers	Status: Fail
<b>New Hampshire</b>		
Question 1	Prohibits the use of eminent domain if the property is to be transferred to another private entity for private development.	Status: Pass (Yes votes: 85.7%)
Question 2	Redistricting	Status: Pass
<b>Rhode Island</b>		
Question 1	Approval of the amendment to the Rhode Island constitution would authorize a resort casino in the town of West Warwick, to be privately owned and privately operated in association with the Narragansett Indian Tribe, with tax proceeds from the casino being dedicated to property-tax relief.	Status: Fail (Yes votes: 37.0%)
Question 2	Elections – Restoration of Voting Rights	Status: Pass
Question 3	Budget Reserve Account	Status: Pass
Question 4	Higher Education Bonds - \$72,790,000	Status: Pass
Question 5	Transportation Bonds - \$88,500,000	Status: Pass
Question 6	Roger Williams Park Zoo Bonds - \$11,000,000	Status: Pass
Question 7	Fort Adams State Park Recreation and Restoration Bonds - \$4,000,000	Status: Fail
Question 8	Department of Environmental Management Bonds - \$3,000,000	Status: Pass
Question 9	Authority for the State of Rhode Island to issue general obligation bonds, refunding bonds, and temporary notes in an amount not to exceed \$50 million for affordable housing.	Status: Pass (Yes votes: 66.0%)

Source: Ballot Measures Database (<http://www.ncsl.org/programs/legismgt/elect/dbintro.htm>).

### Minimum Wage

Effective October 1, 2006, Maine raised its minimum wage from \$6.50 an hour to \$6.75 an hour. This minimum will increase again, to \$7.00 an hour, on October 1, 2007. The minimum wage rates for New England states are: Connecticut: \$7.40; Massachusetts: \$6.75; Rhode Island: \$7.10; Vermont: \$7.25. New Hampshire is the only state in New England with the same minimum wage as the federal level, currently \$5.15 per hour. Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island's minimum wages are all set to rise in January of 2007 to \$7.65, \$7.50, and \$7.40, respectively. Vermont's minimum wage increases every 12 months at the same rate as the Consumer Price Index. As a result, on January 1, 2007, Vermont's minimum wage will increase from \$7.25 to \$7.53 per hour.

## State Highlights

### CT Connecticut

In October, seven housing projects received a combined \$6.6 million from the state's Housing Trust Fund to create more affordable housing in Connecticut. The Housing Trust Fund is designed to help create and preserve housing for low- and moderate-income working families by providing critical gap financing in the form of loans and grants. This funding completes the first year's allotment of \$20 million from the five-year, \$100 million fund.

In November, the North Walke Housing Corporation (North Walke) received a \$1.1 million grant from the state Department of Economic and Community Development to initiate the Norwalk Homeownership Assistance Program. This program is part of Governor M. Jodi Rell's initiative to combat sprawl by expanding housing opportunities in cities. The funds will help first-time home buyers in Norwalk afford down payments and closing costs. North Walke expects to begin accepting applications to the program beginning in January 2007. Interested applicants can learn more about the program by visiting <http://www.norwalkct.org/ReDevelopment/NewRD/index.htm>.

### ME Maine

In December, Maine joined a \$14.5 million, 15-state settlement involving discount programs for home repairs and other services. Chase Bank USA, its subsidiary Chase Home Finance LLC, and Trilegiant Corporation allegedly offered free trial memberships to various discount programs without telling consumers that they would be automatically charged fees if they did not cancel the memberships within a certain time period. To cover civil penalties and recoup costs and fees, Trilegiant is paying the state of Maine \$477,128, and Chase is paying \$175,000.

## MA Massachusetts

In October, Massachusetts launched a first new healthcare reform product: Commonwealth Care. An estimated 50,000 residents with incomes at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) are now eligible to apply for the program. Members get free or low cost health services through managed care health plans and can choose from several plans offered by private health insurance companies. By the end of January 2007, the state will notify applicants in the at or below 100 percent FPL group that they have been approved for coverage. Individuals who believe they are part of this group may call a Commonwealth Care customer service representative at 1-877-MA-ENROLL.

In December, Bank of America announced the introduction of its “America Block by Block” program in the city of Lawrence. Created to assist areas with concentrated poverty, the Block by Block program currently operates in Los Angeles, West Oakland, Washington DC, and Tampa Heights. The program in Lawrence will be delivered through five channels: real estate development, mortgage lending, family asset-building, small business development/technical assistance, and philanthropy/volunteerism. As part of the program, Bank of America announced a \$40 million investment in the development of loft-style rental units at Washington Mill Lofts, with 10 percent of the units reserved for low-income families. In addition, Bank of America committed a minimum of \$250,000 in philanthropic funding to Lawrence CommunityWorks and Groundwork Lawrence over the next five years.

## NH New Hampshire

In December, the University of New Hampshire’s Carsey Institute announced that it had received a \$1 million grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to support the work of its Center for Rural Families and Communities. The grant will support the institute in producing reports and policy briefs on issues of concern to rural communities and in building knowledge of changing conditions in natural resource-dependent communities. The Carsey Institute also announced that it will work with the W.K. Kellogg and Annie E. Casey foundations, the Center for Rural Strategies, Rural LISC, and others to identify key, timely issues where good analysis and effective dissemination of information can make a positive difference in policy debates.

In December, TD Banknorth New Hampshire presented the New Hampshire Main Street Center with a \$100,000 investment through the Community Development Finance Authority’s tax credit program. The money will fund the Center’s specialized training for all communities statewide and will fund technical assistance visits to the 20 Main Street communities throughout the state. The New Hampshire Main Street Center helps communities strengthen their downtowns by focusing on historic preservation and public-private partnerships to build local pride.

## RI Rhode Island

In the November general elections, Rhode Island voters approved Question 9, a ballot measure calling for the sale of \$50 million in affordable housing bonds. Approval of Question 9 will allow the Housing Resources Commission to allocate \$12.5 million annually for the next four years to fund the best proposals for building new homes and converting abandoned houses, mills, and other buildings into housing. The \$50 million is expected to generate an additional \$450 million in funding from private investors, the federal government, and other sources, adding up to over 1,000 more houses and apartments for Rhode Islanders. The Vote Yes on 9 campaign was sponsored by HousingWorks RI, a coalition of more than 120 organizations working to promote affordable housing in Rhode Island.

A state plan to end homelessness developed by members of Governor Don Carcieri's administration, in cooperation with several state agencies and advocates for the homeless, and approved by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, was released in December. The plan calls for creating hundreds of additional housing units, taking steps to prevent people from becoming homeless, and establishing the political will to end homelessness. The state's other priorities as specified in the plan include the phase-out of large shelters in favor of smaller ones, using data to show the benefits of ending homelessness, and creating a coordinated service system for those without a permanent place to live.

## VT Vermont

In October, Vermont presented seven ceremonial checks totaling more than \$400,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG) program to farmers and groups that support farming. The VAPG program was created to help eligible farmers, farmer groups, and farmer cooperatives establish a value-added marketing opportunity for an agriculture product. The Vermont Housing and Conservation Board received a \$200,000 grant to continue its assistance to farmers involved in the Vermont Farm Viability Program and the Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont received a \$50,000 grant to provide intensive technical assistance to start-up Island Pond farmers' markets and general marketing and development support to 28 other farmers' markets across rural Vermont.

In November, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) gave the city of Winooski a national award for Winooski's downtown building boom, the return of a historic street layout, and the RiverWalk, a promenade on the banks of the Winooski River. The EPA created the National Award for Smart Growth Achievement in 2002 to recognize outstanding approaches to development that benefit the economy, the community, public health, and the environment.