



2026 Housing Policy Conference Speakers, Panelists & Moderators

PLENARY SPEAKERS

SALIM FURTH

**Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Urbanity,
Mercatus Center at George Mason University**

Opening Plenary: State Housing Policies: What's Working & Where?



Salim Furth is a Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Urbanity project at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University where he focuses his research on housing production and land use regulation. He frequently advises local governments and testifies before state and federal legislatures. He earned his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Rochester.

Furth previously worked at the Heritage Foundation, at Amherst College, and as a contractor to HUD. His research has been published in *Housing Policy Debate*, *Critical Housing Analysis*, and the *IZA Journal of Labor Policy*. He serves as an advisor to the board of Texans for Reasonable Solutions and a Better Cities Project Fellow.

Featured Research: "Why Housing Shortages Cause Homelessness", "Housing Reform in the States: A Menu of Options for 2024" (Emily Hamilton, Salim Furth & Charles Gardner)

JENNIFER SCHWARTZ

National Council of State Housing Agencies

Plenary: Federal Housing Policy Update & Forecast



Jennifer Schwartz serves as the Director of Tax and Housing Advocacy at the National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA). She rejoined NCSHA in 2014 after previously holding the role of Senior Legislative and Policy Associate at the organization from 2001–2005. Jennifer leads NCSHA's multifamily and tax policy team and oversees the organization's federal legislative advocacy efforts, with particular focus on the Low Income Housing Tax Credit and tax-exempt private activity Housing Bonds.

Prior to returning to NCSHA, Jennifer was the Director of Policy and Programs for the Southern Governors' Association, where she focused on facilitating bipartisan collaboration between governors in various policy areas. Earlier in her career, she worked as a counselor and case manager at Women's Protective Services, a domestic violence shelter and rape crisis counseling center in Massachusetts, and as a project consultant for the Massachusetts Advocacy Center (now Massachusetts Advocates for Children).

Jennifer earned a Master of Science degree in Public Administration and Public Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science and holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Brandeis University with a double major in Psychology and Sociology.



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AMANDA RECTOR

Office of the Maine State Economist

Plenary: Maine's Economic Horizon: Housing Outlook



Amanda Rector is the State Economist for Maine. In this capacity, she conducts ongoing analysis of Maine's economic and demographic conditions to help inform policy decisions. Amanda is a member of the State of Maine's Revenue Forecasting Committee and serves as the Governor's liaison to the U. S. Census Bureau. She started working for the state in 2004 and has been State Economist since 2011.

She earned a BA in Economics from Wellesley College and her Master's in Public Policy and Management from the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine. Amanda is originally from mid-coast Maine and now lives in Union with her family.

ALEX HOROWITZ

Project Director, The Pew Charitable Trusts

Closing Plenary Session: Housing Policies for Maine



Alex Horowitz guides research for The Pew Charitable Trusts Housing Policy Initiative, focusing on how home financing, the housing shortage, and land-use regulations affect household well-being. He also researches outcomes of policies designed to improve housing quality, availability, and affordability, as well as building codes, permitting, housing finance, and homelessness. Horowitz regularly presents his findings to state and local policy audiences, and his work is frequently cited by policymakers and media outlets.

Before joining Pew, Horowitz worked at the polling firm Hart Research, conducting strategic opinion research for clients across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. His earlier career spanned media relations, baseball information, and communications for the Miami Marlins and Cincinnati Reds.

Horowitz holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from Harvard University.



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STATE LEGISLATIVE PANEL



BJ MCCOLLISTER, MODERATOR

Policy Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition & Frame Strategies

From the Maine State House to the White House, BJ McCollister is a veteran political strategist with over a decade of experience driving wins in campaign management, issue advocacy, and public policy. As Chief of Staff to Maine Senate President Troy Jackson, he spearheaded landmark healthcare and labor reforms and negotiated state budgets. A recognized campaign leader, McCollister helped secure a six-point margin increase for Biden for Maine in 2020 and led Senate Democrats to their largest legislative majority in nearly 30 years.

He holds a degree in History and Political Science from the University of Maine.



REPRESENTATIVE AMANDA COLLAMORE

Member, Housing & Economic Development Committee

Representative Amanda Collamore is a dedicated policymaker and advocate focused on expanding economic opportunity, workforce development, and housing accessibility across Maine. Serving in the Maine House of Representatives, she leverages her experience in community outreach and local government to champion bipartisan solutions for working families and local businesses. Beyond her legislative work, Collamore serves as an Education & Outreach Manager for the University of Maine's Technology Innovation Center.

She holds an associate degree in Early Childhood Education from Kennebec Valley Community College and is pursuing a bachelor's degree at the University of Maine.



SENATOR CHIP CURRY

Chair, Housing & Economic Development Committee

Senator Chip Curry is a veteran educator, community organizer, and policy leader serving his third term in the Maine State Senate. As Chair of the Housing and Economic Development Committee, Curry focuses on building sustainable housing solutions, strengthening workforce development programs, and expanding economic security across rural and coastal communities. Parallel to his legislative role, he brings over three decades of higher education experience to his work as a Student Services Coordinator at the University of Maine at Augusta.

He holds a Master of Science in College Student Personnel Services from Miami University.



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THE WORKFORCE CASE FOR HOUSING PANEL



KATIE SHOREY, MODERATOR

Director of Engagement, Live + Work in Maine

Katie Shorey is the Director of Engagement at Live + Work in Maine, specializing in talent attraction, entrepreneurship, and innovation. A Maine native who returned to the state after starting her career in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, she brings diverse background experience across the political, corporate, and nonprofit sectors. She previously led Startup Maine as president from 2018 to 2025 and sits on multiple civic boards. An award-winning ecosystem builder, Shorey was named a Mainebiz 40 Under 40 honoree and an Outstanding Woman in Business. She holds a bachelor's degree from St. Lawrence University.



JACKIE MORGAN

Vice President of Talent Acquisition & Workforce Development, MaineHealth

Jackie Morgan is the Vice President of Talent and Workforce Development at MaineHealth, leading system-wide talent acquisition and workforce planning for one of New England's largest healthcare organizations. She drives enterprise strategies for pipeline development, workforce analytics, and operational excellence while chairing MaineHealth's Workforce Oversight Committee. Prior to joining MaineHealth, Morgan held executive talent leadership roles at Eaton Corporation and Bank of America Merrill Lynch Wealth Management. She holds a bachelor's degree from Saint Joseph's College and an MBA from the University of New Haven.



JON FITZGERALD

Vice President & General Counsel, Bath Iron Works

Jon Fitzgerald serves as Vice President and General Counsel at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works (BIW), where he oversees legal strategy, corporate governance, and regulatory compliance for one of Maine's largest employers and a premier shipbuilder for the U.S. Navy. With extensive experience navigating complex corporate affairs, labor issues, and public policy, Fitzgerald works closely with executive leadership, government agencies, and community stakeholders to support BIW's mission of defense manufacturing and workforce growth. He holds a Juris Doctor from the University of Maine School of Law.



YELLOW LIGHT BREEN

President & CEO, Maine Development Foundation

Yellow Light Breen serves as President and CEO of the Maine Development Foundation (MDF), driving statewide initiatives to advance sustainable economic growth, workforce development, and leadership capacity across Maine. With a career spanning public policy, strategic management, and commercial banking, Breen works collaboratively with business, government, and civic leaders to champion nonpartisan, long-term economic solutions. He is a recognized advocate for expanding educational attainment and strengthening regional economies. He holds a bachelor's degree and a Juris Doctor from Harvard University.



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HOME FOR MAINE'S OLDER ADULTS PANEL



NOËL BONAM, MODERATOR

Maine State Director, AARP Maine

Noël Bonam serves as Maine State Director for AARP, leading statewide advocacy, community engagement, and public policy initiatives to support older adults and families. Bringing extensive global and public sector leadership experience, including directing Maine's Bureau of Multicultural Affairs and heading The Global Institute, Bonam champions key issues such as caregiving, housing access, health care affordability, and financial security. He actively serves on the Maine State Housing Authority Board of Commissioners and the Maine Climate Council. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Studies from the Philadelphia College of Art.



KATY SMITH

Vice President of Senior Living, Avesta Housing

Katy Smith serves as Vice President of Senior Living at Avesta Housing, where she oversees operations, resident care, and strategic direction across the organization's senior living and assisted living communities. A Licensed Social Worker, Smith brings nearly two decades of social service and healthcare experience to her leadership, advocating for compassionate, person-centered care and supportive housing models for older adults. She also serves as Vice Chair of the LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire Board of Directors. She earned her degree in psychology from the University of Southern Maine.



JOY BARRESI SAUCIER

Executive Director, Aroostook Area Agency on Aging

Joy Barresi Saucier serves as Executive Director of the Aroostook Agency on Aging, where she leads regional strategies to support older adults and adults with disabilities in living healthy, independent, and engaged lives. A registered nurse and healthcare executive, Saucier directs home and community-based services, nutrition programs, caregiver support, and age-friendly community initiatives across Northern Maine. She actively collaborates on statewide and national policy efforts to expand rural health access and long-term care sustainability. She holds a Master of Health Administration from Saint Joseph's College of Maine.

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THE FREEPORT TURNAROUND PANEL



JOHN EGAN, MODERATOR

Director of Development, Avesta Housing

John Egan serves as Director of Development at Avesta Housing, leading new real estate development initiatives across Northern New England. Bringing nearly four decades of community development experience, Egan's background includes executive leadership at CEI, five years at the Genesis Community Loan Fund, and municipal service on the Freeport Town Council. He also serves on the MAHC Board of Directors, chairs the Maine Redevelopment Land Bank Board and sits on the MaineHousing Board of Commissioners.



MATTHEW PETERS

Executive Director, Freeport Housing Trust

Matthew Peters serves as Executive Director of Freeport Housing Trust, overseeing asset management, advocacy, and new development—including Freeport's first LD 2003 workforce housing project. With 16 years of industry experience across Maine and New Hampshire, Peters is also co-founder of Maine Cooperative Development Partners and founder of Elysian Enterprises, advising housing authorities and CDFIs on community-focused development. His work centers on creating walkable, equitable, and sustainable neighborhoods.



BRETT RICHARDSON

Development Director, Town of Freeport

Brett Richardson serves as Development Director for the Town of Freeport, leading integrated planning efforts that connect housing, economic development, active transportation, and environmental sustainability. Prior to entering municipal government, Brett supported Maine food and beverage entrepreneurs as Director of Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems at Brunswick-based CEI, following his role in developing, launching, and expanding an organics collection and composting business in Greater Portland. A Great Lakes native, Brett moved to Maine nearly 20 years ago for and holds a masters degree from the University of Southern Maine's Muskie School of Public Service.



TAWNI WHITNEY

Executive Director, Greater Freeport Chamber of Commerce

Tawni Whitney serves as Executive Director of the Greater Freeport Chamber of Commerce, where she advocates for local businesses and leads economic growth initiatives across the region. A former Freeport Town Councillor, Whitney leverages a background in social work and municipal leadership to strengthen community partnerships, support downtown revitalization, and foster a thriving business ecosystem. She works closely with regional stakeholders to balance economic development with Freeport's distinct historic charm.



STEVE MILLS

Chief Executive Officer, Maine Beer Company

Steve Mills serves as Chief Executive Officer of Maine Beer Company in Freeport, leading business growth, operational strategy, and the brewery's signature commitment to environmental sustainability and community giving. A veteran of the craft beverage industry with nearly three decades of leadership experience, Mills previously held executive positions at Uinta Brewing Company and Boulevard Brewing Company. A U.S. Marine Corps veteran, he guides Maine Beer Company's mission-driven model centered on sustainable manufacturing and local community partnerships.



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ASSET MANAGEMENT OUTLOOK PANEL



JENNIFER HAWKINS

President & CEO, Avesta Housing

Jennifer Hawkins brings more than 20 years of leadership experience in housing and community development across major metropolitan markets. Prior to joining Avesta Housing, she served as President and CEO of One Neighborhood Builders in Providence, Rhode Island, where she drove transformative growth, spearheaded innovative housing developments, and aligned housing policy with health equity and economic mobility. She holds a Bachelor of Arts from Connecticut College, a Master of Public Administration from New York University, and executive leadership certificates from Harvard University.



SHERRIN VAIL

Vice President of Asset Management and Portfolio Initiatives, Evernorth

Sherrin Vail serves as Vice President of Asset Management and Portfolio Initiatives at Evernorth, where she leads asset management operations and strategic portfolio oversight for affordable housing investments across Northern New England. With extensive experience in real estate management, financial sustainability, and Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) portfolio compliance, Vail oversees performance across thousands of affordable units. Recognized for her regional leadership, she was awarded the Susan E. Simpson Award by the Maine Real Estate Managers Association.



HEATHER STARZYNSKI

Senior Director of Asset Management, NeighborWorks America

Heather Starzynski serves as Senior Director of Asset Management at NeighborWorks America, where she oversees nationwide asset management initiatives, resident services training, and technical assistance. Bringing extensive national leadership in housing preservation and financial sustainability, Starzynski delivers expert advisory services and best-practice frameworks to non-profit housing organizations and CDFIs. She drives strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening long-term portfolio performance, community stabilization, and resident empowerment across the country.



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PHILANTHROPY IN HOUSING PANEL



ALEX HOROWITZ, MODERATOR

Project Director, The Pew Charitable Trusts

Alex Horowitz serves as Director of the Housing Policy Initiative at The Pew Charitable Trusts, where he guides data-driven research on land-use regulations, home financing, and housing availability. His publications examine how flexible zoning, innovative financing, and targeted philanthropic support can accelerate local housing supply, lower development costs, and prevent homelessness nationwide. Horowitz works closely with state, municipal, and philanthropic leaders to translate empirical research into actionable policy solutions that foster long-term community affordability.



NICOLE WITHERBEE

President & CEO, John T. Gorman Foundation

Nicole Witherbee serves as President and CEO of the John T. Gorman Foundation, where she directs philanthropic strategies to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and families across Maine. Drawing on over two decades of experience in policy research, evaluation, and executive leadership—including ten years as the Foundation's Chief Program Officer—Witherbee leverages strategic grantmaking to address systemic issues, advance housing stability, and build economic opportunity state-wide. She holds a Ph.D. in Social Policy from Brandeis University.



DEBORAH ELLWOOD

President & CEO, Maine Community Foundation

Deborah Ellwood serves as President and CEO of the Maine Community Foundation, where she drives strategic initiatives to bring people and resources together across the state. Bringing decades of experience in philanthropy and public policy, Ellwood previously led the national network CFLeads for 12 years and served in leadership at the Rochester Area Community Foundation. She currently sits on the Governor's Climate Council, the Maine Infrastructure Rebuilding and Resilience Commission, and the Alford Scholarship Foundation board. She is a graduate of Bowdoin College and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.



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BUILD AMERICA, BUY AMERICA IMPACTS PANEL



LAURA MITCHELL

Executive Director, Maine Affordable Housing Coalition

Laura Mitchell brings twenty years of experience in program management, consulting, and coalition building across Maine's nonprofit and business sectors. Combining expertise in economic development, leadership, and public health, Mitchell is deeply committed to affordable housing—a passion shaped by her childhood experience living in public housing. She is dedicated to building robust cross-sector partnerships that strengthen communities and drive meaningful, lasting change across the state. She is an alumna of the University of Maine with a master's degree in Environmental Science.



TODD ROTHSTEIN

Director of Construction Services, Avesta Housing

Todd Rothstein serves as Director of Construction Services at Avesta Housing, where he oversees all phases of construction management, building design, budgeting, and asset management. Bringing over 13 years of technical expertise in housing development, Rothstein manages complex construction projects and regulatory compliance across northern New England. He also serves as president of the board of the Maine Real Estate Managers Association.



LAURA READING

Director of Affordable Housing, Developers Collaborative

Laura Reading serves as Director of Affordable Housing at Developers Collaborative, where she manages the planning, financing, and execution of complex residential projects across Maine. Since joining the firm in 2013, Reading has specialized in navigating local zoning, federal funding structures, and regulatory compliance to expand accessible housing supply. She also serves as Chair of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition Board of Directors, partnering closely with statewide advocates to advance housing policy solutions. She holds a Master of Urban Planning and a Certificate in Real Estate Finance from the University of Michigan.



CONOR DONNELLY

Vice President of Preconstruction, DEW Construction

Conor Donnelly serves as Vice President of Preconstruction at DEW Construction, where he oversees estimating, preconstruction, and mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) departments. With extensive experience spanning the multifamily, commercial, and healthcare sectors, Donnelly leads strategic planning to manage project risk, navigate material sourcing requirements, and deliver practical, solutions-focused guidance for complex regional developments. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Vermont.