ABUNDANT HOUSING MASSACHUSETTS

Housing Abundance Symposium| Saturday, September 26th 2026

You Win Some, You Lose Some

Strategy after the win. Recovery after the loss.

Marblehead · Gloucester · Lexington · Cambridge

Advocacy has a blind spot, and it sits right after the vote.

Tunnel vision

Months or years of planning leave no bandwidth for the question of what comes next.

The morning after

Whether the vote went your way or not, the group wakes up needing a reason to meet again.

Nobody teaches this

There is a playbook for running a campaign. There is almost none for the week after one ends.

Four communities, four outcomes

Housing 4 All Gloucester

Won a repeal referendum, then built a permanent political operation.

THE WIN

Marblehead Housing Coalition

Won Town Meeting, lost the ballot, then got compliance on paper.

THE REVERSAL

Jay Luker, Lexington

First in the state, went furthest, and watched most of it rolled back.

THE OVERCORRECTION

Dave Halperin, A Better Cambridge

Largest zoning win in Massachusetts, now under active revision.

HOLDING GROUND

Housing 4 All Gloucester

The win, and what they did with it

2016 — Cape Ann Local Action forms; later becomes a standing organization, H4AG.

Oct 2024 — City Council adopts a 3A-compliant ordinance, unanimously.

Apr 2025 — Yes for Gloucester: 3,500+ doors, 1,200 calls, 12,000+ texts, 25 AHMA volunteers. Repeal defeated.

2025-26 — Candidate surveys and forums. The campaign becomes an operation.

3,668 – 2,431

April 24, 2025 referendum. Voters upheld the city's 3A ordinance with better than 60 percent.

THE QUESTION THEY CARRY

"You had a machine on April 24. What did you do with it on April 25?"

Marblehead Housing Coalition

The loss, and the win that did not feel like one

Jul 2024
Coalition launches with a mandate to pass the town's MBTA Communities rezoning.

May 2025
Town Meeting approves Article 23, roughly 58 acres and up to 897 homes, by 951 to 759.

Jul 2025
Citizen petition forces a special election. The referendum overturns it, 3,642 to 3,297.

May 2026
A narrow Tedesco and Broughton Road overlay passes 881 to 82. Compliance on paper.

345 votes

The July 2025 referendum margin that undid two years of work and put the town out of compliance.

THE QUESTION THEY CARRY

"The statute is satisfied and almost nothing else is. Do you claim it as a win?"

Jay Luker, Lexington

The win that worked too well

2023

First in Massachusetts to adopt 3A zoning, and well past the requirement: 227 acres, up to six stories.

2023-24

Projections said 400 to 800 homes in a decade. The pipeline passed 1,600 in two years.

Mar 2025

Special Town Meeting cuts the district to about 90 acres and adds height and coverage limits.

After

Subdivision filings froze the old zoning on roughly 62 acres for eight years.

227 → 90

Acres. The MBTA district Town Meeting cut in March 2025, with 94 percent voting for the rollback.

THE QUESTION THEY CARRY

"When did you first know it was slipping, and could the 2023 version ever have held?"

A Better Cambridge

The biggest win in the state, and the fight to hold it

~2015-24
A decade of organizing. A narrower three-story version dies in committee in 2021.

Feb 2025
Four stories by right citywide, six with inclusionary units. Roughly 3,590 homes projected by 2040.

Sep 2026
Council committees advance amendments on setbacks, open space and story caps.

Sep 28
Full Council takes them up. Two days after this panel.

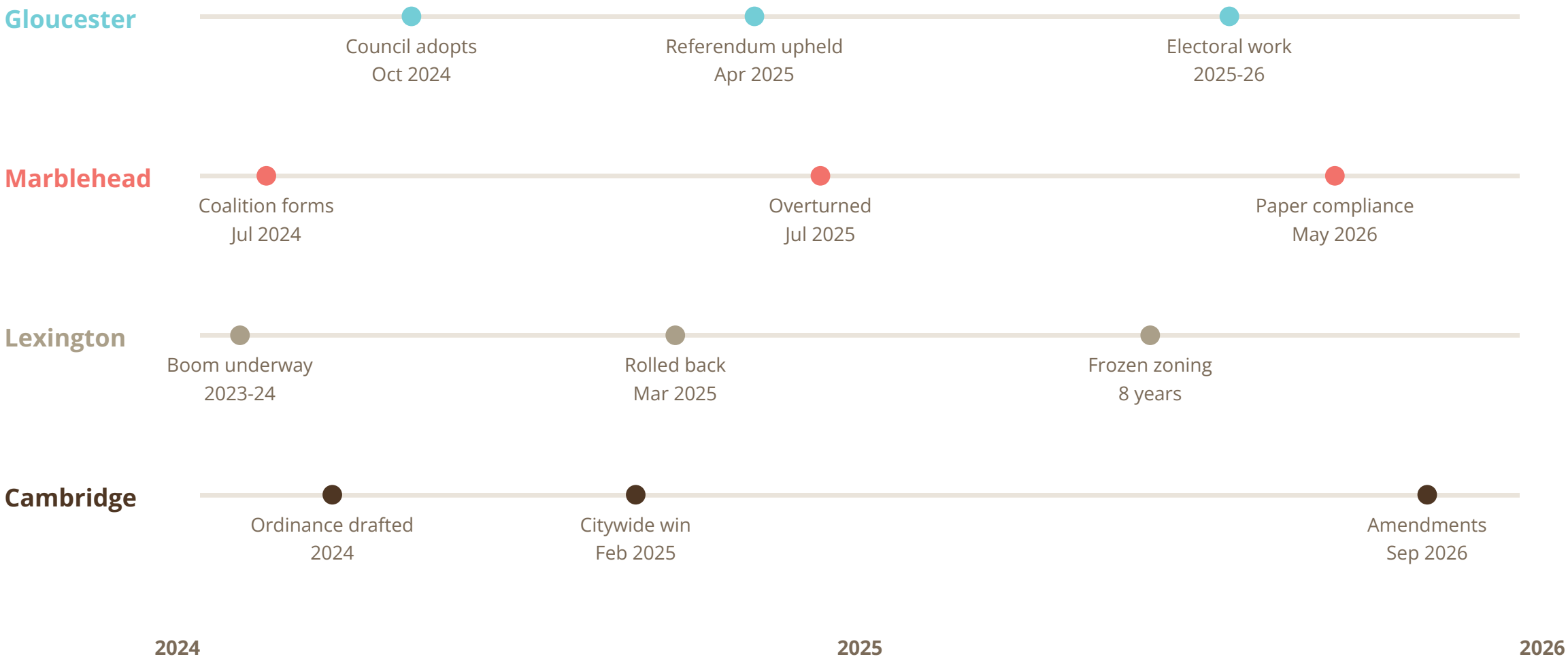
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February 10, 2025. Cambridge became the first city in Massachusetts to end exclusionary zoning citywide.

THE QUESTION THEY CARRY

"A win is not a finish line. It is a position you have to hold. Are you built for that?"

The same law, four different endings



BLOCK 1

Lay of the land

Who shows up. Who decides. What outsiders get wrong.

And what counts as a win in your community.

BLOCK 2

The win and the loss

The step before the step everybody remembers.

What it cost. What luck had to do with it.

And how you told your people when it went the other way.

BLOCK 3

What came next

The volunteer list, six months later.

Holding people through the slow part.

Offense and defense are different skills.

Questions

If you are somewhere in the middle of your own campaign, this is the part of the hour that is for you.

ON THE TABLE

- How do you know when to stop fighting a particular fight?
- What do you build before you need it?
- What do you owe the people who showed up?

ONE SENTENCE EACH

“If you could go back and give your group one piece of advice, what would it be?”

Thank you to the Marblehead Housing Coalition, Housing 4 All Gloucester, Jay Luker, and A Better Cambridge.

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