

MDI Tomorrow Housing Working Group Notes  
March 27, 2002

Present: Hook Wheeler, Stan MacDonald, Marla Major, Sam Coplon, Cheryl Curtis, Terry Kelley, Sydney Roberts Rockefeller, Tom Martin, Janet Hamel, Ron Beard; welcome to new participants : Gary Delong, Maine Sea Coast Mission; Brent Buchholz, Coast Guard Group, Southwest Harbor (Housing Department); Bobby Williams, Planner, Town of Mt. Desert

Sam Coplon, Marla Major and Tom Martin shared a series of draft outcomes for consideration: (Tom Martin's comments in italics)

1. Increase the number and availability of year round, affordable housing on MDI. Strive for 10% of the permanent (year round) housing stock to be affordable. (*This is the standard guideline used by the State Planning Office in its review of comprehensive plan for consistency with the Growth Management Act*)
2. Encourage flexibility in local zoning to promote greater density in housing through smaller lot sizes and cluster development. Promote housing in established settlement areas, villages and designated growth districts. (*Increases in allowable zoning density should not promote an increase in the total number of allowable units.*) *This needs clarification, I read this to mean that a higher zoning density would results in more units allowed per acre. In the planning profession this is called a density bonus.*
3. Projects should incorporate and encourage sustainable design and construction practices. *Examples might include assuring solar access, energy-efficient construction and heating systems. While these measures increase front end costs (electric heat is very easy to install but costly to operate) they do save money over the long run.*
4. Encourage public sewers systems and or private sewer systems where appropriate to protect ground and surface water resources *and to allow for a greater density.*
5. Encourage the acquisition of existing housing stock and the reuse and rehabilitation of existing buildings for affordable housing. *This may include assuring that zoning regulations allow for second-floor apartments above commercial units.*
6. Require that a percentage of the housing development over a certain amount of units meet affordable housing criteria.
7. MDI should seek approximately \$\_\_\_ million annually from several sources that provide funds for both buying and renting units. Potential sources of funds for affordable housing include *Maine State Housing Authority, WHCA, the Community Development Block Grant program and CEI, Inc are sources of either funding or technical assistance that could help us identify funds.*

8. Encourage the development of model programs for Employer Assisted Housing.
9. Encourage banks and local housing authorities to collaborate on programs that would increase purchases of rental units by the authorities.
10. Encourage municipalities to enter into tax stabilization agreements, tax treaties, and other financial incentive programs to promote the development or redevelopment of affordable housing. *This is a very sensitive issue, one option would be to look at waiving impact fees for certain developments.*
11. Support efforts of the island wide local housing initiatives such as the Mount Desert Community Trust in planning for affordable housing.
12. Other?

The group discussed the need to frame the issue in writing, as a preamble to any proposed outcomes and strategies. First, we need to clarify that we are generally concerned with increasing the rental and purchase options for families who make up the year-round workforce for core community purposes: (e.g. teachers, nurses, police and firefighters, other town employees, retail staff and managers, carpenters, Lab employees, Coast Guard staff, etc.). Annual family income for many of these people ranges from \$23,000 (just above the family income level that allows for federal housing subsidies and assistance) on up to \$55,000 (at which a family might be able to afford a mortgage for a new home and land costing a total of \$150,000). The group said we would not be able to provide for all employees on MDI... many will choose to live off island. Marla agreed to draft some language that captures “who” we are concerned about as we expand housing options.

Hook Wheeler said he would seek anecdotal information from key employers on the Island, to determine profiles of the current and near-future needs for housing (who are they recruiting)

The group also voiced support for finding additional housing options for working families in the community with low income and housing needs. These programs are generally administered with federal funds through local housing authorities. Shortcomings in these programs, generally serving less than half of those with demonstrated need, cannot be addressed without significant increases in federal resources, an issue generally beyond our ability to influence.

The group discussed market forces that are largely beyond our ability to influence:

People from areas where housing is even more expensive come to MDI to purchase land or houses for vacation homes, or for retirement, outbidding working people in our communities... even poor quality land with no view is now being purchased at high prices.

Local people, and others, are converting houses that used to be available for annual rents into two season rental properties—the lucrative summer season and the fall, winter and spring.

In general, MDI Tomorrow will suggest three (or more) connected strategies:

1. Each town will be urged to consider a variety of approaches to reduce development costs and increase housing options:
  - a) ways to reduce development costs through changes in local ordinances, to be considered by individual towns (lot size, density, set backs, road design, etc);
  - b) expansion of sewage and water service to allow near-town lots to be developed with less expense
  - c) various incentives (waiving impact fees, etc) for developers who devise affordable housing strategies;
  - d) making it more attractive to develop in-town housing lots
  - e) making it more possible for apartment buildings to serve the niche of workforce families who cannot afford to purchase or build a house, or rent a whole house.

2. Public-private partnerships will be supported to reduce cost of land for eligible applicants, (along the lines of the West Eden Meadows project). Such partnerships are likely to be with the housing authority, the (greater) Mt. Desert Community Trust, Maine Coast Heritage Trust, and existing landowners/developers who might be able to gain tax advantages in return for sale of land at reduced costs to eligible non-profits or towns who then develop the lots for affordability.

3. Public education will help all stakeholders understand the need for a greater percentage of our workforce to have homes within our communities, with corresponding positive impacts on the economy, community inter-connectedness, traffic congestion, volunteerism in community institutions, and quality of life, etc.

The group decided to meet next on Wednesday, April 3 from 8-9:30 am at MDI Housing Authority, 80 Mt. Desert Street, Bar Harbor (in the director's office, left after entering the main entrance doors)

Submitted by Ron Beard ([rbeard@umext.maine.edu](mailto:rbeard@umext.maine.edu)) 667 8212