

## *Notes from meeting of Housing Working Group*

May 1, 2002

### Attending:

Hook Wheeler, Sean Sweeney, Marla Major, Terry Kelley, Stan MacDonald, Janet Hamel, Tom Martin, Cheryl Curtis, Sydney Roberts Rockefeller, Ron Beard

*Next meeting is set for Monday, May 13 from 8-9:30 at MDI Housing Authority, 80 Mt. Desert Street in Bar Harbor. The agenda will focus on developing a strategy to engage members of the housing industry in the issue of housing and affordability for the families of year-round employees (see below)*

Three key agenda items are followed by news and notes gleaned from the group's check-in process:

### **Dialogue and Partnerships with realtors, developers and contractors**

The group recognized that a significant part of the housing issue on MDI is driven by market forces. The housing industry (realtors, developers and contractors) have directed their resources so as to develop land and build or convert housing for (very) willing buyers. The market consists of year-round employees, retirees, people wanting vacation homes, people wanting to invest in housing for the summer rental and employee market. If we are to make any significant progress toward making some of our housing stock (purchase and rental) affordable to year-round employees, we must work with realtors, developers and contractors.

We might ask them *what incentives would cause them to respond to the issue?* What could the towns, employers and other private-public partnerships do so that the housing industry could respond and we, as a whole community, can meet our benchmark of 10% of their housing affordable to year-round employees with incomes of \$25-55,000? If we asked key members of the housing industry to tell us "what are the differences that will make the biggest difference to housing costs?", what would they say?

The group decided to develop a strategy to reach out to the housing industry and to bring names of realtors, developers and contractors to the next meeting, so that we can figure a way to reach out to this group to engage them as partners.

### **Hancock County Planning Commission Study of Housing Needs**

Tom Martin noted that his board of directors (representing member towns of the planning commission) are supportive of HCPC playing a role in documenting housing needs for the county. He said that housing data will likely be focused on the MDI-Ellsworth Housing Market in a first phase of research, with subsequent analysis focused on Mount Desert Island. He has begun to seek funding for staff time in the research. He noted that Mike Finnegan, Director of the Maine State Housing Authority, will be speaking at the HCPC annual meeting at 7pm on May 28, at the Ellsworth Library community room.

He noted that some housing data may be found at [www.mainehousing.org/metac](http://www.mainehousing.org/metac)

### **Questions for MDI Tomorrow survey**

Since the development costs for housing are related to the number of housing units that can share electric service, roads, water supply and sewage disposal (large lots tend to be more expensive, based on the cost of land and lack of any shared services), and since many people have voted with their pocketbooks to buy and build on large lots in rural areas, the group wanted to test the local market for housing that is located more or less close together (but aesthetically designed), to share services and utilities as well as to share open space.

Related questions should gauge opinion on whether current and potential renters would choose in-town apartment housing, (whether over retail stores or in buildings where two or more families live within one building where developers can reduce square-foot costs through common foundation, walls and roof, and linked utilities. (duplex, multi-family buildings, condos or apartments)

And, in addition to surveying potential buyers and renters, we would need to determine the feelings about people in each town as to whether they would support changes in current land use ordinances which would encourage smaller lot sizes for year round housing and multi-family housing in general and, more specifically, for their neighborhoods... we might consider asking the questions in such a way to elicit the kinds of "conditions" under which they would find such housing acceptable. (Like the newly installed resident who moved from the city to the country and said she would accept a pig farm in the neighborhood if she didn't have to smell it or hear the pigs.)

### **Check in news and notes:**

Hook Wheeler noted *conversations with personnel officers at Hinckley Corporation and MDI Hospital*. In the latter case, the most turn-over is in nursing staff... in general, nurses seem to be able to find housing, perhaps through networking.

Hook also spoke with Lynn Bradford at Hinckley Co. Lynn has been the personnel specialist there for about 20 years. She's well acquainted with the housing stock on the island, particularly in the SW Harbor area. Hinckley is not bringing in a lot of top management, but when they do the salaries paid do afford those folks the possibility of a purchase on MDI. Lynn's chief recruiting challenge is skilled technicians and boat carpenters. Even though they pay from \$10-\$15 per hour for skilled carpenters (their biggest need) most can't afford to live on MDI, so they commute from up to two hours away. They report to her that they would live closer, on MDI, if housing prices permitted. Her skilled labor is finding it difficult to rent, not just buy a home. Lynn has seen a tremendous amount of former year-round rentals, in her area, go to seasonal. She has seen some movement so that people who used to rent to winter tenants and then weekly

to vacationers, increase the year round monthly rate to \$950-1000 so as not to suffer too much of a loss of potential income from summer rental... and these landlords are finding that renters will pay the elevated rate just to have a year round home... she thought it made sense to have ***some form of dedicated year round affordable rentals, protected from the market forces to assure some housing to workers...***

Terry Kelley reported that he is beginning to see ***results of the survey conducted by the Housing Authority***, with interviews with both landlords and tenants. From another source he said that there are ***two new houses constructed on MDI for each new year round resident moves here...*** Terry also reviewed the nature of each town's quasi-municipal housing authority, with 5 committee members appointed by town select boards or council, and two selected (elected?) by tenants of housing authority apartments.

Marla Major reported that a subdivision proposal for Somesville indicated that ***lots were to be marketed in the range of \$100,000 – 150,000.***

Stan MacDonald had held a ***preliminary meeting of the Mt. Desert (town) Community Trust***, which was set up a decade ago to work on affordable housing, with a current project to develop 10 acres in Somesville. The group, which he hopes will expand its mission to be able to work on an island-wide basis, will next meet at ***9:30 am on May 22 in the Northeast Harbor Public Library.*** He will try to schedule a meeting when Terry can attend to share the details of the successful West Eden Meadows housing development, which targeted year-round residents, with a mix of income levels.

Janet Hamel noted reading from the book “Balancing Nature and Commerce” about gateway communities, and its case studies, including a ***performance-based housing code*** that looks at housing affordability as one aspect of development review, and another town that uses ***impact fees*** from very expensive houses to offset town expenditures to make other housing more affordable to year round employee families.

Sydney Roberts Rockefeller noted that over 30 people were turned away from a Maine Municipal Association ***workshop on planning and development review.***

Cheryl Curtis noted ***interest by the MDI Rotary Club in housing affordability*** and suggested that Ron get in touch with Becky Buyers-Basso to invite her to future meetings in order to coordinate efforts. Others noted that housing affordability and the need for year-round communities might also be an issue of interest to area churches.