

MDI Tomorrow  
Community Housing Working Group  
Meeting of July 23 meeting

***Next meeting set for September 19<sup>th</sup> 8-9:30 AM***  
***MDI Housing Authority offices, Malvern-Belmont Estates***  
***80 Mt. Desert Street, Bar Harbor***

Attending: Cheryl Curtis, Lee Worcester, Terry Kelley, Marla Major, Tom Martin, Janet Hamel, Sam Coplan, Ron Beard, Keating Pepper

The group heard from Cheryl about her role as an invited observer to a 5000 person “town meeting” organized by America Speaks to provide citizen input to the plans for redevelopment of lower Manhattan (site of the former World Trade Center). We will circulate her notes when she sends them. Members of the MDI Tomorrow steering committee and others will try to meet with the President of America Speaks, a non-profit organization, in mid-August, to determine how their facilitated meeting format might be adapted to encourage greater, more effective citizen participation in small town settings.

Janet Hamel circulated a current draft of the community housing portion of the MDI Tomorrow “state of the island” report. (We will circulate that report when we have it in digital form.) Discussion centered around what additional information was needed to clarify the extent of the housing issue for year-round employees. Tom Martin, of the Hancock County Planning Commission, volunteered to work on additional data, as updated Census material is coming out. Janet will work on incorporating suggestions made by group members. She will also attempt to incorporate stories of real people (anonymity preserved) who fit our profile—folks capable of making a valued contribution to the community but who cannot afford a house, even with decent family income.

The group discussed some implications of the June 20 meeting with developers:

Developers currently are not building housing for middle income, year-round employees and their families. They are responding to market forces by building for higher income retirees and second-home buyers.

They noted that current zoning ordinances on MDI tend to discourage development of homes that might be affordable to middle income families.

They affirmed that zoning that allowed greater density would allow some savings on land costs that can be passed along to buyers.

They noted that even in-town areas served by town sewer and water have relatively large lot size and frontage requirements.

They noted that home buyers often seek land not served by town sewer and water due to lower initial investment (developers have to pass along cost of hooking up

lots to sewer and water, where these costs are borne separately by the home owner if he or she drills a well or installs a septic system).

Zoning ordinances do not encourage mixed residential and commercial uses... tending to drive the cost of land up.

Families that may have held some land and transferred it to their children as a “nest egg” are no longer doing so. Land has become so valuable that the land is sold, often to help finance retirement, medical bills, etc. Today’s MDI natives in their thirties may be the last generation to have inherited land and a traditional foothold in the MDI economy.

The group discussed the strategy of encouraging zoning ordinance changes to allow greater density, and other incentives that would tend to reduce land and construction costs. They noted that such changes in zoning would need to be based in large-scale policy changes in town comprehensive plans. Even when these changes, and the rationale for them, might be framed to support viable, year-round communities where people live and work, local citizens are suspicious that proposed changes are being forwarded to benefit developers and buyers of expensive homes. Such changes, to comprehensive plans and then to zoning ordinances, are long-term strategies, and will need to be endorsed by many different community leaders.

MDI Tomorrow can only suggest long term policy changes, which will be taken up by each town and worked through that town’s political process. We will also have to suggest shorter term projects to increase the amount of housing available to year-round, middle income, working families. Janet Hamel’s draft section contains references to other communities where housing is a problem, and will add a description of West Eden Meadows. Caroline Pryor suggests another technique, used by conservation organizations. They arrange a willing property owner to sell a suitable house, in town, at a bargain price, to a non-profit or quasi-governmental agency. The seller takes a tax deduction for the difference between appraised value and the bargain value. The non-profit then re-sells the house to a qualified buyer at less than market rates.

One update that the working group would find useful is the amount of potential land that could be developed and that is served by town water and sewer. Sam volunteered to determine how difficult it would be to get that information.

The group will next meet September 19, with an updated draft of the community housing portion of state of the island report sent in advance for review and feedback. A more or less final draft is sought by September 20, serving as the basis for both the state of the island report and an op-ed piece to be submitted to the newspapers.