

## **Notes from MDI Tomorrow working group on Housing**

Meeting of July 9, 2002

Next meeting is 8-9:30 Am on Tuesday July 23 at Malvern Belmont Estates, 80 Mt Desert Street, Bar Harbor

Present: Cheryl Curtis, Sam Coplon, Terry Kelley, Stan MacDonald, Sydney Roberts Rockefeller, Janet Hamel, Julie and Greg Veilleaux, Don Straus, Robert Coolidge, Ron Beard

### **Announcements**

Terry Kelley had a call from the Maine State Housing Authority, saying that they would like to have a state conference on workforce housing in September in Bar Harbor.

Don Straus outlined his interest in reinvigorating democracy. Over the last year he has worked informally with America Speaks, which uses facilitated discussions and computer technology in support of public dialogue on issues. The founder, Carolyn J. Luckensmeyer, has expressed interest in exploring how their process might be adapted to work in rural areas and will be in Maine in August. America Speaks is helping with the New York City process of rebuilding “ground zero” and has invited an MDI Tomorrow participant to observe an event in which 5000 New Yorkers engage around redevelopment of lower Manhattan and development of a permanent memorial to the victims of the terrorist attack of September 11. ([www.americaspeaks.org](http://www.americaspeaks.org)) Cheryl Curtis indicated interest in going to the NYC event.

### **State of the Island report**

Janet Hamel reported for a subcommittee charged with drafting the housing section of the “State of the Island” Report. Discussion led to suggestions about:

#### ***Who is the report for?***

All members of the MDI community, including elected and volunteer policy makers, citizens of individual towns, summer residents, organizational leaders, and agencies and funders.

#### ***What is the purpose of the report?***

As in 1991, the report is to serve as a summary of “where we are” as an island in 2002, providing an overview of data and trends (demography, land use, economy, health and educational status, housing, etc), as well as our assets as a community

Next the report will try to “frame of the issues” as we have wrestled with them in each of the working groups, and point out the “intersections” between the issues... eg if we value and are concerned about viable, year-round communities on MDI, then we need to attend

to the parts of those communities such as housing, transportation, the economy, community health and issues of concern to youth...

Even if we present the data clearly, and frame the issues as interconnected, most people will get the message more easily through reading of stories of real people, illustrating the issues.

If we can do all that in our report (and in public forums or in video format (see below), we hope that people and existing organizations and local governments across the island will make use of that information and inspiration to talk about what they want for the future... thus, *we want the state of the island report to summarize where we are, to frame the key issues and opportunities before us and to serve as a springboard for discussion of preferred futures.*

The group said that the report should also note where other communities have found success in dealing with the issues or in using the assets of a community to take advantage of opportunities, so that participants begin the visioning process with some models and examples and inspiration.

In the case of housing, we have begun to outline how other communities have addressed issues of workforce housing through artful connection of:

- Changes to zoning to allow for greater density in appropriate areas
- Financial or tax incentives for developers
- Regulation (requirements that 10% of housing projects be affordable to families  
With incomes of \$25-55,000 per year)
- Public-Private Partnerships

Janet agreed to work with her sub committee to continue work on the draft.

### **Video idea**

Responding to Janet's query about the best way to get others engaged with the material and stories in the state of the island report, Cheryl suggested that we explore a video production that would highlight the issues and the stories. She volunteered to outline a concept and talk with Jeff Dobbs about production.

### **Framing the issue (again)**

The group returned to the overall puzzle of housing in a destination resort or gateway community. We were sobered by the complexity of the issue and the role of the market. Living on a very desirable island, with limited private land, assures MDI residents that the economic market place will never again, on its own, provide housing that is affordable to families earning mid-level incomes. There are simply too many other buyers in this marketplace who come from other places where their combination of assets and income allow them to outbid families who earn from \$25,000 to \$55,000. Those are the incomes of the workforce: carpenters, town employees, teachers, health care workers,

boat builders, technicians, store employees. These are the people who volunteer in our community institutions, who assure that there is a year-round economy, and whose children are in our schools. *If we want some of these people to live in the towns of Mount Desert Island in the future, we will need to intervene in some fashion in the marketplace, either through incentive, public investment or regulation.*

**Implications from meeting with developers**

We didn't get time to discuss this, so it will be on our agenda for our next meeting, along with a review of the next draft of the housing section of the state of the island report.