



White Mountain Board (NH) Begins Quest for Affordable Workforce Housing – August 2013

During a meeting of the New Hampshire Association of REALTORS® in Concord early last year, leaders of the 125-member White Mountain Board of REALTORS® (WMBR) watched a presentation on NAR's recently launched REALTOR® Party Initiative. As Association Executive Janine McLauchlan, President Bonnie Hayes, and a few of WMBR's directors learned about the various kinds of grants available, they said to each other, "Hey! We have things going on in our community that could benefit from that kind of help!"

It was clear from the start that the place to focus was the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition (MWVHC.) WMBR was already involved with the Housing Coalition, which responded enthusiastically to the proposal that they develop a project together that could be funded by a \$5,000 Housing Opportunity Grant from NAR. The result was the Mount Washington Valley Workforce Housing Design Charette, held June 3-6, 2013, in three communities in the area, with additional support from local businesses.

As a scenic, rural region whose primary industry is tourism, the White Mountains offer a high proportion of jobs in hospitality and retail, which do not necessarily pay enough to cover housing within a reasonable commuting range. McLauchlan, who also happens to chair her local school board, sees the problem first-hand. "We have a significant population of homeless students, whose parents couldn't find work to sustain their housing near local schools, and have, therefore, left town." With a dwindling presence of working families to support it, the region's economy is in serious jeopardy.

The charrette's theme of "Reuse, Revitalization and Right Sized Rural" encompasses the hope that the program would find ways to use both zoning and principles of smart growth to promote affordability, home sales and ultimately, a more robust economy.

The intensive design program brought together teams of planners and housing development professionals to rough out various development concepts reusing and/or revitalizing existing structures, as well as developing raw acreage. Particular attention was given to how zoning regulations either work or might be modified to improve the region's prospects for affordable workforce housing. Six REALTORS® served on the hard-working program committee, involved in all aspects from identifying sites for review, to attending to the needs of the design teams during the event. The sessions drew 78 members of the public and 26 housing industry professionals.

According to McLauchlan, her REALTOR® members who participated were extremely encouraged by the ideas and enthusiasm generated by the charrette. "It was well planned, well attended, and produced exciting results," she notes. "We were also pleasantly surprised by the diversity of community members committed to what will clearly be a long and sometimes arduous planning process." The Program Director of the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition will be making a presentation to the WMBR directors and membership later this summer, and McLauchlan expects their full support. "The importance of the project is clear," she says, "and although this is just the beginning of a lot of work to reach long-term solutions, it is a key step to moving our



organizational mission forward to benefit the real estate market, and improve the quality of life here in the White Mountains.”

To learn more about the White Mountain Board’s efforts to promote affordable housing for its local workforce, contact: Janine McLauchlan, Association Executive of the White Mountain Board of REALTORS®, at janine@whitemountainboard.com or 603.733.4748.



Theresa Kennett, Program Director for Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition, presents one of the designs to the charette audience