

**Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, June 13, 2012**  
**10:00 a.m.**

I. **Welcome and Introductions**

Present at the meeting were Jeff Heron (ACAP), Joella R. Theriault (NMDC), Michael Albert (St. John Valley Realty), Jane Towle (ReMax Central), and Keith Brown (Criterium Brown Engineering). Absent were Aaron Greenlaw (Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians), Wayne Troicke (Fort Fairfield Housing Authority), J.J. Roy (Ridgewood Estates and Crosswinds), Jennifer Trombley (Presque Isle Housing Authority), and Troy Haney (Haney Building Supply). All were welcomed and Jeff and Joella expressed their appreciation in having each participate as Team Members on this project.

II. **Overview of the Washington-Aroostook Regional Plan**

NMDC was granted funding from U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to complete a comprehensive plan for sustainable development in Aroostook and Washington Counties. The workplan lists 16 components that must be addressed and the purpose of this meeting was to address the sustainable housing component. This project will end on or about January, 2014. A copy of the Sustainable Housing workplan was distributed. J. Theriault explained that the outcome of this project was to increase participation and decision-making, particularly from the underserved population; identify gaps in affordability and accessibility in housing; increase energy efficiency; and boost economic development.

As a basis for addressing housing tasks, Joella distributed a copy of a memo from the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) regarding minimum standards for acceptable housing assessment plans as well as a municipal housing self-assessment guide, which could be used as a template for the Sustainable Development workplan.

### III. Discuss Sustainable Housing Workplan Tasks

The following is a summary of discussions regarding the workplan tasks:

- In Fort Kent, a recent fire in the downtown eliminated approximately 20 rental units. There is an extreme shortage of rental units in Fort Kent. St. John Valley Realty manages about 200 rental units with only two vacancies at this time. University of Maine at Fort Kent (UMFK) students are having difficulty finding rental units and subsequently decide not to attend UMFK. There has also been a significant decrease in Canadian students attending classes at UMFK. Further research to understand the cause for this is necessary.
- In the Presque Isle area, university students are assisted in finding rental units. The extreme shortage in rental units in this area is for families. ReMax Central receives many requests for family sized rental units.
- Jane Towle is familiar with the State of New Hampshire's Regional Housing Assessment Plan, which is mandated by the legislature and the plan must be updated every five years. She asked if regions would be broken down industry-wise because that would be significant. For example, housing in 'college towns' would be dissimilar from housing in other communities. Also housing development in regions with armed service facilities would be unlike communities with no such facility.
- There are both short-term and long-term requests for family rental. For example, border patrol officers, future employees of TAMC and Cary, and those with sustainable jobs are looking for singly family housing units to rent. The demand has grown for this type of housing. Short term rental, such as 6-month rentals is difficult to get and longer-term rentals usually purchase a home because it is cheaper than renting.
- Keith Brown performs building inspections in both Aroostook and Washington Counties. In addition to Keith, a staff of four additional inspectors provides this service. Since more banks are now demanding home inspections prior to approving a buyer, they are putting the burden of home inspection on appraisers who are not qualified or certified home inspectors. Requests for home inspections come from individuals, but at times referrals are made by insurance companies. USDA Rural Development recently initiated a pilot program requiring home inspections.

- Younger couples are purchasing new modular homes and as a result the older housing units where families were raised and now moved on remain vacant.
- Accessibility is also an issue in Aroostook County. ACAP and NMDC completed a handicapped accessible project a few years back, but many phone calls continue to come in requesting that type of assistance. Not only those who are mentally or physically disabled, but the frail elderly are in need of improvements to existing homes. ADA compliance standards for bathrooms are an issue in older multi-family housing units because there is not sufficient room to renovate bathrooms to meet the wheelchair requirements.
- Elderly population in Aroostook County is growing. As a result, need for housing improvements and construction of new multi-family housing units is growing. USDA Rural Development not willing to finance the construction of new multi-family housing units since there is vacancies in existing units throughout Aroostook County. The problem is that people in central Aroostook may not want to relocate to an existing vacant unit in either Allagash or Danforth for example. Elderly issue relative to housing improvements may never be resolved because most elderly individuals do not want to leave their homes.
- Regarding energy efficiency improvements, Mike Albert has been doing extensive research on alternative energy for independently-owned units. The subsidies on the units do not go up to meet the heating costs. He suggested a need for assistance with grant funding or design assistance for different types of alternative heat. Alternative heating systems are very expensive to install, but assistance with design for multiple housing units may offset the installation costs.
- ACAP received approximately \$1.1 m from Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) and expended those funds on 153 housing units within an eight-month period. Funds were used to replace roofs, install triple pane windows, hot water heaters, solar panels, washers, and energy monitors. This funding was matched with another source of funding to install blown-in insulation. This effort helped address some of needs with more homes still needing this type of assistance.
- ReMax Central discussed another emerging issue, which are requests from people throughout the U.S. looking to relocate to Aroostook County. These are very low

income people looking to purchase single family homes in the price range of \$40,000 to \$80,000; most are on disability; and they seem to be very knowledgeable of Maine's welfare program. Some people travel to Caribou via bus transportation and often, when they can't afford to purchase a home, end up at the DHHS Office or even Senator Collins' Office.

- Affordability is also a topic of concern in Aroostook County. The housing prices do not meet the incomes for many reasons; i.e. joblessness, minimum wage jobs, increased heating expenses, etc. For young couples, the mortgage insurance requirements increase monthly payments by 20% at times. While it appears that rental units has become unaffordable and is a problem here in the County, the dilemma for landlords is that rising fuel costs force them to raise rental rates.
- A report from Homeless Services of Aroostook was received on June 12, 2012. Joella shared the 2011 statistics with the team. Other than the homeless shelter, other statistics could be obtained from women's shelter, etc.

#### IV. Establish Assignments

- Mike Albert – As a result of the on-going research into alternative heat, discuss with Bob Dorsey of NMDC, as well as others, regarding biomass and report to team at future meeting.
- Jane Towle – Provide a report regarding number of calls, where callers are calling from, etc. regarding emerging issue with disabled, low-income people looking to purchase homes in Aroostook County. May even want to contact other real estate companies to see if they are seeing a similar trend.
- Keith Brown – Provide a brief narrative of Criterium Brown Engineering firm and other pertinent information on housing.
- Jeff Heron – Gather statistics on homeless, women's shelter and other shelters in Aroostook County; continue monitoring fuel assistance costs on the 123 units assisted with energy efficiency improvements and provide outcome.
- Joella Theriault – Obtain U.S. Census information on housing and provide information to team. Contact team members who are absent and provide meeting minutes of the initial meeting and send invitation letter regarding June 29th kick-off meeting.

- V. Kick-Off Meeting – Friday, June 29, 2012 beginning at 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Caribou Inn and Convention Center.
  
- VI. Open Discussion – See Item III.