

## For Immediate Release 6/12/2006

### Sandwich Citizens Housing Committee Update

The Sandwich Housing Committee was formed about one year ago by a group of individuals who are concerned about the high cost of land and housing in Sandwich and the impact the lack of affordable housing is having on the community. The decrease in enrollment at the Sandwich Central School is seen as evidence of the inability of young families to settle in town. Members are also responding to a need expressed by adult children of residents who want to live here but have had to move elsewhere due to affordability of housing. Statistics from the Lakes Region Planning Commission as well as other state information about the cost of housing in the region support the group's concern that Sandwich faces a significant challenge to sustain itself as a vibrant and diverse community.

Other communities around the nation have identified similar problems and taken various approaches to keeping their communities affordable to a diverse population. In February of 2005 John Abrams of South Mountain Company in Martha's Vineyard was invited by a group of concerned citizens to speak in Sandwich. He spoke of a similar situation on the Vineyard where many of the native population with their significant multigenerational history on the island could no longer afford to live there. The essence of the community was at risk when people who serve the community such as fire fighters, police and teachers could no longer buy or build on the Vineyard. Abrams and others have worked on the Vineyard to develop multifaceted ways of responding to the housing need. His talk laid out a variety of creative solutions which have received widespread community support.

The SCH began its formal work following this talk, meeting monthly and it has adopted the following mission statement. *"The mission of the Sandwich Citizens Housing is to increase the availability of housing to meet the diverse needs of our community"*. The vision statement is as follows: *"The community of Sandwich would maintain its small town rural character but would consist of people of all ages, interests and incomes. Housing would be available to families of diverse occupations and incomes"*.

Over the course of the past two years meetings have covered a wide variety of topics and ideas. Here are some of the essentials that have been culled from these extensive discussions.

#### What SCH is committed to:

Perpetual affordability in any housing project

"Green" design & construction that "fits" Sandwich

Ultimately providing housing for a variety of ages and income levels

Sandwich verses other NH housing initiatives –While many NH communities lack a diverse housing supply there are a few characteristics that we have found that will define future efforts of SCH:

Our town lacks large employers that are a driving force in most initiatives

Our "unit need" is smaller than most communities. This can limit our attractiveness to public financiers

We lack the high density zoning that is used to bring the per unit price down

These committees have been formed and their scope of activity has been defined. Italics list what ground they have covered to date.

#### Community Outreach

Establish means to collect (& act on) feedback from community communication (*Town*

*wide survey created and completed. Summary of survey results presented to group)*

Talk to town organizations to find how housing is affecting their groups i.e. fire dept., children's center, historical society, church, school (*This was done during the process of administering the survey*)

Newspaper articles and Internet postings of SCH work. (*This has been ongoing via Sandwich board and Meredith paper. We have also attended a Selectmen's meeting and the summer town meeting*)

Create consensus on positions of SHC & language we'll use when interacting with the public (*evolving –we have had much discussion on the language to use. Positions need further definition*)

Develop a public relations strategy that includes public, interactive forums with all segments of Sandwich (*Still to do*)

Collect human-interest stories to help establish understanding of situation in Sandwich(*Still to do*)

Collect statistics that support the anecdotal need for more diverse housing in Sandwich. i.e. salaries vs. house prices (*Evolving*)

Foster an understanding of housing market as it relates to Sandwich& communicate with realtors as source of perspective(*still to do*)

#### **Legal and Formative Issues**

Investigate independent 501c3 formation - costs, benefits, liabilities verses affiliation with existing group -What are benefits /liabilities of going alone as a non profit verses a "piggy back"*(Exploration of this issue involved meeting with Laconia Area Land Trust (LALT), Sandwich Senior Housing/Resources, lakes Region Habitat for Humanity (HH) and Eastern Lakes Region Housing Coalition. (EL) Ultimately SCH decided to pursue independent incorporation. We are currently half way through the non-profit incorporation process with the State, and have completed organizational bylaws. Upon completion of the New Hampshire non-profit process we will file for a federal 501C3 non-profit designation).*

Investigate and inform SCH of the federal and state legal limitations pertaining to any project the group initiates (*still to do*)

Define and present long term issues: Who owns properties? Who controls occupancy? Who maintains units? Who oversees covenants? (*On-going*)

#### **Land Acquisition and Project Development**

Explore possible properties including possible gifts or those that might be sold at below market cost. (*On going - A number of contacts have been made to a variety of property owners*)

Identify sources of funding (*On going - We have initiated conversation with NH Housing Finance Authority and made an initial approach to Quimby Fund*)

Do a needs assessment of Sandwich community- Who needs housing? How many? House or apt or other unit? Income level? (*Still to do*)

Ensure appropriate design – (*Still to do*)

#### **Zoning and Housing Regulations**

Educate SCH members regarding current zoning. What are current rules regarding density?- (*Currently allowed is 2.2 acres w/ a building with a "sanitary facility ". Density can creep to 2-4 units in a single structure on 4 acres. Steep slopes and wetlands affect lot minimums. We do have regulations that address cluster housing but we don't have high-density zoning*)

Research what have other communities done to their zoning to address housing needs? (*Still to do*)

Discussions and investigations over the past two years have led to this partial list of resources that SCC has and will continue to use:

NH Housing Finance Authority (Ted Wilkenson) Provides money and education for multi unit developments.

Lakes Region Chapter of Habitat for Humanity(Earl Miller) – Open to working with SCH. Currently building in M'boro

NH Charitable Fund (David Sinkler) Has grant money available for workforce housing

Upper Valley Land Trust- Ann Cooley (802-291-9100) Serves Nh/Vt border communities. An education and advocacy group in the Hanover area. Doesn't hold title to any land. Spoke with SCH in 2005

Laconia Area Land Trust – Develop and own many rental units and one single-family house. Willing to work with SCH. Spoke to SCH in 2005

NH Community Loan Fund – Provides funding for projects with manufactured homes. Pepperidge Woods in Barrington is one example.