

## SELECTMEN PLAN MORE AFFORDABLE HOMES FOR WORKING FAMILIES IN LENOX

A plan for increasing the number of homes in Lenox that working families can afford to buy has been adopted by the Board of Selectmen and the Planning Board.

As conceived by the town's Affordable Housing Committee, the Housing Production Plan (HPP) calls for construction of at least 55 homes. That would enable the town to meet a state goal that at least 10 percent of its taxable properties should be certified as affordable to qualify. The figure now stands at 7.8 percent.

"The biggest need identified by the plan is for houses that working families can buy," said Dave Klausmeyer, chairman of the committee. "Families want to live in Lenox because of our good schools, but can't afford to buy homes here. The actions laid out in this plan will begin to change that."

The committee called for three major steps toward increasing the amount of affordable housing:

1. Support of the Saw Mill Brook project, which will offer affordable housing for families.
2. Creation of a trust fund to help make affordable construction and renovation more feasible
3. Certification of some existing employer provided rental housing as affordable, through deed restrictions.

Community support for Saw Mill has already been demonstrated with the seed money loans from the Trustees of the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts, as requested by Trinity Episcopal Church in Lenox and contribution from the Stockbridge Congregational Church, as well as \$40,000 in Community Preservation Act funding provided by the Town of Lenox.

### **Debate About Road Ends With Decision**

*A prolonged debate on reconstruction of West Steet (Route 183) to satisfy bikers, walkers and motorists has ended with adoption of a plan to keep the sidewalk at its present width and provide bike lanes on the road shoulders.*

*The Board of Selectmen's endorsement of the plan clears the way for the town's consulting engineers to produce a design for the project.*

*The Massachusetts Highway Department will conduct a public hearing on the design this winter now that state and Federal authorities have allocated \$3.9 million for the project.*

While there is an adequate inventory of affordable rental units for seniors or the disabled, Lenox does not have any affordable single family homes or condominiums. To be affordable a property must be priced at \$175,000 or less for a family of four earning \$51,840 a year, which is 80 percent of the local median income.

"A strong community has housing for people of all ages and income levels," Debbie Burke, president of Lenox Affordable Housing, said. "Many people who work for the Town, or in the hospitality, wellness or other creative and entrepreneurial fields will find they qualify for certified affordable units. This plan makes clear that Lenox wants to broaden its housing to welcome people who want to live and work here."

## *Town Asks Builders To 'Think Green'*

Lenox builders are being encouraged to join the growing volunteer "green" conservation movement with a program fostering innovative energy conservation procedures in new construction in the town.

The Board of Selectmen opened the way for adoption of the program by approving the Lenox Green Building Challenge, developed and proposed by the Green Building Code working group subcommittee of the Lenox Environmental Committee.

For the past nine months the working group has been researching various measures other communities have undertaken to foster innovation in the construction industry by "Thinking Green."

The program provides financial incentives in the form of rebates on building permits for projects that achieve one the following levels:

- A Project that meets the Energy Star standards will receive a \$500 rebate on the local building permits
- A project that achieves the A-plus Energy Star rating and

also a green building certification from LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design); Earth Advantage, or the National Association of Home Builders will receive a 50 percent rebate from the local building permit fee up to \$1,500.

Green building design and construction is based on the principle that thoughtful planning and use of smart materials can create buildings that are healthier, more energy efficient and more cost effective to operate. The economic benefits are significant, with savings of at least 30 percent on energy costs year after year.

The Challenge is one of several efforts Lenox is pursuing as it works toward a more sustainable future. Stay tuned for more green news. Meanwhile, for more information about the new Green Building Challenge, contact the Lenox Land Use or Inspections Departments.

## **Tax Breaks for Senior Volunteers**

At least 25 residents have been spared from paying a total of \$22,500 in property taxes in the two years the Lenox TaxWrite-off Program for seniors has been in effect.

As created by the Board of Selectmen, the program now in its third year, makes it possible for volunteers working for the town a maximum of 111 hours a year to receive a tax bill showing a \$750 reduction.

The program started in the 2006-07 fiscal year with 10 volunteers; it was increased to 20 for the current tax year. Twenty volunteers are now working for tax credits of \$6.75 an hour, the state's minimum wage, with some having been on the "payroll" since the beginning.

Volunteers have been accepted for positions at the Community Center, the Lenox Library, the Town Hall, the Chamber of Commerce and the Academy building. Their positions include filing library books, answering telephones, maintaining computerized records, supervising an after-school homework room, transporting elders to medical appointments, and performing a variety of routine office assignments. In other words, whatever tasks are at hand.

The program is administered by Kim Graham, Executive Director of the Community Center; the Town Assessor records the work-off hours. Daily time sheets are signed by each worker's supervisor.

To qualify for the program, an applicant must be 60 or older, to have been a Lenox resident for at least one year, reside at his or her property for at least eight months a year and produce a current tax bill. Application forms are available at the Community Center.