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**May 2023**

We wanted to find a way to share the work our Coalition is doing and decided to put together this short newsletter that we could share with our friends and interested citizens.

**A Little History**

The Workforce Housing Coalition started its work in 2021 when a group of citizens and municipal officials from Kingfield to Stratton-Eustis came together over concerns that housing costs were making it more difficult for employers to fill vacant positions and for young people to settle in our region and build their lives here.

In the fall of 2021, the Select Board in Carrabassett Valley used $20,000 of ARPA funds and hired Camoin Associates, an Economic Development Research Company to study the [issue](https://eadn-wc04-8242483.nxedge.io/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Report-Workforce-Housing-Plan-Town-of-Carrabassett-Valley-ME.pdf). To no one’s surprise the study confirmed what many of us were concerned about. Many workers in our region are either commuting long distances or spending far more on housing than they can afford. Of the approximately 1100 workers in our region about 36% or about 400 workers are commuting more than 25 miles to work here, and 285 households spend more than 30% of their annual income on housing. (Data collected in housing study by Camoin Assoc.)

In the fall of 2022, the Franklin County Commissioners awarded the Coalition $308,275 in funding to get started. The group is now formally incorporated as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation and is working to build [workforce housing in the region](https://whcwmm.org/).

**Senators Collins and King agree to submit our request for $1.5M in Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) to the Senate Appropriations Committee**

We were elated to learn recently that both of our Senators have agreed to submit our $1.5 Million request for funding to the Senate Appropriations Committee to construct workforce housing in our region. Although a long way from a done deal, having both our Senators support the work we are doing indicates that they recognize the importance of providing housing for employees and their families that is within the financial means of workers.

If we are fortunate enough to receive a CDS appropriation, we would learn about it in the fall, and it would be available in the spring of 2024. This line~~s~~ up perfectly with the timeline to begin construction of our first project as soon as the spring of 2024.

**Public Informational Meeting**s

As the Workforce Housing Coalition Board work progresses, the need to share its work publicly has become important. With that in mind, the Coalition is scheduling public informational meetings from Kingfield to Stratton-Eustis.

The first will be in Carrabassett Valley at the Library on Wednesday, May 24th @ 4:30 PM. At this meeting we will review the need for workforce housing in our region, summarize our efforts to address this need and do our best to answer questions people have.

**Architect Selected**

The Site Selection and Building Committee has hired Kaplan Thompson Architects to help us do some preliminary building and site designs that we can show the public, employers and others. Kaplan Thompson has experience building workforce housing in other locations in Maine. Their preliminary designs will be just that “preliminary.” We plan to hold community meetings early in the process and to integrate comments from the public, employers, communities, and potential tenants and buyers before finalizing designs, which may be different in different parts of the region.

**Coalition Efforts to Find other Locations for Workforce Housing**

The Coalition continues to look for other property in addition to the 7 acres that we secured a purchase and sale agreement for in Kingfield back in December of 2022. One site will not allow us to meet the housing needs of workers, which we feel is critical to the future economic and social wellbeing of our communities. The Camoin study estimated that we need between 104 and 312 units of year-round housing and an additional 225-338 units of seasonal housing.

Starting this process back in 2022, I don’t think any of us thought that finding land would be so difficult. Much of the land in our region is remote, already developed or just not suitable. We have tried to focus on available land where workers could walk to services like grocery stores and easily find transportation.

We have met a couple of times recently with Karl Strand, the General Manager of Sugarloaf, our largest regional employer, to discuss the possible use of property at Sugarloaf. Karl has been very supportive of what we are doing. They are now reviewing the property they may have available that is not needed for snowmaking infrastructure or other operations. We plan to get together with him again in a couple of months and hope to come up with a parcel that can be used for workforce housing.

We are also actively looking at a privately owned site in Carrabassett Valley and a site in Eustis that is owned by the Town. Hopefully more about those in future newsletters.