

Summer Residents Association

Fall 2012

A Publication of the Summer
Residents of the Town Mount Desert

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

I sincerely hope that those of you who were caught in the path of Hurricane Sandy last month are safe, and that your lives are back to normal once again. From what I can tell, Mount Desert Island rode out the storm quite well, without any major property damage. Here in Virginia, we lost a number of large trees to the big winds, experienced seven inches of cold drenching rain, and lost power for three days, but we were able to clean up quickly afterwards.

Last spring and summer was a very active time for your Board of the Summer Residents Association, as we helped fund and coordinate a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), which occurred in early June in Northeast Harbor. The goal of this consulting effort was to revitalize the village of Northeast Harbor as a year round community. Since that time, we have worked hard to communicate and dialogue the findings and recommendations of the ULI TAP with all the stakeholders in the Town of Mount Desert, including the TMD Board of Selectmen, business owners, local year round residents, non-profit

board members, as well as summer residents. We then worked hard to ensure that realistic action plans were being put together by these stakeholders that address many of the recommendations made in the final ULI TAP Report. This newsletter will recap for you the ULI TAP's recommendations as well as where we stand today relative to what the stakeholders believe they can act upon in the short term.

I should add that while some of the recommendations from the TAP are really low hanging fruit and should be acted upon immediately, others are more controversial and may not be readily supported by the SRA.. Still others are harder to envision getting popular leadership and funding from the year round community, and then there are others that are longer term ideas, but still worth considering down the road. Further, as you read through these recommendations, you will note the ULI TAP points out that summer residents, many of whom are very committed to the well being of MDI and NEH, are and always have been a significant philanthropic base for the community. Additional financial (and non financial) support to specific, more tangible elements of the ULI recommendations from this constituency is being recommended. You should note that up until now, the SRA has

never consciously raised money from its members for a specific cause. Your Board will, however, at least consider support to some of the focus areas from ULI needing financial support with current available SRA assets.

SRA Board of Directors

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SRA Mission Statement

The mission of the Summer Residents Association of the Town of Mount Desert is to provide an effective means of communication between the summer residents and the Town leadership on issues that concern the current and future well-being of the Town. The Steering committee (Board of Directors) seeks to represent and to keep them informed of, and involved in, the Town planning process on current and future issues.

The Summer Residents Association seeks to be the timely and constructive voice of the summer residents with Town government working closely with Town leaders to preserve and protect the unique character, culture, environment and quality of life in the Town of Mount Desert.

At the two SRA Meetings in July and August of last summer, there was excellent dialogue regarding the TAP recommendations, and members were very enthusiastic that this effort could result in real positive changes for the community. From my perspective, I can sense that there is a much improved relationship between the SRA and the Board of Selectmen versus several years ago, and that both year round and summer residents are now working in partnership to make changes for the betterment of all. I hope that the momentum we have built will continue into 2013 and beyond. Stay tuned for a further update in the Spring, 2013 SRA Newsletter.

Excerpts from the final ULI TAP Report July, 2012

Background: Under the direction of the Urban Land Institute's Boston District Council, The Northeast Harbor Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) convened in Northeast Harbor, Maine in June, 2012, bringing together stakeholders, Town and community leaders, and a panel of land use and development professionals for a day-long session focused on identifying opportunities and strategies for revitalizing Northeast Harbor's commercial center (Main Street), leveraging recent investments in the marina, and creating opportunities for affordable (workforce) housing to be developed. To coordinate and facilitate the TAP, Durlin Lunt, Town Manager of the Town of Mount Desert served as primary contact for ULI Boston for the Town. Hamilton Clark and Elaine Lincoln, both of the Summer Residents Association and members of the Town

of Mount Desert Revitalization Committee, were also instrumental in organizing the Northeast Harbor TAP.

TAP Recommendations: The economic and social dynamics that have been driving the shift in population from year-round to seasonal residents since the 1980s, will not be altered fundamentally by pursuing any recommendations. However, there are "baskets" of opportunities that could improve this situation and others that can increase business and vitality of the village center independent of the nature of the residential base. These actions will require sustained collaboration between a range of constituencies, including but not limited to: Town government, year-round residents, summer residents, the business community, and local non-profits. These "baskets" combine soft and hard interventions in both the short and long term that can together provide significant incremental improvement to activity and vitality in the village of Northeast Harbor. The following is a menu of strategies that the community should consider:

A. – Make Northeast Harbor a "Beehive" of Activity ... such as a Greenhouse Education Complex, a Farmers Market, Street Fairs, Maritime Museum Activities, an Arts Center, Art Shows, Movie Nights, and better marketing of the village.

B. – Capitalize on Marina Improvements ... such as facilitating visual and physical connections to Main St., adding preservation-based interpretive signage, adding courtesy cars / pedicabs from the Visitor center to Main St., improving marina marketing, web-based outreach, and dredging the harbor for

expanding use for charter and tour boats.

C. – Add Amenities and Animation to Main Street ... such as an artisan tent, outdoor seating, streetscape improvements, and a village square on Main St.

D. – Enhance and Leverage Historic Assets ... such as adding interpretive historic signs, making façade improvements

E. – Strengthen the Commercial Core ... such as attracting targeted businesses, enabling retail / residential developments in the gaps on Main St., re-building a "gathering place" (e.g. a bar/café) on or near Main St.), enabling business consulting to existing businesses, and enhancing the "buy local" initiative.

F. – Provide a Spectrum of Year-Round Housing ... meaning there must be affordable and market rate opportunities in both the rental and ownership markets

G. – Increase the Supply of Affordable Housing ... may require public regulatory and financing mechanisms at the local and state level

H. – Increase the Supply of Market Rate Year Round Housing ... by making available Town-owned sites suitable for such development projects.

I. – Identify and Effectuate Catalytic Projects .. such as better utilization of the off-island parking lot next to the Marina and building an "artists live-work studio" on the Summit and Main St. corner lot.

J. – Pursue Institutional Opportunities & Partnerships ... such as with The College of the Atlantic and/or a culinary school

Next Steps:

Collaborative Partnerships: Northeast Harbor's ability to initiate and maintain momentum on any of the recommended strategies will rely on the further development of an articulated vision for the short, medium, and long term that will require sustained collaboration between the Town, the business community, year round residents, and summer residents. Collaboration, based on ongoing communication, will be key.

Focused, Compelling Vision for Philanthropy: A seasonal constituency deeply committed to the Island and the village, in particular, represents a significant asset. A compelling and coherent vision may provide a boost to philanthropy. While philanthropy to the vision as a whole would be ideal, this can be supplemented by philanthropy to specific, perhaps more tangible, elements of the plan — such as the vest pocket park, which may provide a more satisfying opportunity for some donors. As Northeast Harbor builds on its work to date and continues the conversation about revitalization strategies it began a year ago, it should keep the idea of developing a compelling vision for philanthropy in mind. Organizing individuals and communities and garnering their support are generally easier if it can be done behind a somewhat concrete vision.

Business Mentoring/Soft Incubator Program: The contribution of human capital as well as financial capital can be an important element of the plan, and one that would play a powerful role in building and strengthening bonds between seasonal and year-round populations to build a cohesive community. In the summer months a wealth

of business experience and talent gathers in Northeast Harbor. A key question for the village should be: How to engage this talent for the enhancement of existing businesses and creation of new businesses? An informal forum — held at the Neighborhood House or the Library, on a biweekly or monthly basis — that allows future entrepreneurs or existing business people, from both the year-round and seasonal communities, to meet and share ideas and experience could be a way to achieve multiple objectives through one effort.

NOTE: The full Technical Assistance Panel Report can be accessed on the TMD web site at: http://www.mtidesert.org/public_documents/index

ULI TAP Action Planning and Current Status

The previous Revitalization Committee, which was responsible for enabling the ULI TAP, met with the TMD Board of Selectmen in August, and recommended that a new "Implementation Committee" be formed. The SRA representatives suggested strongly that this new committee should not be led by summer residents (as was the case with the Revitalization Committee), but rather leadership and ownership should be the charge of local business people and concerned year round residents. This approach was agreed to by the Board of Selectmen, and a preliminary meeting of 25+ citizens convened at an initial meeting at the Neighborhood House on September 5th. Subsequently, this group has split into two groups — one focusing on commercial development opportu-

nities (convened by the Chamber of Commerce) and the other on housing opportunities (convened by The Island Housing Trust). These two groups have met on their own since then with much progress, but it is premature now to report on specific steps they are taking or recommending in response to the ULI TAP report. There are encouraging developments in the works, however, and more details should be available by next spring.

Lastly, as many of you are aware, the Township has been dealing with some controversial issues with their outdated Land Use Zoning Ordinances (LUZO), most noticeably at present in Hall Quarry, but also in Seal Harbor earlier this year. The Town has hired a consultant to relook at how these LUZO's may be clarified and brought up to date, and they have formed a LUZO Review Advisory Group. There may be opportunities from this effort to address some of the recommendations from the ULI TAP relative to the zoning in the marina area as well as on Main St. in Northeast Harbor.

***Your SRA Board
wishes you a
happy and safe
holiday season.***

***Thank you for
all your support,
and we look
forward to
seeing you next
summer.***