



# HOUSING SOLUTIONS NETWORK

**Tuesday, November 13, 2012**

**9:00 – 11:00 a.m.**

**1209 S. Garfield Avenue, Traverse City**

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## **A. Welcome and Introductions**

Skip Brown	Freedom Builders
Bob Carstens	Acme Township
Virginia Coulter	GT County
Kevin Cranson	Homestretch
David Dennison	Senator Carl Levin
Brandon Fewins	Senator Debbie Stabenow
Pat Hess	Northern Lakes Community Mental Health
Jim Lively	Michigan Land Use Institute
Bill Merry	Homestretch
Carol Moorman	Goodwill
Connor Miller	North Sky Nonprofit Network
Cathy Odom	NMCAA
Susan Onan	Brickways
Jeff Vitton	GT County
Dee Wilkinson	Area Agency on Aging
Sarah Lucas	NWMCOG

## **B. Consideration of Agenda and July 2012 Meeting Minutes**

Two presenters were unable to attend. Skip Brown agreed to provide an update and overview on Freedom Builders. The meeting agenda was accepted as modified. The meeting minutes were accepted as presented.

## **C. County Updates**

V. Coulter updated that Grand Traverse County is looking for applications for their homebuyer purchase program. She noted that applicants have been waiting for Rural Development loans to become available. B. Fewins noted that low-income RD money has been used up already, and that homebuyers with purchase agreements will be waiting til late March or early April for the loans to become available. The money went in two weeks due to the large waiting list. He added that direct loans are still from Rural Development.

## **D. Freedom Builders**

S. Brown updated on activities at Freedom Builders. There are currently four staff – himself, his wife, a project manager, and a construction manager. He stated that they eliminated all projects that are not absolutely necessary;

they're down to 134 projects, which cover everything from foundations to roofs. Because the organization needed a new funding source, Freedom Builders has begun to purchase and renovate foreclosed homes for resale. Using staff and volunteer labor along with donated material resources, 2 foreclosures are undergoing complete renovation at the same time. One of the homes is a 1700 square foot home that was completely gutted and renovated for resale to an individual that commutes from the Mancelona area to the southeast side of Traverse City. The family can't finance through a bank because the wife's medical issues led to bankruptcy; however, there is an excellent work record, and the Traverse City State Bank determined that if it wasn't for the bankruptcy they would finance him. Instead a Freedom Builders board member will finance the family for 4%. Freedom Builders will make \$30,000 to \$40,000. He continued that the organization has grown faster than we're able to manage, and added that more churches have joined forces with us in one year than in the last ten years.

C. Moorman asked how Freedom Builders prioritizes projects. S. Brown answered that it's difficult to prioritize; there may be top 5 projects now but if someone calls with a crisis then the priority changes. Some priority is based on emotional distress of family.

V. Coulter asked if Freedom Builders will work on manufactured housing, and where most of the projects are located. S. Brown replied that they do, and about 70-75% of their projects consists of manufactured housing; about 20% of that is in parks. They work all throughout the 5-county region, and have also done projects in Wexford and Manistee Counties.

C. Odom noted that the RD housing preservation grants can be used in Grand Traverse County, and can be applied to manufactured homes. She noted that elderly people are often reluctant to take on debt on the house.

S. Onan asked if Freedom Builders staff works for pay as well, as an additional funding source. S. Brown answered that they haven't had time recently, but there is also the concern about the Homebuilders Association. They think we're stealing work from them. He stated that they have done it but haven't had the capacity, and are hoping to open up the doors to that. S. Onan stated that there may be opportunities to work in partnership with other nonprofits that need repairs or renovations.

C. Odom asked if it makes sense to refer people to Freedom Builders right now, given the number of projects. S. Brown answered that if you can income qualify that helps a lot. When they call us first without us talking to you we don't know that they don't have the resources. He suggested just leaving a message or sending an email that you had talked to them.

J. Vitton asked if Freedom Builders has ever considered Building Together affiliation? S. Brown stated that our mission statements may or may not be a good fit. The mission of Freedom Builders is to remind people that they matter and are valuable. Most families we serve are pretty broken. When the people who serve them aren't paid – that's a completely different representation to them than if they were just doing a job.

#### **E. Grand Vision to Grand Action – HUD Sustainable Communities Grant**

S. Lucas updated on Grand Vision regional planning activities and reviewed the draft survey for use at the expo in February/March. Members suggested adding options for accessible housing, energy efficient housing, walkability, locations close to entertainment/events.

She added that we will be asking for help with outreach from Network members to get as many people there as possible.

#### **F. Market Studies**

S. Lucas reviewed needs for updated market studies. Current market studies are now required for MSHDA's Housing Resource Fund (HRF) grant applications. She noted that the first estimate she's received was for \$44,000, but is not one of MSHDA's approved technical assistance providers. She will seek estimates from additional providers over the coming months.

### **G. Roundtable Discussion and Announcements (5 minutes)**

D. Dennison and B. Fewins updated on fiscal cliff issues and stated that there should be concerns about funding for your organizations down the road. There are going to be some major cuts but not sure where; oftentimes cuts are for purposes that your organizations represent. There isn't a big lobby pushing for issues like affordable housing – you're it. Grant opportunities will probably drastically decrease. J. Vitton asked about the potential for eliminating the mortgage deduction and using that increased revenue for housing purposes. D. Dennison answered that it's not likely.

S. Onan related her recent experience with MSHDA procedures that reflects a sense of urgency in their agency due to a HUD audit.

C. Moorman updated that the annual meeting of the Continuum of Care will focus on services to homeless veterans. She added that Homestretch is helping Goodwill in predevelopment for 36 unit supportive housing application.

B. Merry stated that the Depot Neighborhood project is moving at glacial speed. New requirements for environmental assessment which has slowed us down; we've just started on a Phase II Environmental Assessment. If the site is a facility the project will slow down even more and we will have to work with the county to remedy any issues. He added that Homestretch has gotten grants for construction – over \$400,000 from MSHDA and \$200,000 for infrastructure from the Opportunity Resource Fund. Financing is there for our part. Habitat is working on fundraising for their portion.

V. Coulter stated that MSHDA's new director is Scott Woosley. He doesn't have a background in government but does have experience in housing and real estate. She noted that she visited Cottage 36, which includes 29 units of tax credit funded affordable housing and is a very impressive renovation.

C. Miller noted that he's been working with students on media projects, such a video about the Benzie/GT bus connection.

J. Lively stated that the Michigan Land Use Institute is interested in ways we can help with the surveys and expo. He explained the new BATA fixed route bus service to interlochen with connection to Benzie. If you live along fixed-route connection services, you can get to a job without a car. Our region is making a commitment to fixed-route service, which could change housing patterns in villages near bus stops.

J. Vitton stated that Grand Traverse County is creating a data book, which will include regular census data as well as other continuously updated data like the Point-In-Time homeless count. If there are any other sources you can think of, please let him know.

V. Coulter stated that WODA received their tax credit for Brookside Commons, which will include 72 or 75 units; 24 to 26 of those will be supportive housing units.