



## HOUSING SOLUTIONS NETWORK MEETING

Tuesday, May 8, 2012

9:00 – 11:00 a.m.

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### Members Present

Emilee Syrewicze, Foundation for Mental Health  
Dee Newman Wilkinson, Area Agency on Aging  
Virginia Coulter, Grand Traverse County  
David Dennison, Senator Levin Office  
Carol Brito, MSHDA  
Pat Hess, Northern Lakes Community Mental Health  
Jeff Vitton, Grand Traverse County  
Cheryl Naperala, Grand Traverse Area Continuum of Care  
Joanne Turnbull, Traverse City Housing Commission  
Cdr Joseph Buzzella, US Coast Guard  
Carrie Thompson, Bay Area Transportation Authority  
Tom Menzel, Bay Area Transportation Authority  
Ron Crummel, Leelanau County Planning and Community Development

### Staff Present

Sarah Lucas, NWMCOG

### A. Welcome and Introductions

### B. Consideration of Agenda

The agenda was accepted as presented.

### C. Consideration of March 13, 2012 Meeting Minutes

The minutes were accepted as presented.

### D. County Updates

Virginia Coulter noted that Grand Traverse County has submitted an application for a homebuyer purchase and repair program (HPR) for the villages of Kingsley and Fife Lake.

Ron Crummel noted that Leelanau County had worked with the owner of the Silvertree Deli building in Suttons Bay on plans for apartments for the building; but the owner lost the building and it will be auctioned off this month. It's a perfect spot for downtown apartments.

V. Coulter stated that the MEDC Community Assistance Team will be meeting with Grand Traverse County and others on a potential redevelopment project in Fife Lake.

## **E. Coast Guard Housing Needs**

Commander Joe Buzzella reviewed the history and mission of the Coast Guard air station in Traverse City and the city's 2010 designation as a Coast Guard City. There are 140 personnel in the Traverse City base; 25% of those personnel change every summer. The base and its personnel have an approximate \$8.3 million economic footprint in the region. He explained some of the housing issues experienced by personnel. The Veteran's Administration doesn't allow VA loans to be used for site condos – and many residential properties in the area are classified as such. Because of conventional financing terms, this leaves many CG personnel unable to qualify for mortgages from either the VA or conventional financing. In addition, many families can't find adequate rentals. The CG has been working with the VA, with assistance from state and national representatives, to change terms of VA loans to permit CG and other military personnel to purchase homes that qualify as site condos; the VA has agreed to streamline the process and discuss the issue further. However, because of regular turnover, most CG families want to rent; and the rental housing allowance is not adequate for many of the rental homes in the area. In some cases it's cheaper for families to buy than it is to rent.

R. Crummel asked if the CG had considered consolidating housing and if CG families were interested in living in consolidated housing on or near the base. Cdr. Buzzella answered that there was interest in that and it was something that may be considered as an option if other solutions aren't identified for these housing issues. However, the preference is to support the local economy by renting and purchasing existing homes in the area.

V. Coulter noted that there are down payment assistance programs offered by MSHDA and the Federal Home Loan Bank that may be helpful.

Cdr. Buzzella noted that one possible incentive that has been discussed is the possibility of allowing property owners who rent to CG families to claim a homestead exemption.

S. Lucas asked if there was a requirement or preference for CG families to live within a certain distance from the base, and if finding housing near the base was an issue. Cdr. Buzzella answered that there isn't a requirement to do so, and because of the difficulties families have in finding adequate rentals, some have to purchase homes farther out of town, where it's cheaper than renting.

Members noted several rental resources available, including the CoC resource guide and [NWMHousingSearch.org](http://NWMHousingSearch.org).

## **F. BATA**

Tom Menzel reviewed changes over the last three years at BATA. Goals have been financial stewardship, improving the riders' experience, meeting needs, and looking ahead. As part of these goals, BATA has eliminated its debt, restructured the organization's management, and replaced 70% of its fleet. Newer buses with higher mileage have provided a cost savings and generated revenue from advertisers. Other changes include on-board video cameras which have reduced litigation and provided greater safety, allowing for school children to use the bus to get to school. All of these changes have come from state and federal grants. C. Thompson continued that BATA is also working to improve customers' experiences through customer service training for employees, as well as providing a new website and smart phone app. BATA is also looking at partnerships with NMC to providing parking and transportation for Cherry Festival and Film Festival volunteers. She noted that there are currently 5 fixed routes in Traverse City as well as three village connector routes between Traverse City and Northport, Empire, and Fife Lake. In customer surveys, responses indicated that people were looking for more frequent, more convenient, and faster routes. As such, two additional routes will be added between Northport and Empire, and a connector will also be added in Interlochen and Acme. Dial-a-ride services will be reduced from 13 buses to 6, and routes will be focused on collecting riders and taking them to a fixed route.

R. Crummel asked if BATA has considered pub crawl or winery routes. C. Thompson answered that as long as the stops are part of a regular route, and BATA charges regular fares, they are permitted to provide that service. She noted that some winery employees have asked for service to vineyards as well.

V. Coulter asked what the biggest stops are. C. Thompson answered that the mall, grocery stores, and the hospital have the biggest ridership.

Pat Hess asked in respect to greater reliance on fixed routes, how people would be protected from the weather. C. Thompson answered that there will be transfer stations, but BATA would like any suggestions on where those should be or how they should be designed.

J. Vitton asked if BATA would be considering park-and-ride options. C. Thompson answered that TART has catalogued all park and ride facilities and BATA will be doing that as well. They'll also be looking at options that would allow buses to carry more bikes.

S. Lucas asked if BATA coordinates with other county transit providers. T. Menzel answered that it's difficult because respective systems don't "speak" to each other, but they're looking at options such as consistent fares. Other options may arise with fixed route service in Acme and Interlochen.

#### **G. Roundtable Discussion and Announcements**

S. Lucas noted that discussion on placemaking guidelines/plans can be added to the committee agenda for June.

#### **H. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 11 a.m.