



LINCOLN COUNTY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## Housing, water projects highlight Planning Commission annual meeting

Staff recognizes achievements, new officers chosen

By JOSEPH CHARPENTIER | Posted: Friday, June 22, 2018 - 8:30am



Erin Cooperrider explains the differences between types of housing and housing finance. JOSEPH CHARPENTIER/Boothbay Register

Erin Cooperrider of Community Housing of Maine, keynote speaker of the Lincoln County Regional Planning Commission's annual meeting, said most of the work she and her organization have done was started by communities reaching out for help developing housing. Cooperrider shared her knowledge and experience in the housing industry with over 20 LCRPC members from 16 towns.



LCRPC members and guests came to the 1812 Farm to attend the June 19 meeting. They represented Alna, Boothbay, Boothbay Harbor, Bristol, Damariscotta, Edgecomb, Jefferson, Newcastle, Nobleboro, Somerville, Southport, Waldoboro, Westport Island, Wiscasset and Whitefield.

"Housing is key to creating a sustaining and thriving community and every community needs a continuum of housing choice – home ownership and rental, large and small, affordable and market rate. Diversity in housing choice ensures diversity in population old and young, growing families who need larger homes and older folks downsizing, children in school, people working the service sectors and professional jobs, and people in retirement."



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Citing past projects like Ellsworth's Cindy Cookson House for the homeless, Vinalhaven's Hillside Apartments workforce housing, and Boothbay Harbor's Campbell Creek Village, Cooperrider said the greatest change in the industry has been need, awareness and acceptance of affordable housing, and communities actively pursuing it.

Response to housing needs is an ongoing process, so developing affordable housing takes time and expertise in its finance, said Cooperrider. She said that takes a clear understanding of the terms used in public discourse and in municipal regulations.

Affordable housing means the cost of housing – including insurance, heat, electricity, taxes, etc. – is no more than 30 percent of a household's gross annual income, she said. Low-income, as defined by US Housing and Urban Development, is a household earning no more than 80 percent of the area median income (AMI). Very low and extremely low income are considered 50 and 30 percent AMI. Cooperrider explained that "market rate housing" meant the cost of a unit is directly correlated to a private developer's cost of development and return on investment.

In the last decade, affordable housing developers started using the term workforce housing during permitting to describe the financials with the low-income housing tax credit, Cooperrider said. The income bracket the projects target includes many service sector jobs. Workforce housing also havoid using the term low income or affordable to describe the projects, she added.

Portland is among communities that have started referring to workforce housing as a household earning between 100 percent AMI and 120 percent AMI, she said. Cooperider added, other communities have been targeting more specific industries or types of jobs, rather than income brackets.

However, Cooperrider's definition of workforce housing as "whatever you want it to mean" comes with a warning: "Clearly define what you do mean."

"It's also important to understand that unlike traditional affordable housing, there are no specific programs targeted to workforce housing, which makes it hard to build."

Boothbay Harbor member Mike Tomko asked about benefits Cooperrider envisions for Lincoln County to use a regional approach.

"Bingo," said Cooperrider, advising county members to think outside the terms of municipal boundaries about where jobs, housing needs and general opportunities are. "... We're not looking at towns, we're looking at the labor market."

RPC staff addressed varied achievements in the past year. Economic and Community Development Director Mary Ellen Barnes said one of the biggest has been connecting employers with job training resources.

County planner Bob Faunce noted the last five to six years have been concentrated largely on coastal climate change, sea level rise and storm surge. Faunce highlighted projects such as the Boothbay Harbor flood impact study, Boothbay Harbor's West Harbor Pond siphon and watershed survey project, shore and harbor grants in Boothbay Harbor and Monhegan, Monhegan's Island Institute grant toward a study of the island's domestic water system, the reconstruction of the Heath Road Bridge in Bremen, and various Dresden, Alna and Whitefield grants in the works.

Community Development Specialist Harold Spetla shared that since he began working with LCRPC in July 2017, his largest project was the \$400,000 Brownfields cleanup grant (<http://www.wiscassetnewspaper.com/article/wiscasset-makes-cut-400k-epa-funding-former-mason-station-ash-ponds/100989>) and a \$200,000 grant for LCRPC assessment of Wiscasset at the former Mason Station ash pond sites.

Positions on the LCRPC's executive committee changed at the meeting. Chair Stuart Smith of Edgecomb announced he would not seek reelection and was replaced by former vice-chair Chris Johnson of Somerville. Damariscotta's Dick McLean, former treasurer, was voted in as vice-chair, Newcastle's George Parker as treasurer and Tomko was reelected secretary. Nancy Prisk of Southport, Marianne Pinkham of Nobleboro, and Mal Carey of Newcastle were reelected by their respective districts as representatives on the board. Ham Meserve of Southport remains the at-large member.

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