Housing Committee Overview
March 2022

Vinalhaven needs an increased supply of year-round housing and updated existing housing, according to the Vinalhaven Housing Committee.

In late 2020 the Select Board appointed a seven-member Housing Committee and authorized it to: review the Land Use Ordinance for zoning revisions that would promote year-round housing; research energy audit and other home improvement options and grants; and review town owned parcels and private land for possible building sites for year-round housing.

To clarify its understanding of housing needs and challenges the Committee coordinated with Mary Terry, a respected housing expert, to design and circulate a survey. While survey responses did not represent all households, they provided a statistically valid sample and valuable information.

Of the 104 survey respondents almost half report challenges in finding or maintaining appropriate housing. Reasons included: current housing too small or large and/or needing repairs; current housing not affordable; current housing not available year-round or temporary. Several indicated the need to better understand financing options or to know more about upkeep and maintenance and its costs. Some elders reported trouble finding housing, escalating costs such as taxes, and worries about staying on the island as they age.

The complete report and executive summary are available on the Town website at:


Following completion of the survey, the Housing Committee initiated the following:

• **Review of the Land Use Ordinance.** The Planning Commission is using input from the Housing Committee to develop recommendations for revisions to the zoning ordinance that would encourage, among other things, conversion of existing structures or for year-round rental housing. Expert advice will be needed to carry this work forward. The Town is looking for a planner to help with a range of tasks and the Housing Committee has recommended that one of these tasks should be to certify proposed changes to be in accord with the Comprehensive Plan, State and Federal requirements and the rest of the Zoning Ordinance.

• **Finding Help for People to Stay in Their Homes:** Committee work includes: researching programs to assist with energy efficiency improvements and home repairs and identifying funding and grants that would help. There are many organizations and programs that offer different services: help with audits; sealing leaks; installing heat pumps; repair and replacement of central heating; help with fuel costs; home repairs and rehabilitation. Organizations include, among others:
Penquis (a community action agency) USDA and Efficiency Maine. The Committee is working to facilitate Vinalhaven homeowner access to these programs and applying for grants to help. Income qualified homeowners and renters who are approved for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) are automatically qualified for many of the services. To better determine demand for HEAP and related programs, the Housing Committee has run ads in The WIND and put notices on the Vinalhaven Facebook page. HEAP applications are available at the Union Church.

- **Expanding Year-Round Housing.** The Committee is looking at Town owned land that might be appropriate for building year-round housing and reaching out to potential developers to learn what is possible. The Committee is also tracking funding sources such as state legislation now under consideration that would provide various types of funding for islands' efforts to increase housing (affordable, workforce, elderly). Among other things, this funding could support conversion of large existing homes into multiple units.

The Committee reports to the Select Board on a regular basis.

**Housing Committee**
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