

Draft – Not yet approved -- draft

Meeting of the CICA Board, Tuesday March 9, 2010 at 7:15 at the Parish House

CICA Board present: Mabel Doughty, Bob Earnest, Beth Howe, Ester Knight, Ruth Slagle, David Whiston, John Wilson.

Absent: Frank Durgin, Jeff Putnam, Bruce Riddle

Others: Mark Bowman, Tom Calder, Ken Hamilton, Bob Libby, Diane Lukac, Herb Maine, Ken Pelton, Joan Robinson.

The mission of CICA is “to ensure the survival and long-term viability of Great Chebeague Island as a year-round community.”

Bob started the meeting by asking whether we should take up item four on the agenda first. This was agreed to.

Bob said that for the last six months to a year the CICA Housing committee has been working on three things: the beginning of a proposal for affordable housing on the Curit parcel, a study by Mary Terry, an Island Institute Fellow, of the demand for affordable housing on Chebeague, and the extension to 2011 of the low-interest loan on 226 South Road. One of the other issues on the agenda tonight is what to do with 226 South Road as the loan comes to an end.

But the first item will be the current state of planning for the Curit land:

Last spring the Legislature adopted a bond issue to provide stimulus money for energy efficiency and affordable housing projects. The affordable housing provision had language that would create a small, flexible program to provide affordable housing in small rural areas, which was understood to refer, in part to islands. We thought that the application process for this money would begin in summer 2010.

About two weeks ago the Genesis Fund and the Island Institute had a meeting with MSHA about the guidelines for the housing bond/flexible funding for small rural communities program. MSHA said that the program would provide \$2 million to unconnected islands. While the initial idea was to fund about 8 island projects for \$250,000 each with a 10 percent local match in cash or in kind, MSHA is eager to get the money out fast as a stimulus to the economy. When the island people at the meeting said that they thought their projects would be ready to go in 2011 and 2012, Dale McCormack of MSHA suggested \$400,000 grants for projects that could be started in summer 2010. “Started” remains to be defined.

CICA’s Housing Committee has been working for several years toward developing a project on land that could be low- to no-cost. Last fall they asked the Selectmen whether they could evaluate the development potential of two Town-owned lots. The Selectmen approved and members of the Committee did site walks and hired Al Frick to test for septic suitability. A parcel on School House Road proved to be largely peat bog and was ruled out. The Curit property tested positive for septic systems and looks like good land to develop.

The Committee went back to the Selectmen to ask whether a proposal to develop a plan for affordable housing on the Curit parcel would need Town Meeting approval. The selectmen said that since the land had been brought for affordable housing, this was not necessary. So the Housing Committee began work on a plan, with the idea of having a developed proposal for Annual Town Meeting in June. The initial work on the proposal suggested that this 6.3 acre parcel might be subdivided into 4 to 6 lots with duplexes and single family houses. A written version of this proposal was prepared for the Genesis/MSHA meeting – not as a proposal, but rather as a placeholder - and this concept has circulated somewhat on the island. So it is the current straw man for discussion of affordable housing.

Throughout this fall and winter the Committee has also been working with a Casco Bay Affordable Housing Island Fellow, Mary Terry, on more detailed research on the demand for affordable housing on the island among young residents. CICA had earlier made a decision to focus primarily on younger rather than elderly island residents' needs for housing. The Island Commons already was working with older people. In addition on Chebeague, as in the rest of Maine, the population is disproportionately elderly. On Chebeague housing prices have risen beyond the reach of younger people, and a number of year-round houses have been sold as summer houses. These trends mean that Chebeague is not able to keep the young people who grow up on the island or attract new young families from away.

Mary has completed in-person interviews with a number of islanders who are interested in affordable housing and has just sent out a survey to about 50 more people. She can write up her interviews now and may have results from the survey in about a month. The Committee has not wanted to focus on exactly what kind of housing to provide until her information is available.

When the Committee found out that the State bond money would be given out this spring, it seemed reasonable to have a CICA Board meeting to decide whether CICA will or will not work towards applying for it – knowing that if the vote was “yes” then there would be far more work to do, in terms of public and stakeholder involvement in the process.

Beth Howe said she could add some additional details to Bob's description of the program. The grants might be up to \$400,000, with a 10 percent local match in cash or in kind. It can be used for rental housing or home-ownership, duplexes or single family houses. Because the State recognizes that living on islands is more expensive than on the mainland, the income eligibility requirements would go as high as 120 percent of the Area Median Family Income. In Cumberland County this would mean that the highest qualifying income for a family of four would be \$75,500. Also, MSHA could provide a loan of up to \$60,000 for predevelopment planning of a project that could be paid back out of the final grant.

Bob said that the purpose of this meeting is to decide whether CICA wants to tackle this project. If CICA does not, then maybe the Town will. If CICA is interested, then it will have to organize the involvement of voters, abutters and other stakeholders. The process needs to be one in which everyone can make contributions to the final proposal.

Donna Damon said she had also discussed the program with Rob Snyder at the Island Institute. She said he thought the program at this point was being developed and that applications would be due in the summer. Donna said she thinks the project should be jointly sponsored by CICA, the Town and the Land Trust. Donna stated that it is a “no brainer” to decide to apply for the money – that we need to think about how to make it go as far as possible. She does not think that there will be any problem about whether there will be enough island people who will be interested in the housing. People with island family connections are the central constituency, though there have been 3-4 families without prior connections who have made a commitment to live on the island. There should be a public workshop as soon as possible to discuss what kind of housing would work best. If it turns out that a proposal can't be agreed on, we can always bail out.

Ken Pelton said he was concerned about what the island would be committing itself to. Are we likely to get into the project and then find that we can't go through with it and can't get out? Beth said that although the state was talking about projects starting this summer, Genesis has been thinking of them as taking from two to three years.

Mark Bowman said he thought it was important for us to have a good plan from the beginning, so that these kinds of problems would not happen.

Diane Lukac said she has a house on the Curit Farm and is an abutter to the property. She and her family may come to live year-round on the island at some point. They have recently been discussing their estate planning and both thought that if their children do not want the Curit Farm, they should leave it to the Chebeague Historical Society. They are committed to support what islanders want but are concerned that there has not been enough work done to define what housing needs there are on the island. There seem to be a number of older people who own houses that are in poor condition. This is a special parcel, half of which is in conservation easement. It has wood thrushes and oven birds and a bald eagle's nest. There have been few subdivisions on the island and she was relieved, like everyone else, when the subdivision on Roy Hill Road was abandoned. She thinks that a subdivision on this land could affect her water supply and the springs that feed the clam flats below the bluff. She is also concerned about noise and lights in the subdivision and people spraying their gardens with pesticides

She asked whether the State money could only be spent on new construction. Donna Damon said that it could be spent for rehabilitation of existing houses but it had to be 70 percent reconstruction to result in an energy efficient, green house.

Diane said she thought that the money should not drive the process.

Beth Howe said that the Housing Committee has done and is doing a lot of research on the need for affordable housing. There was a CDBG-funded survey of need in 2005 and Mary Terry is doing more in-depth work now. She also said that there had been a number of subdivisions on the island – they have provided for orderly development during these recent years of rapid growth.

Bob said that the Committee needs help developing a housing project and that Diane could help if she wanted.

Donna Damon said she thought it would be useful to provide some background on the purchase of the Curit land. Affordable housing is a real issue on Chebeague. Most people don't do as she did, selling her parents house for \$60,000 to a fisherman. Market prices are much higher. She knew that the Curit parcel had been on the market off and on for years. She saw an ad for it in the Calendar and just decided to ask for the right of first refusal on the parcel. It was obvious that the shore, stream and wetland parts of the land was not useful for affordable housing, but would make good conservation land. She convinced the Town of Cumberland to buy it. The Land Trust agreed to raise money for half the purchase price of \$200,000. They did. MBNA had just set up a land conservation arm and they contributed. A number of the other donors, including Ross Martindale who gave \$10,000, gave as much for the affordable housing as for the conservation easement. The land was surveyed and turned out to be 14 acres of which 8 was set aside for conservation. Dick Sweet did test pits on the upland and found it was fine for housing. The conservation easement was seen as the open space for the housing. The division line provides a buffer for the stream. So, per Donna, the idea that this parcel would be used for affordable housing is not a new idea.

David Whiston said he was concerned about how few people applied for 226 South Road. Beth and Bob said the pool at any given time is quite small, though the second time it was offered, there were four applicants. Bob Libby asked whether 226 was advertized off the island. Beth said it was not – just a notice in the Calendar and a postal patron mailing. Bob said that CICA has no policy on whether applicants must live on the island already. But we do give extra weight to applicants who work on the island, have island connections or are involved in island organizations. Ester Knight said it is important for the island to encourage young families.

Mabel Doughty said that she appreciated what Diane said about the special character of the Curit property. But we also have to think about the young people who live in summer houses and have to move out in the spring when the owners come. Mark Bowman said that is how he lives. He has a house for 10 months of the year but has to move out in the summer – to his mother's or camping. Since he is a lobsterman, this is hard because at the time when he is at his busiest. But he agreed it was important to look at the possible environmental impacts of any development.

Diane Lukac said she has been on the Land Trust board at the time the Curit property was bought. Per Diane, some people may have donated money for the affordable housing idea, but there was also a lot of negative feedback on the idea of using the parcel for affordable housing. Diane stated that the fund-raising letters they sent out were very carefully worded to be vague about the affordable housing issue.

Also she said that CICA is not a Town body. She worries about a non-profit presenting documents on behalf of the Town. Bob said that the Town has no affordable housing committee, so if anything is to be done, some other organization must do it. Since the land belongs to the Town, CICA has to make its proposals to the Town. There is a careful process being followed; in all cases, the Town has final approval of any proposal.

Diane said again she sees the state money as driving the process.

David said that his concern about the small number of applicants does not mean he is against affordable housing. But he would like to know how many more Marks there are on the island, and how many elderly who need housing assistance – may have too much house and want to move to a smaller place. Bob said that since CICA's mission is to sustain the long-term survival of the year-round community, it has focused mostly on younger people. Beth said that was true, but that this island's program is quite flexible and is intended to serve both the elderly and younger people. And because the demand for affordable housing on Chebeague at any given time is small, CICA would not turn away an older applicant. Bud, David said, you need to have different kind of housing for elderly than for younger people. Beth agreed that was usually what affordable housing projects do, but because the market on Chebeague is so small, we need to have maximum flexibility and create housing that could serve all age groups.

Donna said that there are several people like Mark now. Her son Thomas is one who is renting a summer house and will have to move. Different people do have different housing needs: some may be ready for home-ownership while others may need to rent. The program has to be flexible in this way. Mark said that having rental housing would also help people to come out to the island to work – it is hard for lobstermen to get help. He thinks building affordable housing is a great idea.

Ken Hamilton said he thinks the public on the island should have a vote on the affordable housing. What guarantee would there be that we may not be opening the island up to bad people. Beth said the existing criteria for choosing applicants stresses things like whether they work on the island. Ken was not entirely convinced. Ken Pelton said there are also a lot of requirements for non-discrimination in affordable housing from the State and the Federal government. What kind of regulations would we be bound by? Bob said that we would obey the law. One advantage to locally funded projects is that they are not so much bound by things like State income limits. Donna said that she had been involved in the development of Smalls Brook Crossing in Cumberland. It had a point system that gave points for having gone to Greely, having relatives in Cumberland and working in Town. Two people from Chebeague were in the first group of people to move in and since then there have been others. The major challenge there has been to keep it affordable. But it is possible to frame application criteria for connection to the Town.

Herb Maine said he shares Diane's concern about the money driving the process, and he shares David's concern with understanding the nature and size of the demand for affordable housing on the island. People on the island could raise \$400,000 and that would be worth doing if it led to planning thoroughly for the next project. We should do an analysis, quantitative if possible, of what we have learned from owning and renting 226 South Road. Does CICA want to continue to be a landlord. This State money could well have more strings attached to it. He would like a clear list of the risks/problems and the benefits of using this money. It might be a high risk to go into such a project now – if the island has people who are not working, could they pay enough; what if they don't like the kind of housing?

He would like the Committee to consider rehabilitation of the Campbell house as well as Curit. He thinks a collaborative effort between CICA, the Town and the Land Trust would be good, and the process has been fine so far. But if he were on the CICA Board, he would not be ready to decide on go/no go tonight. He praised CICA for taking this issue on.

Bob commented that the Campbell house proposal is a good one to explore as well, and that other such suggestions are welcome.

Mark Bowman asked whether going with the Curit project would mean that other ideas would not be able to be pursued. Bob said that there is limited time, energy and money. The Housing Committee focused on using Town land because it makes a project financially feasible. . . . Ken Pelton said he would like to do the Campbell house but also use some of the money to plan the Curit project.

Donna said that the Campbell house would cost \$136,000. She thinks the land is really the key – it might be better to get a green manufactured house. If CICA isn't ready to make a go/no go decision, it would make sense to have a public workshop, with structured brainstorming about what people would like to see. Get the options out on the table and explore their pros and cons. There are some key people who need to be convinced.

Ester Knight said that we should have a budget estimate for any project before a public meeting.

Beth Howe said she thought it would be useful to go to talk to people at Genesis more about what the application would involve. Bob said that the information we need is here, not with them. Beth also said that she had recently talked with Pommy Hatfield about the good job of facilitation that Mark Eyerman of Planning Decisions had done for the Island Commons. Maybe it would be possible to ask him to help us with a public meeting.

John Wilson said that we have a whole set of questions we have to answer about an affordable housing project:

- Why? We've done a good job of answering that in the original survey.
- Who? Who should be served. He wants to see more information on that.
- What? How would we address the needs of our clients – rentals, ownership, lots to build on . . .
- Where? Would it be better to do scattered site housing or to concentrate in one area of the island?
- How? The financing should not come before the other questions are answered.
- When? Can't answer this till the other questions are answered. In a month we might have answers to Who and What.

Ester said that given her experience in planning for the Island Commons you can't focus just on what the demand is now because it can change. The Commons estimated that there was sufficient demand but when it opened it was difficult to get people to come. John agreed that it was important to try to evaluate future demand.

David said that he disagreed somewhat with Herb. He would not turn up his nose at \$400,000 – there is a lot of fund-raising on the island already; how much more can we fundraise? - and it would be a shame to walk away from this money.

Bob said he thought two things were needed. One is that the Housing Committee needs to be larger – get more help. The second is that at its next meeting next Tuesday, it should begin to plan in detail for a public meeting.

Donna said that Rob Snyder had said that we need to have a placeholder application to get in the queue. That was all the more reason to have a meeting to ask people what they would choose. Mark agreed.

Joan Robinson asked whether, if the Campbell house was a project, would it need to have 70 percent rehabilitation. Bob said no, it really only needs about 20 percent. Some of the existing renovation is fine and some needs more work.

Tom Calder said it would be useful to have a fleshed out plan of any project to be discussed at a public meeting. Bob said we had been planning to have one by June. Beth said it would probably not be complicated to get estimates for the road and the septic system for Curit.

Bob called for a motion on affordable housing. Ester moved to have a workshop on both the Curit project and other approaches to affordable housing in the next few weeks. Beth seconded the motion.

John said that until Mary reports we can't answer questions about things we don't know the answer to, but we would get ideas about what residents think affordable housing is all about. Without information the discussion will be useless. Beth said that we have to have a meeting because we have started the discussion about affordable housing by having this meeting, telling people that State money is available, and circulating the Curit proposal. So we should ask people what approach they find acceptable.

Bob called for a vote on the motion. It passed 6 to 0 with one abstention.

Donna said that the Selectmen will be meeting tomorrow evening and they should be asked to co-sponsor the meeting. Someone said it is not on the agenda. Bob asked whether the it might be better for the Selectmen not to be involved. Herb said he thought it a report could be given under public comment. Donna said she thinks the Town needs to be involved.

Bob said that at the Housing Committee meeting next Tuesday there should be a proposal that can be discussed about how a public meeting would work. Beth said she would prepare this. Mable, David, Ruth and Donna offered to help. Ester said she and Ruth would provide refreshments.

Other Easy Agenda Items

1. MOFGA

Bob said this was an informational item. The Maine Organic Farmers and Gardener's Association has been doing some work with the island institute on island farming. Bob had suggested to Shey Conover at the Institute that, since they have always had an interest in forestry, it might be interesting to combine agriculture and forestry proposals for an island like Chebeague that currently has little open agricultural land. MOFGA might come to advise us on how we might do systematic forestry to clear land that then could be used for agriculture. He does not yet have a date for this one-day visit.

Donna suggested that part of this discussion be reviving old fruit trees. Bob said that is a somewhat different issue, but that one of the possible kinds of agriculture on Chebeague could be orchards.

2. Lobsters

Bob reported that Calendar Island Lobsters has been formed and funded. CICA board members John Wilson, David Whiston, and Jeff Putnam have been involved, along with many others. John reported that Calendar Islands Lobster has hired a marketing firm and is exploring processors and distributors, types of products and potential sales venues. They have been going to large food shows. Types of products might include lobster pizza, smoked lobster. They expect most of the products to be frozen. They have the beginnings of a web site. They are working with Dropping Springs LLC.

3. Oyster Gardens

The Maine Sea Grant Program has an oyster gardening project to encourage small scale raising of oysters. There was a well-attended meeting on the island and a good deal of interest. However, since these oyster gardens require a small state bottom lease, they run into the lobstermen's strong opposition to the privatization of the commons. This is an idea that needs more discussion to determine whether the community is interested or not.