

## **Chebeague Island Annual *Newsletter* 2009-2010**

### **The Chebeague Island Community Association**

CICA has been working this past year in three areas: encouraging agriculture on Chebeague, encouraging economic development, and providing affordable, year-round housing. The three areas of work are often tied to each other, and each area of our work is based on our mission: to ensure the survival and viability of Great Chebeague Island as a year-round community.

In August of 2009 we held a vegetable garden tour covering many of the gardens on the island, including Second Wind Farm. This spring, representatives from the Island Institute and MOFGA have met with interested people on the island about ways of encouraging small-scale forestry, which might clear some land, as well as grazing and growing of crops. This is a small beginning for something that CICA hopes will develop into a larger effort. Given the proximity of Chebeague to many commercial markets for high-end locally-produced food, and the tempering effects of the water that surround us, there is potential for growth in this area – growth that could attract young families to stay on, or move to, Chebeague Island.

Members of CICA are also participating in Calendar Island's work at claiming more 'value add' for Chebeague's lobstercatchers. Moving away from lobsters as a live commodity sold to brokers, and towards lobster markets in which the lobstermen of Chebeague can command a higher boat price, is the goal of Calendar Island's work.

Finally, this has been a very active year for CICA's Housing Committee. The 2000 Long Range Plan for Chebeague identified the need for the island to create "affordable, year-round" housing. Over the past ten or more years, the strong demand for land and houses on Chebeague has bid up land prices so that young people and young families are priced out of the market for buying houses. There is very little year-round rental housing on the island, so people who need to rent often rent a summer house and then have to find housing in the summer in a tent or with a relative, when the owners come to occupy the house. These problems make it difficult for young people to stay on the island when they finish school or for working families to be able to afford their first house.

The Housing Committee (and before Chebeague's independence, the Cumberland Islands Committee) has been working on providing year-round affordable housing since 2004. In 2005 they got a grant to do a study of the need for housing, and in 2009 they funded an Island Institute Fellow to follow up on this research with more detailed interviews with people interested in such housing.

In 2007 CICA purchased 226 South Road with funding from the Genesis Community Loan Fund, the Island Institute and island donors, to be used as a year-round, affordable rental property.

The 2009 State Legislature passed a bond issue to fund energy retrofits and affordable housing throughout the State. One element of this legislation, the result of efforts by the Islands Coalition, Hannah Pingree and Libby Mitchell, was a \$2 million grant program specifically targeted to provide grants for affordable housing on unconnected islands.

Last fall the CICA Housing Committee asked the Town Selectmen if it could explore the possibility of building affordable, year-round housing on either of two Town-owned sites. One is on School House Road, the other is the Curit Property, toward the shore from the Cemetery. The Selectmen gave their permission for CICA to hire a site evaluator to look at the sites. Both proved to have areas suitable for houses and septic systems, though the Curit Property is larger and much better land. But, the Schoolhouse Road site is more accessible, and would potentially have less of a negative impact on the community's commitment to open space.

In February the Maine State Housing Authority (MSHA) announced tentative guidelines for the \$2 million island affordable housing program and CICA's Housing Committee began to have public meetings on making an application for some of the money. Initially they focused on the Curit Property which had originally been purchased by Cumberland with the intent of preserving the 8 acres along the shore as a conservation easement and using the upland 7 acres for affordable housing. Public meetings followed, in which we explored a range of issues, including new construction versus buying houses currently on the market and upgrading them to MSHA standards.

The Housing Committee explored the possibility of using the existing houses. But houses in foreclosure disappear into a kind of legal limbo that makes it difficult to make an offer on them. In addition, rehabilitation of existing houses is generally considerably more expensive than new construction, particularly new, manufactured houses. We solicited the opinions of local contractors, and this appears to be the case with the houses currently on the market – especially given the high standards to which MSHA demands such houses adhere.

While these discussions were taking place, the State came up with final program guidelines that limited projects to rental, multi-family or rent-to-own housing. Since multi-family rental housing is a new kind of housing for Chebeague, the Housing Committee decided to focus on a project that would provide a rental duplex on the School House Road property. This proposal was taken to Town Meeting on June 5 and passed by a wide margin. As this goes to press, the Committee has applied for State funds to develop a detailed plan and application for the duplex, and is entering into conversations with the Town to work out the details of the plan. This plan will be brought to another Town meeting later in the summer.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding CICA's work, or if you would like to get involved – or make a donation! – please contact a CICA board member. We would love to hear your thoughts.

Bob Earnest, President; Beth Howe, Secretary; John Wilson, Treasurer  
Board Members: Mabel Doughty, Ester Knight, Jeff Putnam, David Whiston, Frank Durgin,  
Ruth Slagle