

JAN. 30/13

With property secured, now the hard work

by Richard MacKenzie

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It was a positive step in the process but now the real work begins.

That was the tone Katherine Reed, from the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society, was taking last week following Town of Antigonish council passing a motion unanimously (during their regular monthly public meeting Jan. 21) selling property, located at 2 Riverside Dr. in Antigonish, to the society for \$1.

Reed talked about what has to happen next.

"We now have to develop a business plan and we have to do a need and demand analysis that proves there is a need for housing of the sort we're building and we have to prove, if we built it, there would be a demand for it," Reed said in an interview, a couple of days removed from the council meeting.

"And a business plan, that just maps out everything about our organization and our plan for a housing project on that land. Those two things have to be funded so I'm just now applying for funding so that I can get someone to do that work."

And while a need and demand analysis will make official the objective, Reed said the need and demand is already understood by those focused on affordable housing in the community.

"We certainly know from the [Antigonish] Women's Resource Centre, and all the other organizations around town, that people who can't pay higher rents are going without affordable housing," she said.

In talking about the location of the property provided by the town, Reed said "it's great" but did note it's not as close to some amenities as would be ideally desired.

"It's a bit far to walk to Main Street or the hospital but, at least, it's within a modestly priced taxi drive," she said. "It's also very far from the two groceries stores but, unfortunately, Antigonish doesn't have a grocery store on Main Street ... the bane of our existence," she said.

During the meeting, Reed made it very clear to council that this is a start for the society that hopes to work on other locations going forward. She talked about a private member's bill, expected to go through parliament next month, which could assist in future projects.

"It calls on the government to develop a national housing strategy to address that gap in Canada," she said.

"We're the only developed nation in the world without one. If we had a national housing strategy, we would know the next project we want to build, and the next one after that, there would be somewhere to turn to for funding. Right now, assuming we make the application in time and get in before the program runs out of money, it will expire on the 31st of March 2014, and then there is no more housing program."

In noting some of the enthusiastic comments of support from council, just before they passed their motion, Reed said the society is appreciative.

"We know they understand what we're trying to do and the need for it," she said.