

# Moving forward

## Affordable housing group plans to start construction this spring

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The Antigonish Affordable Housing Society (AAHS) is moving forward with the first of a multi-phase community initiative.

During a Feb. 16 presentation to Municipality of the County of Antigonish council, AAHS representatives Colleen Cameron and Angus MacGillivray outlined the group's progress, including the plan to start construction of four housing units — two of which will be barrier-free — in the spring.

"We have been working hard for a number of years," Cameron — the AAHS president — said, noting such an initiative "takes time."

As part of "doing our due diligence," she added the society hired a consultant.

They concluded there was "not a lot of awareness or understanding of the need" for affordable housing in the community, along with "a lot of competition for charitable dollars."

As part of a "two-pronged approach" moving forward, Cameron noted the society will not

only continue its focus on raising awareness and educating people about the need for affordable housing, but also moving forward with the proposed development.

"It is the first step," she said of the awareness campaign.

Cameron noted "the need is there and we have to get that message out."

"As beautiful as this place is, there are people struggling," she said, adding the "need for affordable housing is great."

As for financing what Cameron and MacGillivray described as Phase A, which carries an estimated \$600,000 price tag, they said a \$200,000 mortgage has been secured with East Coast Credit Union.

Municipally, the Town of Antigonish has sold the land for the project, which is located on Riverside Drive and appraised at \$70,000, to AAHS for \$1, while Antigonish County has committed \$100,000 to the society over a five-year period.

At this point, the society also has approximately \$132,500 in its own coffers.

"We think, if we start small, it will help provide the impetus to move forward," Cameron said.

Ultimately, the volunteer group wants to have 13 units in the apartment complex, which would feature garden space, barrier-free design, clotheslines and energy efficiency components.

After their presentation, the AAHS representatives fielded questions from county councillors, including one from Deputy

Warden Owen McCarron regarding the selection process for tenants.

Cameron said the society has a committee that oversees that part of the process, noting there have also been StFX service learning students assisting in that area.

"We do have a plan," she added, noting one of the focuses will be representation from both Antigonish town and county.

Cameron agreed one of the main criteria will be income.

In Antigonish town and county, she noted there are 131 applications with the province for affordable housing, calling that "a significant number." She added that application number does not take into account how many family members are included.

Noting the poverty found in the community, Cameron said there are people spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing, which is a benchmark used across the country.

For more information about the society, and if people would like to help or make a donation, contact Cameron at 867-3895 or [accamero@stfx.ca](mailto:accamero@stfx.ca)

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