

AAHS putting Aviva prize into community

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The People's Place Library's community room exploded with excitement, at 1 p.m. on Dec. 5, when it was announced the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society was a recipient of an Aviva Community Fund grand prize of \$100,000, which they're putting towards their own community room project.

"Having this fund to put a community room in with our new 10 units is going to make a big difference, because we are building a community ... we're building homes, not houses," society chair Colleen Cameron said to the packed room, immediately following the welcomed announcement.

"That's the goal of what we're trying to do here with Antigonish Affordable Housing Society."

The community room plan is part of phase two of the society's work — the 10-unit affordable home. Phase one, Riverside Estates, with four units, was completed last March.

Cameron, with the buzz of excitement still permeating the room, talked about creating a place for tenants to come together.

"Right now, they get together every couple of weeks to meet with Carlton [MacNeil - Riverside Estates community navigator] and get support, and support each other. So we've started to build community, but to have that community room is going to make such a big difference in the whole model we're trying to build," she said.

"We're trying to show people you can build community and not just stick up some buildings. We want this to be sustainable, socially and culturally, as well as environmentally and financially. That's really our goal; we want to build homes for people that will continue on for years-and-years to come."

Cameron concluded her remarks with words of gratitude, starting with both local municipal units; the Municipality of the County of Antigonish and Town of Antigonish. She noted support from the other two levels of government [provincial and federal] as well as the "tremendous" contribution from the Sisters of St. Martha.

"And, generally, the whole community, she said. "And our hard-working board of directors ... we always say, it's a working board — it is," Cameron added. "But this is the dream we have, the passion we have, it is for affordable housing."

Some notion

Talking to reporters after the announcement, Cameron respon-

ded to a question about whether the society had an inkling they were getting the grand prize.

"The judges called us and it was a good, positive response we were getting; so we felt confident we were going to get something, we just didn't know we would get the big prize," she said.

Cameron said the announcement comes after a couple of months of "intense" work.

"The passion we have for the community room is a big part of this," she said.

"We've been arguing with a lot of people that this is, really, what is important in this. The govern-

ment is going to support us in building the 10 units but they're not putting anything into a community room; this is really something we need to do ourselves.

"We're committed to building the community room and, if we hadn't received this funding, we would have been raising more money than we're trying to raise now. We have that commitment amongst ourselves that this is what we need to do, so we were going to do it."

Cameron noted their submission to Aviva was focused on the community room.

"Our description was not to build the 10 new units but, really, to focus on that community room," she said.

"And it has raised awareness so much in the community and has done so much for us in that sense, to bring the community together."

Cameron provided an update on where phase two of the work is, as of Dec. 5.

"We are still waiting for 'I's to be dotted and 'T's crossed to get our building permit," she said.

"We were expecting to have

that six weeks ago and have this all framed in, to be working all winter, but we've missed that deadline. We're hoping we'll get the permit very shortly and have the foundation poured and then, in the spring, first of May or middle of April, whatever the weather allows, and we hope to have people in by August-September."

Cameron was asked about the cost for phase two.

"It's \$1.5 million and that includes the 10 units and the community room," she said.



Smiles and clapping, as well as hugs and high fives, commenced in the People's Place Library's community room, as it was announced the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society was an Aviva Community Fund grand prize winner of \$100,000, Dec. 5.

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