

Press Release

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Nonprofits Collaborate to Help Find Solutions to Methow Housing Crisis

Recognizing that the local housing crisis in the Methow Valley is dire and complex, a group of nonprofit leaders has come together to try to learn from other communities who have faced similar challenges and find solutions that can work here.

In late fall 2020, Danica Ready, the Executive Director of the Methow Housing Trust, asked Kelly Edwards from Room One, Don Linnertz from TwispWorks, and Jasmine Minbashian from the Methow Valley Citizens Council to join her in exploring what other rural, resort communities have been doing to address affordable housing for locals. In February 2021, the group added Sarah Brooks from the Methow Conservancy to aid in facilitation.

“The need for affordable homeownership units has grown exponentially with the rapid transformation of our local real estate market this past year, along with the obvious need for a diverse menu of affordable rental options for our local workforce - both longtime and seasonal,” reflects Danica Ready, Methow Housing Trust Executive Director. “Our local housing crisis has accelerated at a pace few of us could have imagined, and a larger conversation and action plan is clearly needed. I became aware of a collaboration of housing solutions-focused leaders in Port Townsend, and wondered if creating such a group, to research options and facilitate community progress, was needed here, too.”

The collaboration, now calling itself Methow Housing Solutions Network, is grounded in a straightforward mission statement: *We believe that all local community members should have a stable place to call home. We acknowledge that this is not the case right now and we recognize that if we do not address housing in the Methow Valley soon, the Valley we love may be lost.*

Kelly Edwards, Interim Executive Director of Room One, noted: “Housing is the most critical issue our valley is facing right now. Locals working multiple jobs cannot afford

rent, families who have grown up here find they cannot stay, and individuals of all ages have no options when their current living situations are not safe.”

There are several groups working on the housing issue in the valley, including SASH which is focusing on supported senior housing and also the Methow Housing Perseverance group which features working class needs. The Methow Housing Trust was formed in 2017 in response to the lack of affordable housing after the 2014-2015 fires. The community land trust homeownership model was chosen as a first housing solution for the community because of its proven track record of immediate and lasting impact in other similar communities, and how it matched with the voices of many local lower- and middle-income community members who wish for the possibility of homeownership here in the Methow.

As Edwards says, “It will take all of us to move solutions forward in the Valley - community organizers, nonprofits, the business community, government.... We clearly need a multi-faceted approach, including immediate opportunities and longer term planning.”

To date, the Network has focused on two learning efforts: exploring responses of communities facing similar challenges, like Port Townsend, Chelan, Leavenworth, San Juan Island, Sun Valley, and various Colorado counties, and listening to the Methow Valley community.

“We can learn from what’s worked in other communities and adapt our solutions to fit the unique needs and values of the Methow,” said Jasmine Minbashian, Executive Director of Methow Valley Citizens Council. “It’s important that we honor the rural character of our community in the process of developing solutions.”

The Methow Housing Solutions Network recognized immediately they are not a group of housing specialists. Don Linnertz, TwispWorks’ Executive Director pointed out that “from the start, the group named the value of hearing about the housing challenge from all sides”, noting “the work would not be complete without input and buy-in from the diverse set of people who see this issue from different aspects. This collaborative approach brings together our community and puts us in a better position to get to work on what is possible.”

Throughout June and July, the Network held solution sessions and heard from: people in need of housing, employers who are struggling to find workers because of the housing shortage, potential and current developers and builders, architects, real estate agents, housing management professionals, planners, and elected officials.

“A common theme from all of our conversations,” says Network member Sarah Brooks, “is that this is a complex issue that will require a whole toolbox of tools to address. There is no one simple solution. And, yet, we’ve also heard time and again, so many people willing to step up and think through and work on solutions. There is so much potential here to make real progress.”

The Network has been focused on finding tangible steps the Methow Valley community can take to help address long-term rentals, seasonal and workforce housing, and opening pathways to home ownership.

Over the next two months, the Network plans to coordinate their efforts with other groups looking at local housing issues and is working on a community outreach event scheduled for September. At the event, they hope all who are working on ideas for addressing local housing needs will share their ideas and community members will be able to provide their input and get involved if they wish.

“We are so grateful for the incredible input we have already received from this community and beyond and we look forward to hearing from more people as we plan a September event,” adds Brooks. “We believe there are some clear action steps we can take together to make sure our local community can call this Valley home into the future.”

Additional Resource: The Methow Housing Solutions Network has compiled the following list of data points to describe the current local housing crisis in the Valley:

Key Data from the Methow Valley to Ground our Exploration of Solutions

- 1) A healthy community has a rental vacancy rate of 7-8%. **The Methow has a critically low <1% rental vacancy rate.**
- 2) The median home sale price in 2020 was \$420,000, Up 56% from the median price (\$270,000) in 2016. **Home prices have outpaced wage increases 5.6 to 1.**
- 3) Due to changing business practices, remote work is driving more urban families toward the values/qualities in rural areas. Today, **75% of remote-work income Methow residents earn \$100K+, with 40% earning \$200K+.** These community members compete for limited homes and rentals.
- 4) In 2020, **seasonally-owned second homes** comprised 78% of Mazama housing stock, 48% of Winthrop housing stock, and 23% of Twisp housing stock.

- 5) **75% of MV residences are 1 or 2 person households.** There are limited small footprint homes available for small household size needs.
- 6) 27% of upper Methow Valley residents are 65 or older, and **the County's senior population is expected to increase by 29% by 2030.**
- 7) Demand for subsidized housing significantly outpaces existing supply. Currently, **all subsidized units are occupied and there are nearly 300 people on waiting lists** (47 on the Twisp Gardens senior housing list alone).
- 8) The housing stock in Okanogan County is much older than the national average.
- 9) In 2016, it was estimated that **350 more housing units** (a combination of all unit types) were needed to address the overall housing need. Rent and/or Mortgage levels that would best serve low to moderate workforce resident needs are:

Household Size	50-150% AMI Monthly Income	Recommend Rent/Mortgage
1	\$2,000-\$6,200	\$665-\$2,060
2	\$2,350-\$7,050	\$780-\$2,350
3	\$2,650-\$7,950	\$880-\$2,650
4	\$2,950-\$8,800	\$988-\$2,930