

Exeter News-Letter.

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N.H. still resistant

BY JENNIFER FEALS
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The Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast held its annual meeting Wednesday in Exeter, which Executive Director Lisa Henderson called "the nexus of really great activity."

Exeter is one of the towns across the state that is embracing work-force housing. This year, Rye, Brentwood, and Stratham passed work-force housing ordinances guided by state legislation while

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Exeter's ordinance has been around for a decade.

"We hold up Exeter as pioneers in lots of ways," said Henderson at the meeting April 7. "It seems like the nexus of really great activity."

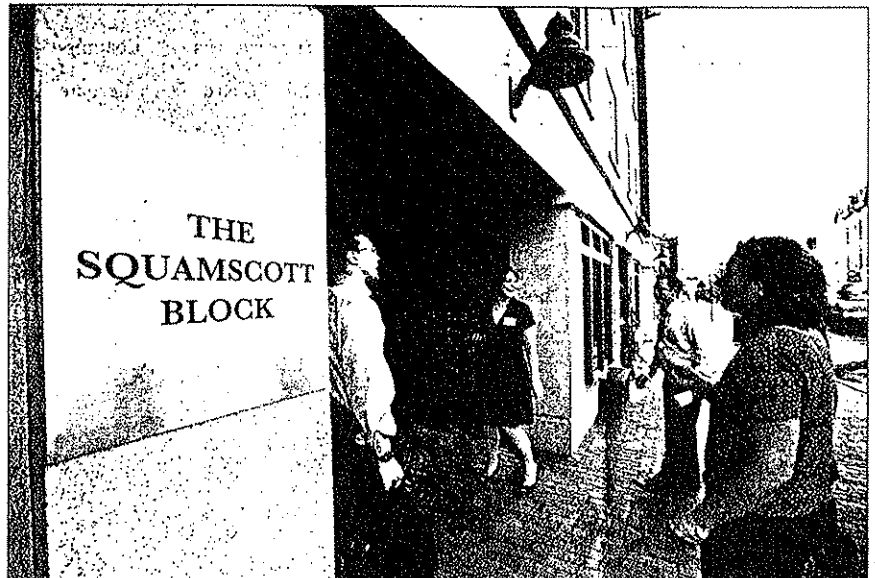
The theme for last year's event "Poised For Recovery," remained the same in 2010, Henderson said.

"There still remains a need. There is an unmet-demand for quality, affordable housing," she said.

This demand needs to be addressed long-term, Henderson said, because the economy will recover, employers will be looking for quality employees and the work force will be looking for a quality place to live.

"It takes time to turn things around," Henderson said. "I applaud every step communities take in the right direction."

Taking a look at communi-



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The Squamscott Block on Water Street in Exeter on Wednesday.

ties in New Hampshire is "Communities & Consequenc-

es," a book by demographer Peter Francese of Exeter and co-author Lorraine Stewart Merrill, a resident of Stratham and Commissioner of Agriculture, Markets & Food, with a parallel documentary by filmmaker Jay Childs. Francese said he feels the book played a role in the state legislation, but said there is much more work to be done toward work-force housing.

"There is still today resistance," Francese said.

With a rapidly growing elderly population, New Hampshire needs to focus on seeking younger people to live in the state and retain college students who seek their edu-

cation here.

"It is an uphill battle," Francese said.

During the annual meeting, the Workforce Housing Coalition presented awards to those who are forward thinking, and moving, when it comes to work-force housing. The Employer Leadership Award went to RiverWoods at Exeter, the Municipal Leadership Award went to the Town of North Hampton Planning Board, the Housing Industry Leadership Award went to the Szanton Company, and the Visionary Award went to Peter Francese and Jay Childs for "Communities & Consequences."

Paving way for work force



Nathan Szanton, right, the managing partner of New England Workforce Housing, gives a tour of an apartment in The Squamscott Block on Water Street in Exeter on Wednesday. Apartments in the building can be rented for less than market rate if certain income guidelines are met.

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Exeter a 'pioneer' of affordable housing units

BY JENNIFER FEALS
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Seeing was believing for developers, local employers and housing specialists who toured work-force housing in Exeter on Wednesday.

The April 7 tour, which traveled to Watson Woods and Squamscott Block, preceded the annual meeting of the Workforce Housing Coalition of the Greater Seacoast.

"It was eye-opening to see it and believe it," said Kristy Hiller of Portsmouth Regional Hospital. "When people hear affordable and work force, they think more entry level. They don't realize these are people serving

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our community and each other."

The Watson Woods and Squamscott Block developments in Exeter each have a work-force housing component. Watson Woods combines market rate condos with work-force housing condos for sale in the outskirts of downtown, off Epping Road, while Squamscott Block combines work-force and market-rate apartments for rent in downtown Exeter.

"We hold up Exeter as pioneers in lots of ways," said Lisa Henderson, executive director of the Workforce Housing Coalition. "It seems like the nexus of really great activity."

Town planner Sylvia von Aulock said the town created a work-force housing ordinance around 1999, when she first started her career in Exeter. The ordinance offers incentives through a density bonus for developers to create open space developments with work-force housing components.

There are misconceived notions of work-force housing, von Aulock said, that the town had to overcome — for instance that it will increase crime and bring additional children into town.

"Tours like this really help get over those preconceived notions of what work-force housing will attract," she said.

When developing the Squamscott Block, developer Nathan Szanton said he faced much opposition to the work-force housing concept.

"You would have thought I was proposing the Empire State Building in downtown Exeter there was so much heated passion," he said, adding that opponents stated the project would create an intolerable burden on downtown parking and traffic.

Melissa Paley, a media producer for Cross Current Productions of Portsmouth, is working with the New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority and the Workforce Housing Coalition to create a media piece that will serve as a resource for other communities in the state, showing that development like work-force housing can be done successfully.

The piece will focus on compact design, of which work-force housing is a component. She described compact design as concentrating growth in workable, walkable and livable downtown areas.

The piece, which is in the planning stages, will center around three case studies of communities that have successfully achieved compact design.

"I think Exeter would be a good case study," she said. "It will showcase the process of good new development that provides housing and enhances downtown areas."