

Conference to review affordable housing

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SARATOGA SPRINGS -- Regional housing administrators and community activists will converge today and tomorrow at Longfellows for a conference put on by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development to address how to overcome institutional barriers to creating affordable housing.

With a recent history of initiatives to address the problem of the lack of affordable housing locally, the Spa City rose to the top of the event organizers list as the place to have an affordable housing conference.

Liza Bowles, general manager of Newport Partners, a housing consultation and research firm, said it was the Saratoga Workforce Housing Partnership's activity that drew her attention when organizing the event.

'It seemed like a good area, because there is a regional problem not only in Saratoga but in Boston, New Hampshire and Vermont,' Bowles said of the conference's regional reach.

The theme of the conference is that unnecessary rules, regulations and red tape drive up the cost of housing and impact everyone's quality of life.

HUD has focused on barrier reduction since 2003, and recognized last month three communities that aggressively worked to reduce regulatory barriers to affordable housing: San Jose, Calif., Mount Joy Borough, Penn., and Suffolk County in New York.

'When hard working families can't afford to live in their own communities because of man-made regulations, it's time for some honest soul searching,' said Alphonso Jackson, HUD Secretary. 'These communities are working overtime to remove excessive and burdensome regulations that have long outlived their usefulness and, in the process, they're putting out the welcome mat for the very people anyone would be proud to call 'neighbor.'"

Suffolk County was recognized for implementing a one-stop permitting process to reduce the time and money the review process cost. It was also commended for its fast track permitting for developments containing at least 20 percent affordable housing, reducing review times from 16 weeks to four weeks.

The recent initiative to create an Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance in Saratoga Springs has brought up both points, and the ordinance, if passed, has a fast track process written into it.

The conference on Monday and Tuesday will teach participants why communities need affordable housing, the best practices for reducing regulatory barriers, and how to win community support for a project.

Congressman John Sweeney is expected to attend Monday, and to meet with HUD Deputy Secretary Roy Bernardi.

Sweeney will announce the formation of a new housing coalition to tackle housing issues in the capital region.

Other items on the day's agenda will include:

- 9:45 -10 a.m.: 'America's Affordable Communities Initiative'

- 10a.m.: 'The High Cost of Regulatory Barriers'
- 11 a.m.: Questions & Answers with presenters from the morning presentations
 - 11:15 a.m.: 'Spotlight on Regulatory Barrier Removal Across the Country'
- 1:15: 'Working Together to Reduce Barriers to Affordable Housing in Montgomery County'
- 3:30 p.m.: Breakout sessions on identifying the most important local barriers, brainstorming ways to improve the regulatory process and developing an action plan
- 5:30 p.m.: Reception hosted by the Workforce Housing Partnership of Saratoga County

Registrations to the HUD conference cost \$100, but are free to members of the Workforce Housing Partnership of Saratoga County.

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