

## **Spokane County Homeownership Symposium Recap**

### **Brief History:**

In June of 2006, Terry Sullivan, 2006 President of the Washington Realtors® Association, sent a letter from the Association to Governor Christine Gregoire, Majority Leader Lisa Brown, and Speaker Frank Chopp, informing them of the current affordable housing issues facing the state and asking her and the Legislature to address this issue. This letter was well received by all parties and Governor Gregoire handed it off to Hugh Spitzer, the chair for a pre-existing committee called Affordable Housing Advisory Board (AHAB).

This resulted in the inclusion of members from the building and Realtors® community in the AHAB committee and allowed for direct input from our industry in developing recommendations and potential legislation to address housing issues for the 2007 Legislative Session. The Spokane Association of Realtors® (SAR) realized that the AHAB Committee would be focusing on developing statewide housing policies, but the local communities would be the ones to implement those policies.

Therefore, SAR, in cooperation with SHBA, decided to develop a local version of the AHAB group to look at developing solutions to our current and future housing situation, as well as modeling an annual symposium held by Seattle/King County Association of Realtors® (SKCAR) that is used to educate local officials about current housing issues to assist them in making land-use and housing policies in relation to how such policies will impact the affordability of homes.

So, starting in early July 2006, SAR Executive Vice President Rob Higgins, SAR Governmental Affairs Chair Ken Garceau for 2006, and Government Affairs Committee member, and potential 2007 SAR GAC Chair, Ken Mewhinney, and Government Affairs Director for SAR and SHBA Derrick Braaten began meeting weekly to develop a symposium for the fall of 2006.

### **Funding:**

SCAHS received a \$4,000 grant from the Association of Washington Realtors®, and one of six \$3,000 grants awarded nationwide by the National Association of Realtors®, as well as staff and financial support from SAR and SHBA. Any funds left over are to be used to support the task force.

### **Purpose:**

The primary reason for this symposium was to bring together those parties that are involved in local housing issues, elected officials, and local policy makers and educate them about local housing issues, ensuring that when they make land-use decisions, they consider the impact of those policies on housing affordability. It was concluded early on that we needed to ensure that all sides of this issue, as far as how things should be done,

were asked to present their positions. SAR wanted to ensure that there was no claim of partiality to a particular process, and that the symposium was held to inform, not control, the debate.

From this, SAR and SHBA will develop a task force to begin developing solutions to our housing situation. At the symposium, we asked attendees to notify us of their interest in participating in the task force. 30 attendees indicated they would participate in the task force.

**Attendance and Participation:** 64 Attendees

Spokane County Commissioners Phil Harris and Mark Richard, County Assessor Ralph Baker, Spokane City Council members, Joe Shogan, Bob Apple and Rob Crow, Spokane City Mayor Dennis Hession, City of Spokane Valley Mayor Diane Wilhite, and Deputy Mayor Steve Taylor

Local policy makers included Frank Triplett, Spokane City Water Department, Dave Mercier, City of Spokane Valley City Manager, Marina Sukup, City of Spokane Valley Director of Community Development

We also had multiple attendees from local and state affordable housing agencies and programs, such as the Spokane Low Income Housing Consortium (SLIHC) and Washington Center for Homeownership. There were also a number of attendees from the real estate and building industry.

The Spokesman Review covered the event positively, and BIAW mentioned it in their weekly announcements.

**Panel Members and Questions:**

Panel #1 was made up of the following people:

Buster Heitman, Landmark Builders; Randy Barcus, Avista Utilities; Glenn Miles, SRTC; Chris Venne, Community Frameworks; Clyde Haase, Haase Landscaping; Tom Arnold, City of Spokane; and Jason Wheaton, Greenstone Corporation

They were asked to respond to the following question:

How should local governments prioritize, and finance, infrastructure improvements that will help to maintain home ownership opportunities for working families in Spokane County?

Should special considerations be given to infrastructure that serves "affordable housing projects" for low and moderate-income households (making less than 50% or 80% of the countywide median household income)? If so, what specifically?

Panel #2 was made up of the following people:

Ron Wells, Wells & Company; Jeff Caden, WA Homeownership Center; Michael Luis, Michael Luis & Associates; Andy Cook, BIAW; Tod Woosley, SKCAR; and Craig Condrón, Condrón Homes

They were asked to respond to the following question:

How can jurisdictions within Spokane County provide sufficient buildable land capacity (sufficient land that is actually suitable for development) to ensure the construction of an adequate supply of diverse housing stock that will be affordable to the area's working families?

What Comprehensive Plan Provisions and Land Use Regulations will need to be changed to make this happen?

### **SCAHS Future:**

30 attendees agreed to participate in the task force. The first meeting of the task force will be in January 2007. Task force members will receive monthly reports on Spokane County's housing market. We are currently looking at adding a local SCAHS Task Force web page that will act as an informational clearinghouse. The task force will meet on at least a quarterly basis.

Networking has already been established with state level housing coalitions. We will continue to garner support and participation from the various governmental departments that deal with housing and development issues, as well as other non-governmental housing agencies, that did not attend the symposium. The education of local electeds and policy makers will continue throughout the year, as well as a formal annual educational event.