



Ground Breaks on Cook County Housing Project

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In the past, workforce housing wasn't exactly a topic on the radar for economic development organizations. But as we come to recognize the interconnections between housing, workforce development, quality of life, and growing our businesses, making sure the regions where we operate have high-quality homes that are within their budgets. A new housing development in Grand Marais is the fruit of Northspan's latest efforts to think creatively about community development, and just another example of how our long-running partnerships produce results for the communities we serve.

The housing project was the culmination of Northspan's long-term involvement in Cook County strategic economic development efforts. In 2012, a group of county stakeholders engaged Northspan President Randy Lasky to facilitate the launch of the Go Cook County initiative, which helped lay the foundation for a systematic assessment of the county's needs and future development goals. Addressing affordable workforce housing needs emerged as the major economic development priority from this process.

Northspan then assisted the Cook County/Grand Marais Economic Development Authority as it took responsibility for the organization and facilitation of focus groups, informational sessions, and the creation of a thorough workforce housing survey and needs assessment in 2015. In conjunction with community partners, the EDA set targets for affordable housing creation, identified development sites, and selected a community land trust model as the most effective method for delivering and sustaining affordable workforce housing. Stakeholders engaged One Roof Community Housing to develop housing projects in both Lutsen and Grand Marais, and on October 2, Northspan joined county and city leaders in a groundbreaking for eleven new modular homes in Grand Marais. These new homes, which are a significant development in a city of Grand Marais' size, build off of a unique model that will keep new single-family homes affordable for working families in perpetuity.

In Lutsen, detailed plans are in place and funding development continues for 16 one- and two-bedroom rental units. The Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation approved \$122,000 in infrastructure development funding on October 26, and One Roof aims to begin construction in spring 2018. Both the Lutsen and Grand Marais project sites include room for potential future expansion.

The success in Grand Marais was the result of collaborative efforts between the city, county, EDA, Chamber of Commerce, businesses, and other stakeholders. Northspan helped develop a creative package of local, state and non-profit funding for the project, including support from the Lloyd K. Johnson and Northland Foundations. Northspan continues to research and address housing-related issues, and can provide the organizational and strategic support necessary to bring partners together and get projects off the ground. If your own community is interested in addressing housing issues, contact us today to learn how we see projects through to fruition.

See news coverage of the groundbreaking here:

WTIP Community Radio

Cook County News Herald

Finance & Commerce