

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 21, 2018

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Housing Partnership Organization Launched

NORTHWEST, MI - A new organization is being established to help address the workforce housing shortage in Northwest Lower Michigan. The Northwest Michigan Rural Housing Partnership (NMRHP) is being founded by a diverse group of public, private, and nonprofit stakeholders in Northwest Michigan and incubated by Networks Northwest. Nearly half a million dollars has been raised for a multi-year effort, with funding from Rotary Charities and the Frey Foundation, along with contributions from Networks Northwest and the Northern Michigan Community Health Innovation Region.

The organization will take a three-pronged approach to addressing housing issues: addressing communication and education needs, advocating for housing solutions, and providing technical assistance for specific projects. They say they will approach their work with an understanding that housing shortages exist at all levels in the Partnership's ten-county service area of Antrim, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, Manistee, Charlevoix, Emmet, Missaukee, and Wexford Counties.

Kelly Smith, President of Baker College in Cadillac, will serve as chair of the newly formed board. Other officers include Vice Chair, Carlin Smith of the Petoskey Regional Chamber of Commerce, and Treasurer, Tony Lentych of the Traverse City Housing Commission. Steve Parsons of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians and Caroline Kennedy of the Village of Elk Rapids round out the executive committee. Kelly Smith says this group will recruit additional members to the board after the first of the year.

Networks Northwest is providing operational support for the Partnership, allowing the organization to build capacity and focus on implementation in its first few months. "We've worked closely with communities on housing needs for over a decade and will continue to do so," said Networks Northwest CEO Matt McCauley. "We're excited that our efforts have evolved into action, and are looking forward to helping the region take the next step."

(MORE)

Current Networks Northwest Community Development Director, Sarah Lucas, will transition into the Partnership's Executive Director position, effective January 2019. Officials with Networks Northwest and the housing partnership say Lucas has been immersed in the housing crisis for years at the regional level and truly understands the scope of the problem. "If you were to identify someone who is closest to being an expert on this issue, you would probably name Sarah Lucas," said Kelly Smith, the acting Chair of the NMRHP Board of Directors. "She was a logical fit for what we're trying to accomplish and we feel very fortunate to have her work with us,"

The Partnership recognizes that there is no quick fix or silver bullet to the region's housing shortages. "New development is a complex process that requires financial resources, proper zoning, public support, developers, and local government participation in order to be successful," said Lucas. "In the past, there hasn't been an effective way to align all these forces. Now we have the capacity to take action. We're so grateful to Rotary, Frey, and Networks Northwest for their support of this concept, and are thrilled to be able to help move it forward."

Kelly Smith says an early priority for the partnership will be to decide on a new name, tagline, logo, and other pieces of the branding package. "We're close to deciding that and should unveil something soon," she said. "We want to send the right message about our mission and our regional approach to this important work," Smith stressed. The board is also working on finalizing by-laws and other governance documents.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by e-mailing Dan Boss at dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution (300 dpi?), file format (.tif? .jpg?) and file size (1MB or less?). Or, phone (231) 929-5047. Check our online Media Room at: networksnorthwest.org/media

Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the 10 county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works, Small Business Development Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our website, networksnorthwest.org. Networks Northwest's member counties are: Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.