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For more information contact:



Minnesota **H O U S I N G** Partnership

Barb Jacobs, (651) 649-1710 ext. 117
Minnesota Housing Partnership



Andrew Schlack, (651) 221-1997 ext. 106
Greater Minnesota Housing Fund

Northeastern Minnesota Leaders Come Together to Plan for Incoming Workforce

Meeting Marks the Beginning of New Approach to Planning for Homes on Minnesota's Iron Range

Hibbing, Minn. (August 30, 2007) – Faced with the possible creation of over 1,700 permanent and as many as 6,500 construction jobs on the Iron Range, Northeastern Minnesota communities and organizations, Minnesota Housing Partnership (MHP), and the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund (GMHF) came together on August 28th to strategize about housing the new workforce. Fifty-four representatives from a wide array of Range communities, service agencies, and private business participated in the meeting and showed support for creating new approaches to meeting housing need in the area.

“Our primary goal,” said Chip Halbach, MHP’s executive director, “was to have an environment where local solutions and expertise emerge with clear action steps that illustrate how to move forward. We’re pleased to report that at this meeting several initial actions were identified.”

Participants agreed to first get a handle on the housing need facing the Iron Range by pursuing a dynamic market analysis developed by GMHF which will be equipped to track rapidly changing employment projections. Acknowledging the need for urgency and timeliness as various industrial projects approach fruition, participants voiced the desire to complete the market assessment in the next 90 days.

“We’re pleased to see so many representatives of public and private agencies uniting to address the housing impact of some twenty major industrial projects planned for the region,” continued Halbach. “A unified, collaborative approach will benefit everyone.”

Many local and regional organizations have already started working together to address the possible economic growth. One group, the Iron Range Large Scale Projects Readiness Initiative has already organized a response process and is moving ahead to address housing,

infrastructure, government services, workforce and other needs arising from the realization of one or more proposed industrial developments in the area.

“I look forward to working with the housing group emerging from this meeting on helping Northeastern Minnesota grow in a sustainable way,” said Range Readiness facilitator Randy Lasky. “There is tremendous potential to address temporary and permanent housing needs as we look at non-traditional and flexible ways to finance and construct a variety of market rate and affordable housing while minimizing displacement of low income residents and the elderly population. We have the opportunity and a responsibility to maximize our effectiveness by bringing all of the resources available in a coordinated, targeted, and equitable manner.”

In addition to needs assessment and coordination, organizations that fund affordable housing development in Northeastern Minnesota shared ideas on how the region can attract more resources for projects. Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Small Cities Development Program, Blandin Foundation, Minnesota Housing, and Minnesota Housing Partnership underscored the importance of regional collaboration to help address both short- and long-term affordable housing needs through collaborative planning and project coordination.

“The potential for new economic development along the Highway 169 corridor brings the prospect for new workforce housing needs throughout the region. We support all efforts to work collaboratively to address the full range of temporary and long-term housing needs” said Warren Hanson, president and CEO of Greater Minnesota Housing Fund.

Earlier this year, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund announced it had set aside \$1 million to help Northeastern Minnesota respond to projected housing needs related to economic expansion. “As a funder, GMHF is committed to being nimble and responsive to emerging affordable housing needs in Northeast Minnesota. Our Board of Directors feel funds need to be reserved for well-planned projects to help strengthen communities and families and support economic expansion and business investments on the Range,” Hanson explained.

Founded in 1996 by The McKnight Foundation and the Blandin Foundation, Greater Minnesota Housing Fund is a private, nonprofit organization that supports the creation of affordable housing throughout the 80 counties outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. By combining its resources with funds from other and public organizations, GMHF offers financial and technical assistance to make affordable housing initiatives possible, and develops affordable housing strategies that strengthen local communities, promote economic vitality, and increase the health, stability, and self-sufficiency of low-income and working families in Greater Minnesota.

The Minnesota Housing Partnership is a statewide nonprofit organization that advances the preservation and creation of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people as a means of strengthening communities and families. MHP provides local governments and nonprofit housing organizations access to loans, grants, and technical expertise to plan and construct housing, in addition to advocating and educating people on sound housing policies. MHP's work in Greater Minnesota is primarily supported by The McKnight Foundation.

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