



Summer 2003

OPAL Newsletter

Housing Is and People, Maintaining Is and Character

OPAL's First Rental Apartments Under Construction

Open House August 28

OPAL CLT'S director, Lisa Byers, is all smiles these days when she talks about the Reddick project. "Seven households will have a safe affordable place to live by early 2004," says Byers, "because we will be able to offer housing to people we've been unable to serve until now."

A last minute push to acquire the \$40,000 in contributions and pledges needed in order to

begin construction by mid-May, was successful. As those pledges are fulfilled, donors are having the satisfaction of seeing their investment in the community transformed into affordable apartments, before their very eyes, every time they drive by the northwest corner of Enchanted Forest Road and Lover's Lane.

OPAL hired the general contractor, Terra Firma/Able II in mid-May. In addition to working quickly, the contractors continue to work toward cost savings, recommending changes in materials or techniques which they believe will bring the total cost of the project down. "We are fortunate to be working with a

firm that works hard to be a partner in cost control," comments Gabriel Olmsted, project manager.

All the framing should be complete by the end of August. To mark that milestone, OPAL is opening the site to the group which has worked very hard to make this project a reality—our members.



The Reddick project is well underway, with completion of OPAL's first affordable rental apartments, and office space for OPAL and Eastsound Water Users Association expected by January 2004.



The south wall of the Farmhouse building is raised into place. The Farmhouse will contain a conference room, restrooms for the office spaces, and four small rental offices



Seven small rental apartments will be affordable for households earning a full-time hourly wage of \$7 to \$16/hour. The buildings will be ready for occupancy early in 2004.

Members are invited to join the staff, trustees, and contractors at the site on Thursday, August 28 from 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. for an open house. Join us for some lemonade and snacks and have a look at what we all are doing together for our community.

Three Community-Builders Honored at Annual OPAL Members Meeting

Three island residents whose efforts have fostered better housing and a richer community were honored at the OPAL annual membership meeting, held May 5.

Recipients were Tina Rose, awarded the Peter Fisher Award for dedication to the cause of fair housing; and Didier Gincig and Robin Woodward, sharing the Michael and Penny Sharp-Sky award for voluntary service that builds and sustains community. Both awards were named in honor of OPAL members who themselves exemplified these areas of service.

Tina, a renaissance person whose current employment includes that of graphic artist and designer, is a vigorous advocate for housing applicants. She insisted that OPAL's policies reflect not paternalism, but rather partnership. In addition, for many years, Tina volunteered to design and produce OPAL's publications, invitations and other artwork, which helped OPAL explain its work in a clear and attractive manner.

Didier was cited for his dedication to the islands' children and for work "beyond the call of duty" in directing the Orcas Island Recreation Program. As one OPAL trustee put it, "whenever I dropped my daughter off at an event, there was Didier, organizing and playing with the kids—the kids love him and he keeps coming up with great ideas."

Robin was honored for her service on the board of Children's House, for her leadership in maintaining The Living Room as a gathering place, and for civic beautification through establishing lovely gardens on her properties in Eastsound. Robin's dedication and sound business skills helped Children's House establish a more firm financial footing.



OPAL's Lisa Byers congratulates Didier Gincig and Robin Woodward

How Does the Design of Our Existing Homes Work? Learning from OPAL Residents

On a rainy spring Sunday eighteen residents, staff and trustees gathered to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of OPAL's current house designs and the site layout of our neighborhoods. Residents who participated had lived in OPAL homes for a minimum of four years and maximum of nine years. The lively and informative day included many suggestions.

Residents encouraged OPAL to continue including prospective residents in the design process, to develop site plans that separate cars and parking from the houses, retain open common lands in close proximity to every house, honor existing natural habitats and natural features. They like house designs that include covered front and back porches, lots of windows facing south, east and west, attic space for storage, and at least two doors leading to the outside.

Residents suggested improvements such as: include a common building where meetings could occur and that include shared laundry facilities; incorporate water catchment systems; continue to incorporate more green building materials whenever affordable; utilize materials with longer life-cycles that may cost more to install (such as metal roofing); and strive to increase the community-building aspect of OPAL's mission.

The Community Land Trust Alliance of the San Juan Islands: Update on Current Events

For the first time in their 14-year histories, OPAL Community Land Trust and Lopez Community Land Trust have collaborated on a project that will benefit the entire county. Joined by the San Juan Community Home Trust of San Juan Island and the Waldron Community Land Trust, the groups, now calling themselves the Community Land Trust Alliance of the San Juan Islands, have designed and delivered a countywide housing demand survey that will guide the type and location of affordable housing to be developed by community land trusts in the islands over the next five years.

The response rate to the housing survey was tremendous, 18% (1,465 complete responses of 8,098 surveys mailed). Within the total survey, we included a random sample of 1,000 households who received additional requests to respond. The response rate for this “imbedded sample” was 25.5%. Clearly the residents of San Juan County care enough to respond to the detailed questions, and we look forward to a thorough analysis. That analysis is expected to be largely completed by September, when the Alliance plans to hold public meetings on each island to share the results and answer questions.

Alliance members are now beginning to work on the next cooperative project: an assessment of technology and communication systems for each organization. The goal is to gain greater efficiency by employing the same operating systems and software. Staff trained on one type of software will be able to assist other staff who are just learning and utilizing the same accounting and database systems will save time and funds.

A third cooperative effort will be in evidence at the County Fair: the four community land trusts will share a booth at the fair and are developing a combined presentation that can be utilized at the fair, as well as in other locations.



Alliance members concur that if the positive working relationship demonstrated in the first six-months continues, it is highly likely that the Alliance members will strengthen their ties, and cooperate on more efforts in the future. Cooperative projects and the time spent on defining and working as the Alliance is supported by a three-year grant from Impact Capital, a non-profit that invests technical training and funds in Washington State organizations that build community.

Research on Best Practices for Rental Management

Next year, when OPAL adds to its responsibilities that of being a landlord, we will be prepared. A thorough year-long investigation by a four-person Residents Committee into the ins and outs of managing rentals, begun in spring of 2002, resulted in a draft residential rental management policy. Currently under review by the board of trustees, the policy will guide us as the Reddick property is transformed into a complex that will include seven affordable rental apartments plus some office rental space.

The committee talked to representatives from other community land trusts, especially those whose rental policies integrate some form of resident participation (typically, mandatory attendance at neighborhood meetings). The group also obtained advice from landlords of other non-profit housing providers. The varied input was useful, but none of the organizations' policies fully met our need. "We plan to encourage a degree of resident involvement that proves truly meaningful to the residents," says Julie Brunner, Housing Coordinator.

In this, our first rental community, we hope to have the same balance of resident interaction and respect for individual privacy that makes existing OPAL neighborhoods special, explains Lisa Byers, OPAL executive director. "Our rental policies contain clear-cut rules of conduct, so as to foster the development of a well-maintained community where resi-

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dents feel a genuine sense of personal connection," she says. To that end, residents will be given as much self-determination as is consistent with our obligation as owners. In Lisa's words, "The role of OPAL will be that of partner rather than parent."

The Reddick complex will have a long-term rather than transitory emphasis. Each rental applicant will make a commitment to participate in regular neighborhood meetings, where community issues will be identified, discussed, and solved, whenever possible. The exact nature and extent of that "participation" is now being determined by the board of trustees, who reviewed the committee's first draft in September 2002. To some extent, the type and degree of involvement will depend on the mix of residents.

A key element, as in other OPAL neighborhoods, will be that of consensus. Consensual decision-making has two elements. First, each resident will have the opportunity, and the obligation, to express his or her opinions. Second, all views will be heard and each receive respectful consideration.

To provide a sounding board for and communication link with renters, and in that way to identify issues before they become problems, a three-person Site Council will be named. It will comprise representatives of each tenant segment: (1) OPAL itself, who will occupy office space in the project; (2) Eastsound Water Users Association, a project partner and also an office tenant, and (3) the residential-renter group.

Most "house rules" are mandated by law (for example, no narcotics), and are unchangeable—as are some specific OPAL provisions (no smoking). But other rules (possibly those regarding visitor parking) might be subject to change by resident agreement.

The first group of renters will have a greater decision-making role than future residents, in that they will largely determine the features of some common areas, including design and location of play structures or picnic tables, and guidelines for private gardens. At the start,

OPAL will provide a budget for these purposes, to be used as the resident group decides. Each unit will be responsible to contribute three hours a month to community common lands improvement projects.

Because the Reddick complex abuts OPAL's Bonnie Brae neighborhood on the east, the two neighborhoods will name a liaison to the other neighborhood in order to collaborate on shared issues. One such example is the community pea-patch garden, which will be a resource, and possibly meeting place for residents of both neighborhoods.

In order to qualify for a rental unit, an applicant must have resided in San Juan County for at least three years.

Management of the physical property, including facility maintenance and repair, will be contracted out to a local professional in that field.

In order to qualify for a rental unit, an applicant must have resided in San Juan County for at least three years, and meet largely state-specified financial criteria. As an example, the applicant's income may not exceed 65 per cent of the county median; nor be so low that rent payments would take over 30 per cent of income.

The present OPAL list of affordable-housing seekers (over 45 families or individuals) includes some people, working full-time, who are not financially able to buy a home on Orcas even with assistance from OPAL; and perhaps some others who (because of lack of time, advanced age, physical impairment, etc.) may simply choose not to incur the burdens of home ownership and prefer to rent.

The apartments will be advertised early in 2004. If there are more qualified applicants than dwelling units, the names of those selected will be drawn through a lottery system. Those not chosen may elect to be placed at the top of the list for the next rental housing that becomes available.

Meanwhile, back at the project itself: Construction is moving along at a rapid rate, with passersby on Lovers Lane and Enchanted Forest Road able to observe daily changes in the exterior contours of the buildings. Work is to be completed by the end of January, with residents' move-in to follow shortly thereon.

A Balanced and Whole Community

OPAL CLT exists so Orcas can maintain a vibrant and essential assortment of lifestyles and income levels on the island. Our residents include teachers, medical technicians, business owners, office managers, law enforcement, EMTs, healers, delivery drivers, house cleaners, store clerks, custodians and artists. Please include OPAL Community Land Trust in your year end giving to help keep our community balanced and whole. The funds will help us provide permanently affordable housing for islanders.

Please help us keep our valuable neighbors on the island.

Join our efforts by sending in your donation today to: OPAL CLT, P.O. Box 1133, Eastsound, WA 98245.

\$25 \$44* \$100 \$440* \$1000 \$4440 (an Eastsound Water Membership!)
 other barter membership (please contact the office)

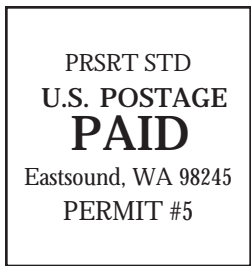
***Help us buy water memberships!**

A \$44 contribution is 1% and \$440 is 10% of an Eastsound Water Membership.

OPAL CLT is certified by the IRS as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization



PO Box 1133
Eastsound, WA 98245
360-376-3191
opalclt@opalclt.org
www.opalclt.org



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IN THIS ISSUE

Writing: Joe Floren, Mary Blackstone & Lisa Byers
Editing and Proofing: Mary Blackstone & Judy Whiting
Photographs: Joe Floren and Clyde Eagleton
Design: Tina Rose
Layout: Bob Gamble

Construction Site Open House Please Join Us

**Reddick Property – NW corner of
Enchanted Forest Road & Lovers Lane**

Thursday, August 28, 2003

5:00 – 6:30 p.m.

Come tour the site and see the progress on construction of our first seven rental apartments and offices for OPAL, Eastsound Water Users Assoc. and additional tenants. Have a chance to meet with OPAL's Lisa Byers and Gabriel Olmsted, and Terra Firma/Able II's Justin Paulsen and Shon Geer. See how the new "old farm" is taking shape.

