

## Cohousing development planned for Buxton land

By Cliff White, Staff Writer  
Nov. 23, 2007 - **Gazette**

As early as next fall, those looking for a more environmentally sustainable residential alternative may be able to find paradise in Buxton.

"Paradise" is the tentative name of a "green" – or ecologically-friendly – development project thought up by Françoise Paradis. Paradis laid out her idea for the development in a Sept. 17 Buxton Planning Board meeting. The development – intended for Paradis' 30-acre property on Marshall Lane between Route 117 and Route 202 – will feature up to 24 units.

"The idea is to build a 'green cohousing community' that promotes sustainable living, and to be able to rent or sell the units for reasonable prices," Paradis said.

Cohousing is a type of residential development in which residents actively participate in the design and operation of their own neighborhood, Paradis said. The physical design of the development encourages both social contact and individual space, she said. Private homes within a cohousing development contain all the features of conventional homes, but residents also have access to common facilities such as open space, courtyards, office space and a common house, Paradis said.

"Paradise" will also include an emphasis on green behavior, and Paradis plans to install solar panels and geothermal heating, and will set the goal of zero fossil fuel use in supplying the development with heating and electricity.

"The technology that I plan to use is prohibitively expensive for single homes, but it becomes much more reasonable in clustered living areas," Paradis said. "You only need to install one system for all the units, and after it is installed, electricity costs are cut by between 30 and 70 percent."

The development is planned to feature a shared sewer system and office space with shared equipment. Paradis said she already has 12 interested parties, and that she would welcome input of ideas for improvement of the project from all residents. "Ideally, a cohousing community encourages involvement from all its residents in its building and its day-to-day operations," Paradis said.

Some units could be ready for occupancy by next fall if all goes according to plan, Paradis said. She has obtained the services of two builders and an

architect for the project. Architect Andy Shapiro, who has experience building environmentally sensitive structures, has been hired to create precise plans for "Paradise" in the coming months, Paradis said.

Options for those searching for housing that is both green and affordable is extremely limited, Paradis said. She said she has searched throughout southern Maine and could not find any green residences for less than \$300,000. Paradis plans to price her units from \$175,000 to \$300,000, and also plans to rent some units. "I'm trying to find the best compromise between cost efficiency and environmental sustainability," Paradis said. "One way that it will be more affordable is that I'm not a big developer out to make a lot of money – I got a good price on this land, and I'm going to pass that on to the buyers."

Paradis has a personal stake in seeing "Paradise" behave like its namesake. "I'm going to live there myself, so I have personal incentive to see that it's built as well as it can be," Paradis said.

One neighbor has already voiced her displeasure at the project, though it is still in its preliminary stages. Barbara Elwell, who is also a member of Buxton's Planning Board said she would recuse herself when Paradis' plans come before the board, but said Paradis' "green" development is a contradiction-in-terms. "If she wanted it to be truly green, she should leave the property as it is now – undeveloped," Elwell said. "That land has a lot of wildlife on it now, and a lot of people use it for hunting or to go snowmobiling. This is the country – this is what some people out here like to do. I just don't think a development like that fits into that neighborhood."

However, Paradis said the development will not be destroying the natural feel of the land. "There's plenty of land in the area, and the development would leave a large part of that land to be natural," Paradis said. "We will build on as little land as possible and leave the rest green, with the idea that we would put in nature trails that people from the area can use to go cross-country skiing or snowshoeing on."

Paradis said she did not yet know when her proposal will be evaluated by the planning board. Elwell said when it does, she would fight as a resident to have her opinion heard. "It goes against what the people who have lived here all their lives want," Elwell said. "From what I've heard, they want a place where they can go out and meditate, and that's nice if that's what they want to do. But I'm not a person who has time to do that, and I'd rather look out and meditate with the animals. I'll be at the meetings as a spectator, and I will voice my opinions."