



Tim Coulombe and Kevin Lacasse (right) of New England Family Housing are working with the city on a proposal to attract federal funding to clean up some of the city's blighted housing. The two met with the city council Monday night. (BARBARA TETREAUPT PHOTO)

# Berlin forms partnership to clean up blighted housing

## Gov. Lynch to tour proposed project area Thursday

BY BARBARA TETREAUPT  
THE BERLIN DAILY SUN

**BERLIN** — The city and a private housing management company with local roots have formed a partnership to apply for \$6 million in federal funds to clean up blighted housing in Berlin.

Housing Coordinator André Caron told the city council Monday night that the public-private partnership proposal got a good reaction when it was presented to state officials last week.

"We seem to have done very well with it," Caron said, noting that Gov. John Lynch has decided to come to Berlin to tour the four targeted neighborhoods this Thursday. The neighborhoods are the lower East Side, downtown, Granite Street, and the area around Notre Dame arena.

Berlin is one of five communities in the state eligible to receive federal Neighborhood Stabilization Funds

from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The state has \$11.6 million set aside to address abandoned, foreclosed, or blighted properties in those communities.

One of the advantages of the funding is it can be used for demolition. Caron said they are asking for \$1 million to demolish blighted buildings. He noted the city's tax deeding list has over 70 properties on it and the city would look at tackling some of those. In some cases, the city would look at replacing a demolished property with a modular home that it would turn around and sell.

Caron introduced Kevin Lacasse, owner and director of New England Family Housing. A native of Berlin, Lacasse said he formed NEFH in 2004 and currently owns and manages 113 multi-family and commercial units. Over the last three years, his company has purchased over \$7 million of property and invested close to \$3 million in rehabilitating 101 residential units. The company has done a lot of

see **BLIGHTED** page 6

**BLIGHTED** from page 3  
work in Claremont.

Another Berlin native, Tim Coulombe, will join NEFH as site supervisor and a partner in the Berlin operations. Lacasse said he also expects to have a full-time maintenance person here.

Lacasse said he has watched the Berlin market for two years but the rents were too low to cover the cost of both acquiring and rehabilitating properties here. The availability of funding from the Neighborhood Stabilization Program to cover the cost of rehabilitating the properties makes it financially feasible for NEFH to get involved here. Lacasse stressed that his company will purchase all the properties it renovates using private capital. The federal funds will be used to cover all the rehabilitation costs.

Under the terms of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, NEFH must hold the properties for 20 years.

All new and rehabilitated properties must follow energy efficiency guide-

lines including low flow fixtures, efficient heating, insulation, and compact fluorescent lights. Each property will undergo an energy audit including a blower test and thermal imaging.

Lacasse said his company has already purchased the five unit building at 632 Champlain Street and is currently negotiating to buy a three unit apartment building at 183 Grafton Street.

In rehabilitating properties, Lacasse said he will use local labor and materials. As a private company, the properties owned by NEFH will pay property taxes. Lacasse said he believes revitalizing what are mostly vacant buildings will improve the appearance of highly visible sections of the city and promote neighborhood pride.

Coulombe said when he returned to Berlin to take a job at the state prison, many people who took jobs there did not want to live in Berlin because of a lack of good quality rental housing. He said nice housing will help the city attract employers.