

## Traverse City Case Study

The Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® (TAAR) has had a long-standing policy of environmental stewardship in the Traverse Bay, Michigan region. The effort initially came about with the formation of the TAAR Environmental Subcommittee almost thirty-five years ago. The committee was charged with developing a position on water-quality issues based on septic systems' discharge into the local watershed.

The Traverse Bay region, a longtime tourist destination and agricultural area, began developing 1960s and 1970s when affluent middle-class workers from the automotive industry in Southeast Michigan migrated to the area. The influx of new people brought more commercial and residential development and greater pressure on the watershed.

TAAR's Environmental Subcommittee became a voice for good environmental stewardship during this period and its efforts became the genesis of several watershed and land conservation efforts by other regional stakeholders.

In December of 2007, TAAR and its wholly owned subsidiary, the Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® Multiple Listings Service, initiated a strategic effort to green the MLS. The Board of Directors charged the MLS Committee with developing the green MLS initiative.

The MLS Committee concluded that for this effort to succeed, it was necessary to partner with an expert in green building technologies and LEED, and it chose the Homebuilders Association of the Grand Traverse Area (HBAGTA).

Despite being in operation for forty years, HBAGTA the TAAR had never had a concerted collaboration before the development of TAAR's green initiative. The original aim was to develop a plan to green the regional MLS and promote building and remodeling among consumers. The HBAGTA became the mentor and primary knowledge broker to TAAR as the special Green MLS task team developed the criteria for this effort. A team consisting of TAAR association members, TAAR association staff, TAAR MLS committee members and HBAGTA members and staff disseminated information, reviewed certification criteria, and developed relevant information fields for listings being placed in the MLS database. What also emerged was a draft of the Green Sellers' Disclosure form, Green Features form and field criteria for the Fidelity Paragon software used by the MLS.

The process was streamlined because the MLS was owned by the same stakeholders, the REALTOR® association, and because a policy committee and a forms review committee already existed within TAAR's structure. Careful and deliberate review by the Forms and Policy committees completed the process and determined that the Sellers' Disclosure should be voluntary and not mandatory.

During its deliberations, the team determined that the level and quality of information, and the process knowledge needed to carry it forward through the MLS phase was too complex for REALTOR® members and consumers to understand.

The team recommended to the MLS Committee that it was imperative to create an outreach and education program to provide relevant information both to consumers and REALTOR® members when the new MLS criteria was launched.

Working collaboratively also was key to success. During the process, concerns about liability issues emerged, particularly whether misrepresentation – green washing – could occur. However, by taking a holistic approach as part of an association- and MLS-based strategic initiative toward the greening of the MLS and by enlisting the support of the homebuilders in designing the criteria, the board determined that the MLS Committee had created a comprehensive enough plan to move ahead. At the end of the process, TAAR's Board of Directors recommended that there be an aggressive REALTOR® education and public outreach effort made both by TAAR and the MLS.

Green Solutions 4 (GS4) emerged as the solution that would help REALTORS® and consumers disseminate information about all facets of green housing and how green technologies and lifestyle choices can affect the environment. Another significant aspect of the initiative was to encourage TAAR members to pursue the newly-launched [National Association of REALTORS® Green Designation](#).

Thanks to the cross-functional nature of the task team, the endorsement and support of the Board of Directors, the enthusiasm of the organizations' staff and because of the long history of regional environmental stewardship, roadblocks in greening the MLS were few. Of further help was that the political landscape was changing and NAR had endorsed a culture of sustainability for REALTOR® associations and their members for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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