



May 12, 2015

Dear Members of the Shelburne Select Board:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. We are writing to provide you with information prior to the meeting and hope that we would have an opportunity to provide this letter to the public prior to the meeting.

We want to be clear about the intent, purpose and mission of Harbor Place. Our goal has been to operate a motel that is safer, less expensive and has better results for people who need it. Our guests are and have been a wide variety of people: veterans, victims of fire or floods, or of domestic violence, young children, and the elderly. A surprising number of them are working: at Vermont Teddy Bear, Kinney Drugs, Burger King or Panera Bread, to name a few.

Case management services at Harbor Place are provided on site by Women Helping Battered Women, the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, the Safe Harbor Clinic of the Community Health Center of Burlington, and the Howard Center.

Over the course of the first 11 months of operations, we provided rooms at Harbor Place for 593 unduplicated households. Rent affordability is a major obstacle to permanent housing for Harbor Place guests. Affordability is a particular challenge for people who cannot secure a Section 8 rental subsidy. Even with rental assistance, however, finding an apartment in Chittenden County is challenging because of the lack of available housing in the local market.

That's why it's notable that guests at Harbor Place were twice as likely to find permanent housing than those staying in other motels. This is happening at just two-thirds the cost to the state.

When we were creating Harbor Place, we placed a heavy emphasis on security and behavior. At the time, we were aware that other motels in the area (this one included) had reputations for drug dealing and prostitution. We did not want that to occur. As a result, guests at Harbor Place are required to sign guest rules that prohibit (among other things):

- a. Intoxicated or disorderly behavior by guests or visitors;
- b. Public disturbance on the premises;

- c. Signs of drug activity, such as cars coming and going to a particular room and leaving shortly thereafter, excess or unusual foot traffic to a particular room, or any other activity (especially in the middle of the night) that creates a reasonable suspicion by management that drug activity is occurring.
- d. Engages in behavior resulting in law enforcement being called to the premises or to nearby properties.

The penalty for violating these rules is a ban from Harbor Place for 30 days up to a lifetime ban.

In order to ensure this high level of security, we offered to pay the Shelburne Police Department directly; recently, we agreed to reimburse the Police Department for calls over a certain threshold. In addition, we have on site security from closing till early morning, have two staff who live on site, and have installed security cameras through the motel and have offered a direct feed to the police department.

If there are more calls to the Shelburne Police, it's because of this higher level of vigilance. A recent incident of some bad actors running through the neighborhoods was because our staff saw criminal behavior and called it in. The fugitive drug dealer could have operated at any other Shelburne motel for weeks or months without being exposed. We put him out of business in less than 18 hours due to our security policies. We know that this type of behavior is increasing at other area motels and we will continue to work to eliminate it at Harbor Place.

We also know for a fact that prostitution occurs at motels in Shelburne and Chittenden County. Harbor Place has zero prostitution due to a security policy that anyone coming to Harbor Place must sign in and out with a picture ID and our 16 video cameras.

When we asked guests in a recent survey what they liked, they said the following:

- "Having security on hand."
- "The social environment is good because of the rules and monitoring and enforcement."
- "They don't mess around when it comes to visitors and poor behavior."
- "The security ensures my safety which helps me sleep better at night."
- "Monitoring of the property".
- "Security, knowing if something happens it will be taken care of."
- "It is a secure safe place."
- "Peace and quiet at night, security and the rules make it feel safe."
- "The safety and it's a quiet nice place."
- "Security."
- "Security."
- "Safety."
- "Safety."
- "Safety."

We understand that this seems contrary to the belief of some, but we know this is true. In fact, we know that we have seen a decline in calls from the previous year, about a 20% decline when comparing January through April, 2015 versus the same four months in 2014. (You should know that the leadership at CHT reviews a report from staff every night, and hears more detailed information if there is a disturbance. We review the 911 logs, although we haven't received any since January. We also know that some of these calls are for assists from other agencies asking for information such as requirements for child support, and are not real security issues).

There are a few efforts that are underway that we hope will make things better:

1. We are working closely with State officials, local agencies and religious groups on opening a cold weather shelter in Burlington. A smaller shelter was opened this winter which was successful, but was small and still did not meet all of the needs for this winter's coldest days. The State has a real interest in eliminating the use of motels for cold weather exceptions, and so do we.
2. We continue to look for ways to reduce the use of Shelburne Police and EMS rescue while maintaining a safe environment.
3. We felt that the presence of a Police vehicle at the site would be a deterrent to crime. Police officers do visit often as a courtesy, but we now understand that the police vehicle increases the perception that there is an incident underway. Most often, that's not the case.
4. We have asked the Town Manager to provide us with the number and amount of non reimbursed EMS ambulance trips for guests at Harbor Place. We will work on behalf of the Town of Shelburne to recoup these losses.
5. We meet every school bus and have started meeting all CCTA passengers as they walk to HP from the Lighting House bus stop.
6. We now have an agreement with Nicholas from Shelburne Taxi to bring intoxicated guests to ACT 1 day or night if they are cooperative and not a danger to themselves or others.
7. We have initiated conversations with the State to focus their referrals to Harbor Place to be exclusively families. We will continue to have that conversation and welcome that direction. Just for your information, we built a playground with volunteer help and donated funds last summer, as well as community gardens.

Finally, when we purchased the Econolodge, we did not expect to operate a motel forever at this site. We are waiting for the outcome of zoning changes currently under consideration to determine the best opportunity for repurposing the site.

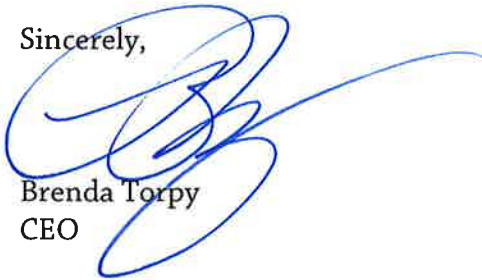
There are however, several rumors that we do want to address directly:

1. We are not, nor have we ever, had any intent of purchasing another motel in Shelburne. We are having conversations with Mr. Pomerleau for his land that is adjacent to Harrington Village for an expansion of those uses, perhaps with a focus on homeownership;
2. We have talked to several reputable residential real estate brokers, and they have seen no indication of changing values for property as a result of Harbor Place;

3. We have checked with the owners of Bueno's. The restaurant is not for sale because of Harbor Place. The place is very busy every night;
4. We have not seen any negative postings about Harbor Place on the Front Porch Forum since it opened;
5. CHT pays property taxes for this property, as well as all of the other properties it owns and manages, around \$120,000 annually in Shelburne. Our properties are worth about \$6 million (not including the Senior Housing at Harrington Village or the numerous shared equity homeowners).

Finally, we are truly grateful for the support we have received from so many in Shelburne. We are always prepared to discuss what we are doing in at Harbor Place and in Shelburne. If anyone would like a tour, please contact Chris Donnelly at chris@champlainhousingtrust.org. We'll be scheduling a couple of dates in the next few weeks and will publicize them through Front Porch Forum and the Shelburne News.

Sincerely,



Brenda Torpy
CEO