Closing in on completion of the first Green Mountain Habitat for Humanity Duplex at Harrington Village, Shelburne
DEAR MEMBERS,

In many ways this has seemed to be a long winter; weeks of freezing weather will do that. But as I sit down to write this it seems only a short time since last fall when I invited you all to contribute to the power of membership by joining in our annual events. And you did, as our very successful Annual Meeting and Legislative Day attest.

The 2015 Annual Meeting was a successful mix of business and social time, with 150 residents and community supporters converging on the Hilton in Burlington to hear business updates, elect new Board members and enjoy dinner and mingling. Board President Sarah Muyskens shared the great news that at the close of its 30th year, CHT is doing well and celebrating innovation with new neighborhoods, new projects and new community partners.

In February, CHT members and staff joined more than a hundred affordable housing and conservation advocates at the Statehouse in Montpelier, speaking out for continued funding of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, which supports many of our programs. Looking ahead, mark your calendars for our most festive annual gathering – this summer’s picnic on Saturday, July 18.

Champlain Housing Trust is proud to be a membership organization that emphasizes and supports resident participation and engagement. It is one of the things that makes us strong. In keeping with this priority CHT chose the theme “Community Matters” for our current Strategic Plan, a three-year blueprint where we set goals for CHT’s board and staff and also establish measurable strategies to achieve them.

At the heart of the “Community Matters” vision is a commitment to deepening our services to residents and adding new community-building activities like community gardens and neighborhood barbecues. This will be achieved through a new staff position and expanded responsibilities for other staff (details inside). We are very proud to have marshaled the resources to do this and look forward to working more closely with you to strengthen your connections to each other and with that, to improve your neighborhoods overall.

Also inside are updates about one of our new developments, Green Street in Hinesburg. There’s also a feature on our “Resident-Controlled Housing Collaborative,” which offers workshops and peer support for residents who manage their own properties through volunteer leadership.

Finally, this issue features three of our staff members who were chosen as Employees of the Quarter based on nominations from their coworkers. In an organization with almost 90 staff members as well as multiple locations and departments, we take time to come together each quarter to learn, and to recognize and appreciate the many contributions of the CHT team. I hope you also enjoy learning about these jobs and the dedicated people who do them.

Thank you for being part of this community! I look forward to deepening our connections.

Brenda Torpy, CEO
At CHT, we believe that everyone deserves a safe, decent and affordable home. Each year, our programs and neighborhoods are supported by fees and rents paid by our residents, but around 25 percent of our expenses are funded by donations from community members and government sources. Whether it’s the $30 check sent in to join at the “Carpenter” member level or planning ahead to include CHT in your will, your support makes our work possible. “Planned giving” refers to charitable gift options that are given in the future – contractual pledges for supporting the work you believe in after you’re gone. “It’s easier than you might think,” said Katie Grauer of the Vermont Community Foundation, a philanthropic financial organization that offers assistance and services to CHT and our donors. “Think creatively…[supporting a cause] doesn’t have to come out of your paycheck.” If you would like to learn more about supporting our work through Planned Giving, please contact Chris Donnelly, Director of Community Relations, at chris@champlainhousingtrust.org or call 862-6244.

In early 1999, Willie Pearson was working in inventory control at a local gardening center and paying high rent in Burlington. By the end of that year he had not only purchased his first home, but also joined the Board of Champlain Housing Trust. “I just could never save enough money on my own to buy at a market level,” Willie explained. After looking at a few places in his price range, he recognized that he didn’t have the “master carpenter” skills to renovate any of the buildings to a livable standard. So Willie contacted CHT and enrolled in the Shared Equity program. “Once I moved into my new home I started to wonder how I could help return the good will,” he said.

Volunteering on CHT’s Board has given him the opportunity to learn about business, communities, development, tax issues and many of the other challenges and triumphs of the local housing scene. Willie found there is a time commitment, and “a lot of reading involved,” and there can be a learning curve in the beginning. “It’s been an amazing journey of growth and expansion, being able to help more people in more areas,” Willie said of his Board service, which spans the past 16 years – but comes to a close at the end of 2015. “There has been some personal growth as well. Having a nice home with an affordable mortgage in the community where he works allowed Willie to build his retirement savings. So in addition to his service on the Board, Willie also decided to include CHT in his will as a way to pay it forward. “It’s a great way to be able to continue to contribute after you’re gone,” he explained, “and CHT is an organization you know you can trust.”

Willie Pearson, CHT homeowners and Board member.

“If you would like to learn more about supporting our work through Planned Giving contact: Chris Barden, Director of Community Relations, at chris@champlainhousingtrust.org or call 862-6244.”
NEW: RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Spring days invite gardeners to the dirt, planting seedlings while weeding out strong growth. Days lengthen into summer evenings, ripe for barbeques and friends sharing stories. If you’re a CHT apartment and those activities sound enjoyable, stay tuned.

“We want to develop more meaningful relationships with our residents,” Anna Herman explained, “and help them to be able to connect with their neighbors.” Part of that is to be achieved by creating activities that bring people together.

The first step has been to create a new position, and add a new twist to an existing one. Anna Herman will serve as CHT’s new Community Relations Specialist, while Ryan Allard will take up duties as Resident Relations Coordinator.

“THIS IS ABOUT OPPORTUNITY. A ROOF IS IMPORTANT, BUT BUILDING COMMUNITY IS A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE.”

The Town of Hinesburg, especially its Building and Development Management Committee, has been focalizing its efforts with the long-range plan, and its vision is to promote a sense of place and community among its residents. While we’ve always hosted activities for all residents and supporters, this enhances our services.

“This is about opportunity,” said Ryan. “It’s important, but building community is about much more than the physical space.”

This spring, residents at South Meadow celebrated Green Up Day, taking to the streets to help clean their Harington Village in Shelburne will soon host a new playground during the property’s redevelopment.

Harrington Village in Shelburne will soon open 20 units of affordable housing, built with volunteer help and maintained by tenants. Local companies are reaching out with advice, discounts and seed donations, and in June, during our NeighborWorks Weeks, the residents at Harrington Village are invited for a planting party and barbecue.

These efforts come out of CHT’s Strategic Plan, created by the Board and staff to guide its programs for a three-year period. The theme for 2014-2016 is “Building Community Matters”, and part of the vision is to promote a sense of place and community among our residents. While we’ve always hosted activities for all residents and supporters, this enhances our services.

“This is about opportunity,” said Ryan. “It’s important, but building community is about much more than the physical space.”

To learn more about this new initiative, suggest ideas, or offer your help, please contact Ryan at the Town’s office, or email info@cswd.net.

Green Street is a partnership in Housing Vermont and is being developed by Chris Snyder of Snyder Homes. The company will build to CHT’s specifications and then the organization will purchase the property (a process known as a “solvency” development). This is the latest collaboration with Snyder, the builder for Cedar’s Edge in Essex.

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RESIDENT-CONTROLLED HOUSING – BUILT ON PARTICIPATION

T he term encompasses a range of housing types, including cooperatives, cohousing neighborhoods and more. Members enjoy unique benefits and responsibilities because they govern their communities together. They may hire their own property managers or contractors, make the rules in such areas as allowing pets and handling arrears, approve the yearly budget and teamwork skills. Many also have a “roll-up-our-sleeves” approach and a desire to share and learn from each other. These housing models call for members to develop their business and governance skills. Many also have a “roll-up-our-sleeves” approach and a desire to share and learn from each other.

Seeing a great opening for collaboration, CHT formed a Resident-Controlled Housing (RCH) network in 2012, bringing together leaders of CHT’s co-ops, mobile-home cooperatives, cohousing neighborhoods and more. The term encompasses a range of housing types, including cooperatives, cohousing neighborhoods and more. Members enjoy unique benefits and responsibilities because they govern their communities together. They may hire their own property managers or contractors, make the rules in such areas as allowing pets and handling arrears, approve the yearly budget and teamwork skills. Many also have a “roll-up-our-sleeves” approach and a desire to share and learn from each other.

The RCH network provides ways for everyone to learn together and for experienced residents to help new ones. It has been good to meet some of our “cousins” from other co-ops from around the state, Burlington Cohousing, and Northgate Apartments, an affordable rental community governed by its residents.

When forms are filled out for new residents, the RCH network reminds the community that we are part of something larger. It’s energizing to see groups handle the challenges we all face. It’s energizing to see groups handle the challenges we all face. It’s energizing to see groups handle the challenges we all face.

By organizing training workshops, gatherings, and other ways to meet their shared needs, the RCH network embodies Principle Six of the Cooperative Principles, “cooperation among cooperatives.” The network provides ways for everyone to learn together and for experienced residents to help new ones.

“With four new mobile-home co-ops forming right now, we have a lot of people looking to learn, so this really meets a need,” notes Sarah Woodward, director of the statewide Mobile Home Program at partner organization CVOEO. “With four new mobile-home co-ops forming right now, we have a lot of people looking to learn, so this really meets a need.”

This fall the network will host a public event in Burlington to highlight resident-controlled housing. It is also creating an online forum where members can exchange ideas and advice. The network will also continue to grow, as CHT will break ground this spring on the Bright Street Co-op, adding 42 households to this cooperative community.

The Resident-Controlled Housing network has been supported by grants from NeighborWorks® America, which provided funding for the initial startup and its expansion.

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