Heather Gruen shares her path to homeownership on page 3
It is with great pleasure that I bring you this spring newsletter which, in keeping with the season, highlights the renewal of two of our largest neighborhoods, Winchester Place and South Meadow, and introduces a newly-arrived program offering, On Track.

We are currently undertaking one of our organization’s biggest processes of renewal – crafting a Strategic Plan. Every three years, we tackle big questions while planning for the future:

- What are we doing well that we need to double down on?
- What are we doing that we need to improve on?
- What new initiatives should we undertake to better deliver on our mission?

The first step in this process is gathering feedback from our residents and community. A big thank you to all CHT residents who responded to our survey. We had great participation this year and you shared some big ideas! We also asked 30 local agencies and non-profits to share their thoughts with us. In addition, CHT staff devoted a full-day retreat to brainstorming and identifying areas for improvement.

This spring, the Board will take all of this information and begin crafting the final plan. We’ll refine it throughout the summer and adopt it in September in preparation for our next fiscal year, which begins October 1.

In our last Strategic Plan (2014 through 2016), we committed to improving resident services and to serving the most vulnerable populations. We’ve made great strides, and hold ourselves accountable to these goals by reporting quarterly to the Board and constantly evaluating our progress. This process of accountability will continue to drive our day-to-day work, assuring that we are constantly improving and stretching to bring more value to you and our communities.

Our new program, On Track, is a great example of a strategic planning initiative that is now up and running after months of design, testing, tweaking and evaluation. The program is offered to any CHT tenant who falls behind in rent, and our first group of participants have achieved real results by learning about credit, budgeting and getting control of finances overall. If you’re worried about falling behind or not making rent, get in touch with your property manager to get On Track!

Even as we plan for the years ahead, we’re staying busy with current projects. Many neighborhoods are working to prepare their community gardens, and we’re renovating homes at Fort Ethan Allen, Winchester Place and South Meadows. We are designing a new neighborhood on North Avenue in Burlington, and actively looking for sites to provide permanent homes to people experiencing homelessness, just as we’ve done at Beacon Apartments in South Burlington.

In addition, we recently served our 1,000th homeowner and hosted a green-up day at a few of our properties.

I look forward to seeing you all at the summer picnic!

Wishing you a wonderful summer,

Brenda Torpy, CEO
Heather Gruen approaches home improvements with an eye both to the past and the future. Her vision is eco-friendly and involves reusing historical items. “It’s a matter of being patient, finding the right thing and being creative with how you use it,” she explains.

Her condo, which she purchased in 2013 through the Champlain Housing Trust’s shared equity program, is a treasure trove of old-made-new-again materials. There are the 1950s light fixtures, some old tires as tomato plant pots with a wooden screen door for their trellis, and some decorative tin sheets from her parents’ national historic registry home that will become her kitchen backsplash. Yard sales, Goodwill and ReSource VT are her inspiration.

Heather works in retail and rented for many years in both Burlington and Winooski. She looked forward to homeownership, but says that “no matter how much I was trying to save [for a down payment], something would always happen.”

She remembers one apartment where she got notice from the landlord that the building had been sold, giving her just a month to move out before the property was condemned. “Since when did having a roof over your head become a luxury?”

She looked at homes with a realtor, but found that “it was just not gonna happen.” In her price range on the open market was a home in Milton that she visited only to find a gutted foreclosure. She remembers the bonfire pit that had been built in the middle of the living room and how her friend fell through the stairs. Because of the safety issues, it needed an additional $110,000 just to make the house livable.

“Heather shares her home with Buddy, a New Zealand white dwarf rabbit. He enjoys watching Downton Abbey and venturing out back on his leash.

“People don’t realize where they can’t live, where they can’t stay,” she stresses. “I have a future here now. You’re building a community where people care. It’s been fun, it’s been scary, it’s been exhilarating… I feel so incredibly empowered doing this, and doing this on my own!”
The homes will serve people of all incomes, building a mix of rental and for sale housing. The master plan, with considerable public input, calls for preserving open space and input, calls for preserving open space and open space and open space and open space. The property sits on the northern edge of the Old North End in between North Avenue and Lake Champlain. On the remaining 15.65 acres, which are historic buildings with hardwood floors and other amenities. The apartments will be constructed in two buildings around a common courtyard. CHT plans to build 76 affordable family rental apartments, with nine being set aside for people coming out of homelessness. Seventy percent of the current student tenants, so conversions will happen this summer only as vacancies occur. This acquisition is made possible through below-market financing from Community Housing Capital.

In November 2012, CHT purchased 148 apartments in Burlington’s South End, preserving their affordability into the future. Since then, the 16 duplexes – which housed 92 two-bedroom style apartments – have been converted into condominiums and are all owner occupied. This spring, CHT and partner Housing Vermont will begin renovations on the remaining 215 apartments. Work will include exterior siding and painting repairs, increasing energy efficiency, storm water system improvements and paving. The community gardens, the bluffs overlooking Lake Champlain and a pedestrian path from North Avenue down to the lake. The apartments will be constructed in two buildings around a common courtyard. CHT plans to build 76 affordable family rental apartments, with nine being set aside for people coming out of homelessness. Seventy percent of the current student tenants, so conversions will happen this summer only as vacancies occur. This acquisition is made possible through below-market financing from Community Housing Capital.

CHT recently purchased 116 apartments in Essex Junction from UVM. These are historic buildings with hardwood floors and other amenities. The apartments will be constructed in two buildings around a common courtyard. CHT plans to build 76 affordable family rental apartments, with nine being set aside for people coming out of homelessness. Seventy percent of the current student tenants, so conversions will happen this summer only as vacancies occur. This acquisition is made possible through below-market financing from Community Housing Capital.

CHT is proud to be a Renewal Award recipient as we also celebrate our 1,000th household moving into a shared equity home. Our homeowners’ stories illustrate the real success of the shared equity program by helping people find a path to homeownership. For more stories that inspire people here and around the country, visit us at www.chtvt.org/vacation-stories.

$11,000 HOMEOWNERS
Following the success of Ready-Set-Rent, our tenants in need one-on-one counseling to help close gaps. In addition, to relieve some financial pressure, CHT allows tenants to build off of paying back rent as soon as they are making current payments and are working toward a repayment agreement.

Stay new, and perhaps the most important for long term financial stability, is how and why to budget expenses. Counselors help tenants figure out:
- how they spend their money
- how to save for emergencies
- how to prioritize spending
- how to live within a budget

One-on-one counseling has been used to bring within a budget, they develop a rent repayment plan with their counselor and get approved by their property manager.

So far, 37 people have entered the program and eight have graduated. If you would like more information about On Track or any of the other educational programs we offer, please give us a call at 802-861-8244.

The On Track program's first year was tempted to a pilot program, which showed how important it was to us to provide this service. Everyone who sent back a completed survey was entered into a raffle to win a $75 gift card. A winner for the drawing will be held in early July.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share your thoughts by filling out our survey. Everyone is vital to our process of making sure we are meeting your housing needs. Everyone is working toward financial stability, which means coming up with a budget and sticking to it. Counselors help tenants figure out:
- how they spend their money
- how to save for emergencies
- how to prioritize spending
- how to live within a budget

On Track employees who have done an outstanding job.

NAME: Judith Ververs, homeowner
TIME: 2 years
HERE'S WHAT YOU WISH MORE PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT CHT?
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