

# At Home

NEWS FROM CHAMPLAIN HOUSING TRUST | FALL 2020



CHAMPLAIN  
HOUSING TRUST



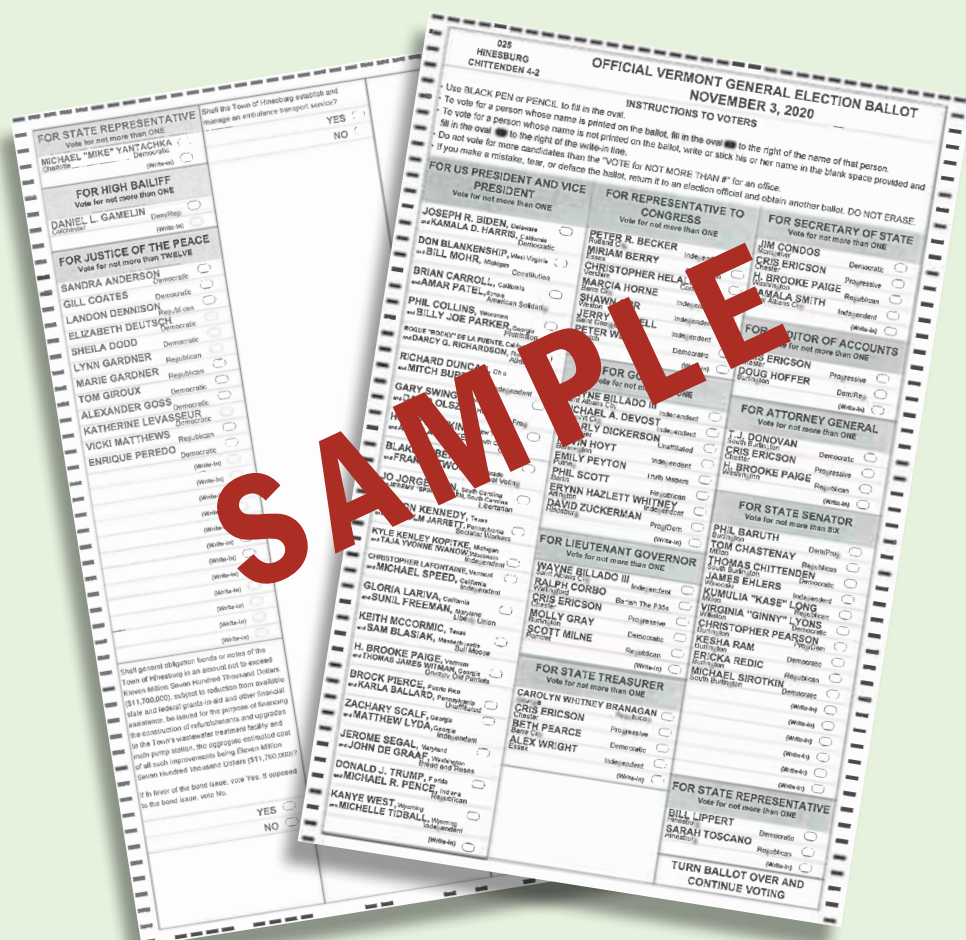
WWW.GETAHOME.ORG



**Election Day is November 3**, and with important races up and down the ballot, it's vital that Champlain Housing Trust members have their voices heard. If you are already registered to vote, you should receive a ballot in the mail – it is safe and legal to use, and please do! If you didn't receive

a ballot, you can still vote. Visit [mvp.vermont.gov](https://mvp.vermont.gov) where you can:

- ✓ Register
- ✓ Request an Absentee Ballot
- ✓ Find the polling station near you



## Dear CHT Members

As many of you know, I will be stepping down as CEO at the end of the year, and the Board has hired Michael Monte as CHT's next CEO. Michael has been a tremendous asset to CHT in his current role and he will take CHT to new levels of achievement going forward – I know this because I have worked with Michael since the founding of CHT in 1984. His letter to you is later in this newsletter.



While stepping back, I am not completely leaving this work behind: CHT has been thinking for some time on how we could train others and support communities to learn from our experience here in Vermont, and I'm looking forward to leading this new effort.

Over the years I have been privileged to work with a large community of people: staff, board, volunteers, donors, partners, and supporters who have inspired and guided the creation and growth of CHT. I am enormously grateful to all of you for your contributions and support, especially the current board and staff who are shouldering unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic – and have worked hard to assure this smooth transition for CHT's future.

Right now, staff are deploying a host of new programs to help CHT residents like the rental assistance that enabled Debra Davis and her granddaughter to cover rent through the crisis. We'll be opening Susan's Place in Essex soon, named for longtime CHT staffer Susan Ainsworth-Daniels, to house people experiencing homelessness who have been in motels during the pandemic so they have a home, not a shelter bed or a tent. We're creating a new, expanded site for Steps to End Domestic Violence to provide their services, and a new facility for people needing to quarantine will be up and running shortly. All in the course of a few short months. Truly amazing.

Inside we've also outlined the work that we are undertaking to address racial equity throughout the organization and all of our programs. This work will be ongoing and we will seek guidance from BIPOC community leaders as we go forward.

The words of Dr. King headlining that piece do more than offer hope, they are a call to action. The arc of the moral universe will not inevitably bend towards justice. We have to work toward it day in, day out, and generation to generation. This is the call we answered in creating CHT and committing to permanent affordability: making our communities more affordable and accessible for all. This is the call that we answer with a sharper focus on racial equity today, a call that we answer through programs and services to support our residents, and one that we answer when we stretch to meet a crisis like this pandemic.

Above all, we have worked to assure that CHT remains a strong and resilient institution committed to housing justice and to responsible stewardship of the community assets we create. I have no doubt that CHT's best days are ahead.

Warmly,

  
Brenda Torpy, CEO





## Staying Put—With a Little Help

**B**efore the Covid-19 pandemic, Debra Davis worked as a human resources manager while raising her 11-year-old granddaughter and pursuing her associate's degree. Life wasn't perfect; she had suffered the loss of her daughter four years earlier and struggled to afford care for her aging parents down in Florida.

Despite these challenges, Debra saw the glass half-full, grateful to have a stable place to raise her granddaughter, Taelor.

"I feel it is my duty to give her a better life than I had."

Like many, Debra's life changed suddenly following the impacts of Covid-19. She was let go from her position and had to adjust to living off unemployment. She deferred her college classes to save money, but in supporting Taelor and her parents, she still fell behind in rent.

There was a hold on evictions at the time, so when she found out that her Dad had passed away, paying back rent was far from her mind.

"It was quite expensive to attend the funeral, but I was determined to be there for my family."

When they returned, reality set in. The hold on evictions was still in place, but the unemployment benefits were running out.

"I was in a depression. I didn't know who to talk to, and for a while, I didn't say anything."

Wanting more stability for Taelor, she mustered the courage to ask her property

manager at Champlain Housing Trust if there was any help available. That is when she learned about the Rental Housing Stabilization Program and how it helped renters affected by Covid-19 pay back their rent and avoid eviction. CHT's advocacy helped create the program.

**"I don't know what I would've done without the support of the relief fund and CHT. It was truly a blessing."**

The application was simple, and the ongoing support from her property manager made it even more straightforward. To Debra's relief, she was approved, putting her back in good financial standing.

"I don't know what I would've done without the support of the relief fund and CHT. It was truly a blessing."

With housing stabilized, a brighter future was possible. Shortly after receiving the relief funds, Debra got a job working with the Youth Intervention Specialist for the City of Winooski. She re-registered for classes this fall and is only a year away from graduating. Both Debra and Taelor are excited to start school again and relieved their home has stayed the same despite all the past year's changes.



# The Arc of the Moral Universe Is Long

One of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr's most quoted phrases refers to the long road, and longer time, that marginalized people – and more specifically, Black, Indigenous and People of Color – have taken and toiled to be treated morally as human beings. Is the uprising across the nation this spring, summer, and into the fall a hastening of what Dr. King expected was a “bend towards justice?”

That remains to be seen, but CHT's Board and staff are committed to evaluating our internal policies that may discriminate and redoubling our advocacy alongside leaders of the BIPOC community to do what we can to undo years of racism in our economic, social, political and yes, housing, systems.

We have established a set of twenty goals that address what we will strive to achieve in three primary areas: our programs, our communities, and our own leadership.

We've committed to be data driven, and to use the data we collect to change our policies if necessary. We have seen that being intentional can create change: for example, our homeownership rate for BIPOC is 13.5% of our homes; yet in the last five years after we increased outreach to BIPOC organizations and offered more translation services, 25% of our buyers have been people of color.

We still have much work to do.

The lesson for us here is of one of change, learning, and community engagement. We welcome your partnership as we move forward.





# Responding to Covid-19 with Safe Housing



Future site of Susan's Place

When the realities of the coronavirus became clearer – especially the ways in which it could spread quickly through close contact – one thing became frighteningly obvious: the *Stay Safe, Stay at Home* executive order issued by the Governor was impossible for those without a home.

The State of Vermont's swift response was to use motels and hotels as temporary housing. They quickly put up people who had been at homeless shelters or other places where there was no capacity to live with social distancing. The action literally saved lives and helped slow the spread of Covid-19 in the State. CHT's Harbor Place was repurposed into a motel for quarantining or isolation for people showing symptoms or who were Covid-19 positive.

Soon, there were 2,000 Vermonters in motels, and the question became, "What's next?"

CHT and others worked with the Legislature to appropriate \$34.25 million of emergency federal funding through the CARES Act to the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board to help answer that question. This money was made available for two primary purposes: help make homeless shelters more resilient, and to create permanent housing options for those impacted by the public health emergency caused by the pandemic.

CHT has acquired two properties – both motels in Chittenden County – to address these challenges. One will be a new shelter and service space for Steps to End Domestic Violence, whose existing shelter was inadequate in design and scale to meet the needs. A second will be a 68-apartment building to house people coming out of homelessness that we're calling Susan's Place, in honor of the life's work of

Susan Ainsworth-Daniels who passed away last Spring due to complications after a surgery. Susan was a social worker who worked at CHT for decades.

CHT just recently was able to place a third property under contract, providing the State with a longer-term quarantine and isolation facility at the correct scale. This will allow Harbor Place in Shelburne to return to its former purpose: as a motel providing emergency lodging and services to help people that don't have a safe place to live.

We realize these properties, and others that VHCBC funded across the State, won't solve all the needs of people impacted by this crisis. We remain committed to pushing for more resources to make safe, decent and affordable housing available for all.

## Housing Supports Available

In addition to purchasing new property like the one here, CHT has lobbied for other programs related to the significant challenges presented by Covid-19. We understand that many community members have lost income and dealt with periods of unemployment during this crisis. With that in mind, we encourage residents to learn more about programs that aim to help ease the financial burden on Vermonters. It is important to remember that these programs have limited available funds and looming deadlines, so please act quickly!

The **Rental Housing Stabilization Program** offers rental arrearage assistance due to Covid-19. The Vermont State Housing Authority will provide either partial or full payment of amount to qualifying households. For assistance, get in touch with your property manager or visit: [www.vsha.org/rental-housing-stabilization-program](http://www.vsha.org/rental-housing-stabilization-program)

The **Vermont Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program** provides financial assistance to moderate and low-income homeowners who are behind on payments due to Covid-19. It is administered by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and applications are being accepted: [www.vhfa.org/map/](http://www.vhfa.org/map/)

The **Re-Housing Recovery Program** is offered by the state through nonprofits like CHT. We are now accepting applications from property owners to rehab vacant and distressed apartments to increase available affordable rental housing, particularly for vulnerable and homeless households impacted by Covid-19. To learn more visit: [www.getahome.org/RentalRehab](http://www.getahome.org/RentalRehab)

# Stepping Up

I am honored and grateful that I have been appointed Champlain Housing Trust's next CEO.

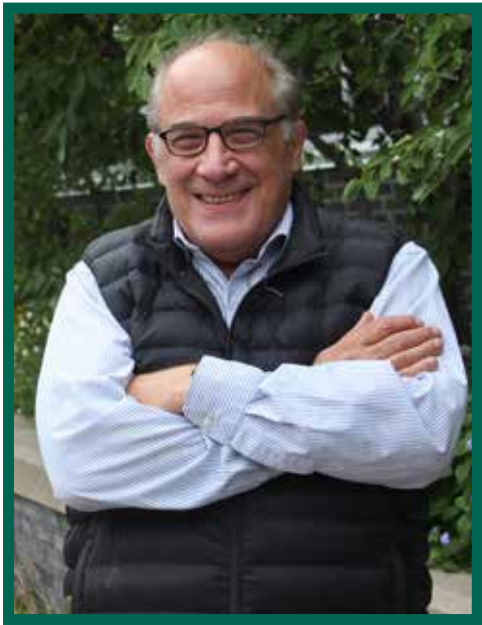
Brenda Torpy, for almost 30 years, guided the Burlington Community Land Trust and then CHT to become a great organization with a clear mission and set of values that continues to operate at the highest level. And yet we continue to learn, to be challenged and to adapt – especially this year of all years.

I have been happy to be here for the past twelve, and look forward a future working with a strong, dedicated, and talented Board, and a staff that strives for and achieves excellence every day.

These are challenging times. Our response to Covid-19 and the need for even more affordable housing and services certainly stretches all of us, but especially CHT as it stepped up to support our communities' most vulnerable, when "Stay at Home" was a health care prescription that some could not fill.

The loss of jobs and a fragile economy has placed even greater importance on stable and affordable housing. An increased pressure from out of state buyers seeking healthier, greener pastures has the potential to exacerbate the gap between wages and housing affordability. And the call for racial justice has rallied all of us here at CHT to be vigilant in being anti-racist, and to make sure that access to housing has no barriers because of a person's race or ethnic background.

In short, there's no shortage of work ahead of us.



Along with my assuming the role of CEO in January, there will be two other notable promotions at CHT. On October 1st, Cheryl Read will be assuming the role of Chief Financial Officer. Cheryl's new position as CFO is a natural progression from her current work as Director of Human Resources, a position she will continue to hold. Amy Demetrowitz will assume the role of Chief Operating Officer in January, bringing her 25+ years of experience in all aspects of CHT to this leadership position.

It is my hope and our aspiration as an organization that CHT will continue its work as a leader in affordable housing here in Vermont and elsewhere in the country.

We are up to the challenge, and I am humbled at the opportunity to be in leadership.

Don't hesitate to send me a note. Always happy to hear what people have to say.

*Michael Monte*

Michael Monte, COO

# Summer Celebration!

We're sorry we couldn't get together for our annual **Members Day Picnic** or **NeighborWorks Week** event. Still, we wanted to make sure members didn't miss out on ice cream!

**343 MEMBERS**

used their coupons and enjoyed ice cream this summer. **THANK YOU** to these participating businesses for partnering with us:





# Community Garden

FORT ETHAN ALLEN, ESSEX JUNCTION



88 King Street  
Burlington, VT 05401



NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
BURLINGTON, VT  
PERMIT NO