

HousingMatters

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*The bi-monthly
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**VERMONT
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Executive Briefing

From *Sarah Carpenter*, Executive Director, VHFA

Housing bills moving through Vermont's Legislature

As you read this, we are about halfway through Vermont's 2008 legislative session. Lawmakers are facing several major chal-

lenges, in particular a state budget with practically no wiggle room. We in the housing community approached this session with cautious optimism; majority leadership in both the House and Senate had assured us that housing would be one of their top priorities.

On that, they have certainly delivered, although the

The housing community approached this session with cautious optimism

outcome of much their work is yet to be determined. First, lawmakers passed S.355, a bill that removes

the cap on VHFA's borrowing, allowing us to devote more resources to our mission of supporting affordable housing through our home mortgage products and our financing of housing devel-



Sarah Carpenter

opment. That bill now goes to Governor Douglas' desk for signature.

Second, a significant amount of legislative time has been devoted to a pack-

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age that includes a measure of regulatory relief and modest incentives to communities in order to encourage more affordable housing develop-

ment. What is often referred-to as the "neighborhoods" bill is actually two bills.

One is a proposal from the Douglas administration, called "New Neighborhoods," which was described in this column when it was introduced in 2007, and which VHFA supported. That proposal met with opposition from some constituencies, and it did not pass. H. 299 has been re-introduced after some revision.

The other is a similar proposal written by the House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee called "Vermont Neighborhoods", H. 863, based upon a frame-

work created by a group of housing, development, planning and environmental stakeholders, including VHFA, over last summer and fall.

The bills are similar in many respects; their primary differences lie in the deliniation of where communities can site housing development that is eligible for the relief, some incentive provisions, how to value the affordability of what expedited permitting would bring to these neighborhoods, and in the clarifying language the "Vermont Neighborhoods" bill adds towards development in rural areas.

H. 863 as it stands now,

also adds elements from five other bills — a \$100,000 increase in state affordable housing credits to be used for homeownership; an increase in the property

would review and make recommendations on a more comprehensive apartment safety program; and a study of how to use surplus state land for affordable housing.

I have great hopes the Legislature and the Administration will be able to reach a compromise between their respective proposals before this session ends

transfer tax exemption limit for VHFA, VHCD and RD borrowers; the continued provision which would allow VHFA to provide development financing to a broader range of projects; a task force that

I have great hopes the Legislature and the Administration will be able to reach a compromise between their respective proposals before this session ends in May. The housing community

has consistently advocated for the updating and streamlining of our regulatory process in order to stimulate greatly-needed affordable housing development, and the \$100,000 homeownership tax credit would be an important financial tool, bringing in more private equity investment to housing in Vermont.

Compromise, of course, is not completely satisfactory to either party, but in the case of the “neighborhoods” legislation, we have a very good opportunity to take an important first step towards providing more affordable housing development for Vermonters. ■

Community Housing Events Coming Up

Central Vermont Community Land Trust, Vermont Law School Land Use Institute and the Upper Valley Housing Coalition get busy this spring

by John Fairbanks

While the need for more affordable housing is felt at the state, regional and national levels, the most crucial decisions on housing development in Vermont are made locally. Vermont's affordable housing shortage affects nearly every community in the state, and that's why a lot of effort has been made over the past several years to organize local housing task forces and other community groups to help give people the information and resources they need to promote housing creation.

The next three months will see several housing events with a community focus.

[Central Vermont Community Land Trust](#) is hosting a series of community housing workshops in March, April and May leading to a regional housing summit on May 17th.

The workshops are designed to help people organize in their towns to encourage development of affordable housing. Each workshop will feature presentations on how to conduct a community survey or housing

needs assessment, where to find information and technical assistance, and the fundamentals of development. Workshop attendees will break into discussion groups that will focus on housing issues in their communities. Attendees will also select delegates to attend a housing summit in Montpelier on Saturday, May 17th.

Doors will open at the workshops at 5:30 p.m., and the workshops will run from 6 p.m. until 8 p.m. A light dinner and child care will be available.

Workshop dates are:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Thursday, March 20 | Berlin |
| Thursday, April 3 | Bradford |
| Thursday, April 10 | Marshfield |
| Thursday, April 17 | Barre |
| Thursday, May 1 | Duxbury |

Contact Chris Wood at CVCLT for more information. 802.476.4493.

The Vermont Law School Land Use Institute and the [Upper Valley Housing Coalition](#) will host their third annual Citizen Planners Conference on Saturday, April 5th at VLS from 9 a.m. until 2:45 p.m. This year's conference is entitled, "Sustainable Housing: Community, Affordability, Energy Efficiency in an Environmentally-Friendly Way." Lunch will be included.

Citizen planners and local experts will

engage in discussions facilitated by speakers in three panels. There will also be exhibitions presented by various greening and energy efficiency organizations.

The first panel will address both green building and affordable efficiency solutions for new and current housing stock. The second panel takes a look at the growing trend of intentional communities as a way to create a socially sustainable community. The concluding panel will provide the stories of communities that have been successful in putting together affordability, efficiency and socially sustainable solutions.

Online registration is available at www.uvhc.org. Registration costs \$35 prior to March 21st and \$45 at the door. ■

Inside VHFA

A round-up of newsworthy happenings at the Agency

Panton joins VHFA as HR/Office Manager

Martha Panton of Vergennes has joined VHFA as Human Resources/Office Manager.

Martha was most recently Human Resources Project Coordinator at HallerLee Human Resources Consulting LLC in Burlington. Before that she served as Human Resources Administrator at 4 Seasons Garden Center in Williston.

She was recently certified a Professional in Human Resources (PHR) by the Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI), the credentialing affiliate of the Society for Human Resource Manage-



Martha Panton

ment (SHRM) in Alexandria, Virginia.

The certification is the result of an intensive course of study in strategic planning,

compensation and benefits, HR development, employee rights, and other HR issues, followed by a four-hour exam.

Martha holds a Bachelor of Science in Business, earned at Champlain College in 2006.

VHFA sweet on United Way for Valentine's Day

VHFA staff helped raise \$175 to benefit the [United Way of Chittenden County](#).

On Feb. 14, members of the Agency's United Way Committee rolled a pastry cart around to staff members' offices.

Together with a cake baked by Lender Accounting

Coordinator Sue Joachim that raised \$30 at auction, the cart raised \$175 for the Chittenden County charity.

Assisted living development toolkit now online

On Jan. 11, VHFA debuted a new resource for developers of assisted living properties in Vermont.

The Assisted Living Development & Operations Toolkit is made available by Vista Senior Living Inc., thanks to a grant from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) to the [Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living](#) (DAIL) and VHFA.

VHFA Senior Development Underwriter Cindy Reid worked with Vista Senior Living's Terri Sult to bring the project to fruition.

This new resource offers three tools for developers: the "Financial Feasibility Analysis Model for Assisted Living Residences" to help determine the financial viability of proposed assisted living residences in Vermont; the "Instruction Guide for the Financial Feasibility Analysis Model for Assisted Living Residences," step-by-step instructions for using the feasibility model; and "Financial Guidelines and Comparative Data for the Operation of Vermont Assisted Living

Residences."

Tools for owners and operators of assisted living residences will consist of sample policy and procedure manuals, and will be hosted at the DAIL Web site, with a link provided on VHFA's Web site.

[The toolkit is online now.](#)

Ribbon cutting: Daly Shoe Building

In late-January, officials cut the ribbon on the Daly Shoe Building on Birge Street, Brattleboro, which at one time was the Estey Organ Factory.

This adaptive re-use project includes 29 family apartments and 5,300 square feet of new office space for the [Windham Housing Trust](#)

(WHT), formerly the Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust.

The building features post-and beam construction; large windows; high ceilings;

**VHFA Senior Development Underwriter
Cindy Reid (second from left) and others at
the ribbon cutting for the Daly Shoe Building**



and original, restored wood floors on the second story.

This renovation is the largest housing development project WHT has undertaken.

Housing Matters to become a blog

This marks our final issue of Housing Matters, the bi-monthly electronic newsletter we started in January 2002.

After publishing nearly 40 issues across six years, we felt it was time to retool Housing Matters to make it more dynamic and timely.

From now on, we'll publish Housing Matters as a blog — posting individual stories online as soon as they're written. The new format will allow us to publish housing news and matters of interest more quickly than our old bi-monthly format.

[Visit the blog now](#) and [subscribe to our RSS feed](#). Subscriptions are free, and allow you to be automatically alerted whenever we publish a new entry. ■