

WWHT 2024 Annual Meeting June 25, 2024

The Annual Meeting of the members of the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust was called to order at 5:00 PM on June 25, 2024. The meeting was held at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center in Brattleboro, Vermont.

Board members present at the meeting included: Victor Morrison, Debbie Boyle, Leo Schiff, Ellen Snyder, Anne Chapman, Joan Weir, Carol Buchdahl and Margaret Clark.

Victor opened the meeting at 5:00 with his opening remarks

- “It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to our 2024 annual meeting and celebration. Thank you, Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, for hosting us in this beautiful space. We’re also pleased to welcome our very special guest, Dr. Jim O’Connell who you will hear from a little later in the program.
- As we reflect on the past year, it’s important to acknowledge that this land we gather on today, and the buildings and the land that we redevelop and steward in Southeastern Vermont, sit on the ancestral homelands of Abenaki people (pronounced: ah-BEN-uh-kee), who have lived here in Vermont for over 12,000 years.
- The Sokoki band of the Abenaki, here in Brattleboro, called this area Wantastegok, meaning ‘At the river where something is lost.’
- We acknowledge the harmful past of colonialism dominating the landscape and attempting to erase indigenous peoples and culture. We know Abenaki culture is alive and continuous despite the pervasive narrative. We strive to elevate this more complete narrative, informed by Indigenous voices and experience.
- No, I’d like to turn the program over to our WWHT Executive Director, Elizabeth Bridgewater.

Elizabeth gave the following remarks

Good evening and thank you for joining us for our 2024 annual meeting and celebration. I’m going to keep my remarks short tonight because we have a wonderful guest speaker, but I want to start off with a few quick thank yous. First to BMAC for making this beautiful space available to us this year. I also want to thank Mascoma Bank and the Vermont Country Store for sponsoring this event and Marion Major, WWHT’s Outreach & Marketing Coordinator for her creativity and organizing skill in putting this event together.

Our annual meeting is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges and successes of the previous year and the truth is, 2023 was a very challenging year. We unexpectedly lost three colleagues who served our community here in Southeastern Vermont and state-wide. We continued to grapple with a challenging labor market that has made it more difficult to fill vacant positions, not just at the Housing Trust but throughout many of our partner organizations and the vendors we hire for specialized work. And there are many more community stresses than in the past. The lasting impacts of the pandemic’s isolating years is still being felt by many many

community members. Opioid use and some of the accompanying challenging dynamics continue to persist and the recently published point in time count showed an increased rise in homelessness. And a foundational variable to many of these challenges is an urgent need for more housing opportunities. While everyone in the community is feeling the impact of these trends in some ways, those without a permanent home are carrying the biggest burden.

In spite of these challenges, and perhaps because of them, the resiliency, cohesiveness and collective action of Southeastern Vermont community members is shining brighter than ever. I'd like to highlight a few examples.

Last year, when Groundworks Collaborative staff needed to step back to heal from a devastating loss, the entire greater Brattleboro community stepped forward to fill the gap. Great River Terrace and the Chalet are two Housing Trust communities that receive daily supportive services from Groundworks staff and during their pause, Fred Brunig and Lise Sparrow collaborated with the Housing Trust to organize over 80 community volunteers to spend time at each property for 3 weeks so that residents had continued to receive support during this difficult time. And it all came together within 48 hours because so many understood how important it was to take meaningful action right away.

Residents of Londonderry, recognized the challenges of meeting the housing needs in their rural community and more importantly, they recognized their ability to do something about it. They formed the Mountain Town's Housing Project and with support from the Housing Trust, built a new 3-bedroom house on donated land that is now home to a long-term Londonderry resident, a mom with 2 children. This beautiful new home was funded by community donations that volunteers generated and by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and a new Missing Middle Program administered by the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, two sources that the Housing Trust helped secure. This home is now part of the Housing Trust's shared equity program that will remain affordable for generations to come.

Feeling a sense of community within a building or a neighborhood has never been more important. Our newly piloted SASH 4 All program, launched in collaboration with the Brattleboro Housing Partnership, Cathedral Square and Evernorth, does just this. Modeled after the 13 year old successful SASH Program, SASH 4 All provides opportunities for residents to get to know one another through shared community meals, art programs and other events and for residents to receive support for their individual needs either from the program coordinator, the SASH nurse or the SASH . By providing resident driven support and services right where people live, we're seeing some of the frayed community connections being knit back together and we're seeing greater housing stability for those engaged in the program.

These are just a few examples of the collective action of this community of how people are coming together with the Housing Trust to support one another, create new opportunities and strengthen our relationships in the process.

And because of this, despite the list of challenges I started with, when I look ahead, I'm feeling hopeful. It's because of these collaborative relationships, because of the people who step up to

solve problems and because of the residents WWHT serves, both homeowners and renters who teach us every day what they need and how we can do better.

The Housing Trust is updating its 3-year strategic plan and with the support of Maggie Foley, our consultant, we are fully engaged in conversations around four key themes.

1. Increasing the safety and wellbeing of the residents we serve.
2. Maintaining organizational resiliency
3. Continuing to create new housing opportunities in the region
4. And recommitting to our values around racial and social equity.

This is a year-long process that involves the board of directors, staff members, community partners and residents. I'm proud to say that our strategic plan does not simply sit on a shelf. It is a living document that grounds our work and determines our priorities. I'm looking forward to sharing more details about the plan as we finalize it later this year.

Elizabeth introduced Dr. Jim O'Connell:

Now it's my honor to introduce Dr Jim O'Connell, director of Boston's Healthcare for the Homeless. Dr Jim brings years of direct service meeting the basic health needs of individuals who are experiencing homelessness in Boston. He and the many of the people he interacts with in his work were featured in the book "Rough Sleepers" written by Tracy Kidder. I read the book earlier this year and found it to be a very heart opening experience. Rather than exclusively feature Jim's inspiring life, Tracy Kidder creates an assemble cast where health care workers and community members being served are featured in equal measure, where Tony's life story (a man who lived on the streets from many years) is told in as much detail as Jim's. I know that this is part author's choice, but I can't help but believe that this choice stemmed from the culture the author experienced when he spent time with Jim, his colleagues and community members because what came across so beautifully was the abiding respect and affection that Jim and his team have for the people who utilize their services.

Though VT is quite different from Boston in many aspects, the housing crisis and its devastating impacts on people experiencing homelessness is very much the same. The need for increased mental health and addiction services is the same and the need for well-funded service models is the same. So one Sunday morning, on a whim, I emailed Dr. Jim and invited him to join us tonight to share his insights as we engage in the conversation around homelessness, housing and healthcare. He responded to me within an hour with an enthusiastic yes and here we are. Please welcome Dr. Jim O'Connell.

Dr. Jim O'Connell

Dr. Jim gave a great presentation, this was followed by a Q & A that the audience was very engaged in.

Elizabeth concluded this by thanking Dr. Jim and present him with a gift made by one of our shared equity members.

Leo Schiff gave the Tom Yahn Award Presentation:

Thank you, Jim, for those insightful remarks and for being so supportive of our community here tonight.

The presentation of the Tom Yahn Award is special every year, honoring a community member who's dedicated to supporting housing opportunities to low- and moderate-income community members in the spirit of our beloved and missed founding board member and lifelong advocate, Tom Yahn. This year we take deep pride in recognizing someone who has worked closely with our team. Could the Family members of the awardee, and the SEVCA Team, please come to the front.

On behalf of the board of directors I am so pleased to award **Susan Howes** with the 2024 Tom Yahn Award.

Susan Howes passed away unexpected in 2023 and the loss of her presence in this community has been deeply felt by so many. Susan worked in the human services field in Southeastern Vermont for decades, including working closely with the Housing Trust staff to place families in stable, affordable homes. Susan started with SEVCA in 2004 with the Crisis Fuel Program in Westminster as a Family Services Worker and always valued making sure that clients felt they were fully informed and empowered. Due to her dedication to the clients and wanting to work longer term as folks found stability, she shifted to case management and eventually to the role of Senior Housing Specialist. She was responsible for training SEVCA Teams in Brattleboro, Springfield, and White River Junction while also providing services to clients. When people were stuck with housing challenges, they would call Susan.

Her strengths were in building relationships and discovering paths to make things really happen. She was one of the startup forces behind the Bellows Falls Warming Shelter. She served on the Westgate board. She developed the Housing Resources Center and during the Groundworks pause last spring, she stepped in to volunteer at the Chalet. Throughout her career she worked with our leasing department to secure housing for countless families.

Susan was also a gardener, a loving family member, and devoted to her beloved dogs. Her dedication to the field of human services and to helping families find safe and stable housing is outstanding. We are so pleased to honor her work and her memory with this very special award.

The award was given to Susan's daughters and followed by a few brief remarks from Pat Burke of SEVCA.

Katherine & Marion: Staff recognition:

Marion kicked it off with highlighting how many years of experience we have combined for the staff and some of the key points that the SASH team has accomplished over the past year. Katherine gave an overview of some unknown skills you would not associate with the Outreach role. Other departments mentioned were homeownership, maintenance and property management.

Victor: Business Meeting

Confirms that proper notice of this meeting was mailed to all members in accordance with the By-Laws and seeks resolution to waive the reading of, and to approve, the minutes of the 2023 annual meeting

- You have all had an opportunity to read the minutes of the 2023 annual meeting which were posted to our website; do I have a motion to waive the reading of the minutes, and to approve those minutes, Anne made the motion, Ellen seconded, the motion passed unanimously.

Victor: Board Elections

- “It is the Executive Committee’s role to cultivate new board members for the Housing Trust board. This is a year-round function culminating in a new slate proposed each spring at our annual meeting. The process considers our strategic goals, the balance of resident, community and public service members and the desire to have a variety of perspectives at our board table.
- Once a potential candidate is identified, a member of the executive committee, and/or the executive director, meets with the person to explore their interest in serving on the board, reviews the board’s roles and responsibilities and ensures that the person is able to make the commitment required to serve.
- Once the slate for the annual meeting is drafted, it is presented to the full Housing Trust board for a vote and then presented at the annual meeting”
- We are pleased to introduce the slate for this year’s board of directors, which includes two new board members and reelection of several existing board members.”
- First, the proposed slate for Resident Member representatives includes two renewal members:
 - **Samba Diallo**, a resident from West Brattleboro, Samba is the Director of Southern Vermont Aids Project and brings leadership and expertise in service delivery and community engagement.
 - **Dora Urujeni**, a resident in Putney, Dora has served on our board since 2020. She brings a strong background in case management with her work at Ethiopian Community Development Corporation supporting refugee resettlement, as well as strong voice supporting resident services.

From the residents, do we have a motion to approve the Resident Member slate as proposed, Ellen made the motion, Anne seconded second. The motion passed unanimously.

I will read off the next two categories and we will take a full membership vote at the end. Here are our proposed General Member representatives, including one new member and two renewing members

- **Denny Frehsee** Denny Frehsee has been an integral part of the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust Community for over 3 decades. Denny was part of our development team in a professional capacity. As the architect for many Housing Trust projects, Denny’s

design creativity and skillful problem solving has helped to create or improve homes for hundreds of families in our community. Denny has served on our housing development Project Committee for over 7 years where we deeply value his expertise.

- Our first current General Member up for renewal is **Victor Morrison**. Currently serving as board chair, Victor has also served on the finance committee and brings a background in business, organizational development and executive coaching.
- Second is Prudence MacKinney. Prudence has a strong background and expertise in public health and has been an active member of the housing development project committee for over 6 years.

And lastly our proposed Public Service member representatives, including one new member and two renewing members:

- **“Kayenta Snide** is nominated for a Public Service member seat. Kayenta is the Coordinated Entry Case Manager and Data Specialist with Springfield Supported Housing Partnership. Kayenta also serves in a Leadership role, providing Supervision to the Intake Department, Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program & Emergency Motel Housing Programs. Kayenta also volunteers as the Secretary Officer for the MWYMCA Board of Directors. She’s an enthusiastic Springfielder where she lives, works, and plays. Her life experience has shaped her passions including social equity, service connection, and encouraging the authentic expression of self.
- Our first current Public Service member up for renewal is **Carol Buchdahl**. Carol hails from Saxtons River and has served on our board for 6 years. She is passionate about social justice and meeting the basic needs in our community.
- Second is **Leo Schiff**. Leo works at Hireability and has a long history of advocating for the needs of our residents and others in the community. He is a co-chair of our Program Committee and a member of our executive committee and has served on the board for 6 years.

From our entire membership, do we have a motion to approve the slate as proposed for the General Member directors and the Public Service directors as proposed, Debbie made the motion, Anne seconded, the motion passed unanimously.

Victor: Recognition of Margaret Clark

We share a heartfelt THANK YOU to Margaret Clark. Please join us in thanking Margaret for her 8 years of support and leadership on WWHT’s board. Margaret has been a dedicated board member throughout her term, serving most recently as vice-chair and as a long-term member of the executive committee. She brought excellent skill in organizational strategic planning and has been a trusted thought partner to Elizabeth on matters ranging from social and racial justice, fundraising, organizational strategy and grant funding. At the board table, Margaret could be

counted on to be clear eyed in her thinking, forthright and respectful with her opinions and feedback and always kind and compassionate. She cares deeply for our mission, for this earth that we share with one another and for the community of Southeastern Vermont. We will all miss her knowledgeable and compassionate leadership. Margaret, as a token of our appreciation, a gift certificate for the Tucker Box restaurant in White River Junction has been mailed directly to your home. As you enjoy the delicious Turkish food they serve, know that we wish you the best and appreciate all that you gave to the Housing Trust while serving on the board.

Marion: Raffle Draw & Tile Project unveil

- \$50 to the Brattleboro Coop – won by Tara Brown
- Passes to Next Stage Bandwagon – won by Deb Zak

Meeting Close and Adjournment 6:30

Victor: This ends the business meeting part of our event. Thank you for joining us this evening.