

WWHT 2025 Annual Meeting

June 18, 2025

The Annual meeting of the members of Windham & Windsor Housing Trust was called to order at 5:00 PM on June 18, 2025. The meeting was held at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center in Brattleboro, VT.

Board members present at the meeting included: Victor Morrison, Debbie Boyle, Ellen Snyder, Anne Chapman, Joan Weir, Kayenta Snide, Chuck Collins, Denny Frehsee, Prudence McKinney, David Vandervert and Cynthia Gubb.

Victor opened the meeting with welcoming remarks:

“It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to our 2025 annual meeting and celebration. Thank you, Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, for hosting us in this beautiful space.

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.

Now, 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 all for joining us for our 2025 Annual Meeting and Celebration. Normally, we meet on the 4th Thursday of the month for this gathering, but this year it fell on Juneteenth, the national holiday that celebrates the end of slavery in the United States. So we moved the date to respect this important holiday and all the celebrations that accompany it.

I'd like to begin with a few important thank you's. First, to the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center for generously hosting us once again this year. This space is not only beautiful, but it also reflects the creativity and vibrancy of our community—making it the perfect venue for tonight's gathering.

Thank you as well to our sponsors - Neagley & Chase, ReArch, Savings Bank of Walpole, C&S and ServePro whose support helps make this event possible. And a very special thanks to Marion Major, WWHT's Outreach & Marketing Coordinator, whose creativity and organizational skill have brought this evening to life.

We also welcome our elected officials who are here tonight –

Rep Mollie Burke
Rep Emilie Kornhieser
Rep Michelle Bos-lun
Senator Wendy Harrison

Tonight's program will highlight some of our collaborative work in Brattleboro as well as how our homeownership programs and our Windsor SASH Program make a difference in the lives of participants. A few other milestones from 2024 to celebrate including bringing 30 rental units on line through Vermont's Home Improvement Program, breaking ground at Central & Main, a new construction project that has resulted in 25 new homes in Windsor. This project is now complete and the first residents are moving in this week. We also cleared the last hurdle in our quest to build 25 new homes in Putney and were able to finally break ground earlier this year. And we successfully permitted the redevelopment of the Chalet property in West Brattleboro which will result in 70 new homes, both rental and homeownership. All three of these projects are being co-developed with our partner, Evernorth as well as with an equity investment from TD Bank, and state investments through the Housing & Conservation Board and the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

Building new homes is core to our mission and these are exciting milestones, but I also want to take a moment to reflect on the present—the moment we're living in right now.

Because we are in uncharted territory. Never in my lifetime have we faced such deep uncertainty about the future. We are witnessing the systemic dismantling of our nation's safety net—one that, while imperfect, has long provided essential stability for millions of Americans, including thousands here in Vermont.

Rental vouchers, which create a lifeline for individuals and families—whether it's a single parent, a senior living on Social Security, or someone unable to work due to health challenges—are being drastically reduced. These reductions not only limit access to affordable rents, but also reduce mobility, locking people into housing situations that may no longer serve their needs. And when people can't move or when they can't find housing that fits their changing needs, the entire system becomes gridlocked. And that affects all of us.

Simultaneously, the federal funding streams that support new housing construction are in jeopardy. And our public healthcare infrastructure—for those who can't access coverage through an employer—is steadily eroding.

These aren't abstract policy shifts. They are decisions that will directly impact the health of our communities and our ability to respond to the most urgent issues we face: the housing crisis, homelessness, and access to basic supports.

In the face of these challenges, we are called—more than ever—to stand together.

We believe that everyone deserves a decent place to live. We believe in access to basic supports—whether that's healthcare, nutritious food, or meaningful human connections through essential community building initiatives.

Today, we are compelled, more than ever, to be creative with how we use our resources—both financial and human. And we are called to collaborate holistically, knowing that the wellbeing of the people we serve is deeply tied to the success of our partners and fellow community organizations.

The good news is: Vermonters know how to do this. Vermonters have a long history of refusing to accept a future where stability is reserved for the few. We don't just stand for housing. We stand for dignity, equity, and a future where everyone belongs. While things may feel discouraging right now, there will come a time when these long-held values will help lay the foundation to recover from the

unprecedented challenges we are facing today. It will not be easy, but we are extraordinary, resilient and creative and we will call forth all of these attributes to carry us forward.

So tonight, as we celebrate our accomplishments, let us also recommit—to each other, to this work, and to the values that bring us together.

Let's continue to raise our voices for what's right. Let's support our neighbors, build new partnerships, and push for policies that reflect our shared belief: that housing is a human right.

Each of us has a role to play. Whether you're a funder, a volunteer, a partner, a policymaker, or a concerned community member—your voice matters. Your actions matter.

Together, we hold onto the vision that in Vermont, everyone has not just a roof over their head, but a foundation for a healthy, connected, and dignified life.

Thank you for being here, thank you for standing with us, and thank you for everything you do to make this community stronger.

Elizabeth then opened the panel discussion:

Now, I'd like to invite some folks to join us for a discussion about a unique community collaboration that's happening in Brattleboro right now. Most of these folks - Assistant Chief Jeremy Evans from the Brattleboro Police Department, Rachel Trill from Interaction, Dakota Roberts from Southern Vermont Aids Project and Kate Trzaskos from the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance work for organizations that are part of a new initiative called One Brattleboro. One of downtown residents was going to join us as well, but a health issue has prevented him from participating tonight.

One Brattleboro evolved from a town-led initiative under John Potter's leadership and was created to develop and maintain a shared consciousness, strategic guidance, and measurable goals around protecting and improving public health, public safety, and the quality of life in Brattleboro. It is comprised of the leadership of 27 member organizations representing all facets of community service including the health care sector, housing, social services, business development as well as municipal services such as law enforcement, public safety and the library which serves as an anchor community resource. If you'd like to read more about One Brattleboro, there is a great page on the town's website that provides a list of the

members, the history of how the group was formed and links to several articles and videos that discuss the group's work. The full One Brattleboro group meets monthly and from our discussions, a variety of strategies have been developed among different combinations of One Brattleboro members. We'd like to highlight one tonight that involves our downtown properties.

Because the Housing Trust owns a lot of properties in downtown, we've had a front row seat to some of the most challenging dynamics that impact the community. Many of our residents and staff have been impacted by these dynamics and our response has been to develop a strategy with other One Brattleboro members that stands at the intersection of compassion and support, accountability and safety and community building.

To set the stage, **Assistant Chief Evans**, can you provide some context to some of the trends that have been occurring in Brattleboro over the past few years?

Can you describe the various ways your team has engaged with the Housing Trust to promote safety in our buildings and neighborhoods?

Dakota, as an outreach staff member with Southern Vermont Aids Project, you've been working with us as well. Can you describe your work and why this approach is important?

Rachel, your work with us seeks to build community connections through restorative conversations. Can you describe what that means and the work you are doing with our residents, SASH and Property Management staff?

Kate, as the Director of the Downtown Brattleboro Alliance, you see the health of our downtown through a broad lens. Can you talk about how economic vibrancy and public safety intersect?

Molly Bennett, the SASH Coordinator and Kayla Bernier-Wright Homeownership specialist:

Molly gave an explanation of what SASH stands for and highlighted some of the important work they do with residents from assisting with connecting residents with the care providers they need, running different community programs, assisting those in need of food with the various meal programs and hosting community

breakfasts where knowing how individual residents take their coffee is just one example of how well the SASH staff knows them.

Kayla Bernier-Wright then presented one of the many success stories of the Home Ownership department about a couples move to Vermont and some of the challenges they had to navigate to finally reach the finish line of becoming home owners.

Kayla, introduced Penny, a recent client that Kayla worked with who is now one of the proud home owners in our shard equity program. Penny shared her own personal journey of how she became involved with the home ownership program and can proudly say she has officially moved into her new home after some much needed renovations that, thanks to a very special person in her life that has passed away, taught her the skills to proudly complete these upgrades herself.

Partnership Awards:

Ellen Snyder presented the Community Partnership Awards to Cathedral Square, Evernorth and Brattleboro Housing Partnership for their collaboration and support for the SASH for All program.

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 2024 annual meeting

- You have all had an opportunity to read the minutes of the 2024 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?

Cynthia made the motion to waive the reading of the 2024 annual meeting minutes, Deb Zak seconded, the motion passed unanimously.

Victor: Board Election:

“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 and one new member:
 - **Anne Chapman is a resident in Putney.** Anne has been on the board since 2023 and became our treasurer in 2024. She is a member of our executive committee as well as the finance and asset management committee. Her background in accounting and keen interest in learning all about WWHT's finances leads her to ask great questions at our board table. We're excited that Anne has agreed to serve another term on our board.
 - **David Vandervert is a resident in Brattleboro and joined the board in 2023 as well.** David has a background psychology and family systems and is currently employed at Interaction working in their restorative practices program. David is a member of the Housing Trust's Program committee which reviews issues and trends that relate to our property management and supportive services programs. We are grateful that David has agreed to serve another term on the board.
 - **Jean Risman has rented from the Housing Trust for over 20 years and lives in Brattleboro.** She has agreed to join the board and bring her thoughtful feedback to our program committee. When Jean lived in Maine, she worked in the field of domestic violence and as a public policy research assistant. She also served as the Chair of a Community Mental Health Board responsible for allocating Maine's mental health dollars in Southern Maine. She is currently a board member at the Woman's Freedom Center here in Brattleboro. We are excited for Jean to bring her knowledge and experience perspective to our board discussions.

From the residents, do we have a motion to approve the Resident Member slate as proposed?

Ellen Snyder made the motion to approve the Resident Member Slate, Anne Chapman seconded, the motion passed unanimously.

I will read off the next two categories and we will take a full membership vote at the end. **We have one General Member board member up for renewal – Joan Weir.** Joan joined our board in 2023 after a long career at Vermont's Land Trust. She had also served for many years on the Housing Trust's Project Committee and has continued in this capacity which supports the development staff at the Housing Trust as they moving through the predevelopment and development process. We are grateful that Joan has agreed to renew her term on the board.

We have one new board candidate for our Public Services Category – Patty Eisenhaur. Patty lives in Londonderry and joined a group of volunteer residents who wanted to do something tangible to create affordable housing in their community. They formed the Mountain Town's Housing Project and promptly got to work fundraising so they could build a single-family home on donated land. They worked closely with Bruce Whitney who helped them access state funding and learn about our Shared Equity Program. Last year, this group welcomed a young local family to their new shared equity home build by community volunteers! In addition to a passion for housing, Patty has a background in corporate communications and investor relations in the pharmaceutical and life sciences industries. We are excited that she has agreed to join our board.

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?

Kathleen White made the motion to approve the slate as proposed for the general and public service members, Debbie Boyle seconded the motion, the motion passed unanimously.

Victor: Recognition of outgoing board members.

The Housing Trust has two board members who are retiring from the board that we'd like to thank.

Cynthia Gubb from Londonderry joined the board in 2021 and has served on our finance committee. Cynthia brought a well of experience as the Chair of the Vermont Community Development that provides CDBG grants to housing

development project and home repair programs throughout the state. She was also a founding member of the Mountain Town's Housing Project mentioned early, a group that helped fundraise and inspire volunteers to build a new shared equity home in Londonderry. She was the point person between the volunteer group and the Housing Trust and worked closely with Bruce Whitney during this time. We are so grateful for Cynthia's service on our board. Thank you, Cynthia.

Ellen Snyder from Brattleboro has a been a resident board member for the past 8 years and has served on the Program Committee. A few years ago, Ellen was featured in our annual report in an article titled "*Send in the Grandmothers*" which highlighted the important role that older residents have in building community and strengthening relationships. Ellen is a retired nurse and an exemplary community grandmother who can always be counted on to show up for a volunteer day or a community gathering. From tree planting in our neighborhoods or pulling weeds at our annual chalet clean-up day to joining art classes for kids hosted by our SASH for All program or building ginger bread homes with families for the holidays, Ellen has consistently moved with an open-hearted approach to everyone she meets. While we are sad that she has termed off the board, we are grateful that she has agreed to continue serving on our Program Committee. Thank you Ellen.

The meeting concluded at 6:07 PM.