

# HomeMatters

A Newsletter of Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

SPRING 2024

## The Tile Project: Creating Place and Celebrating Home Through Public Art

Home is at the heart of a new public art project destined for downtown Brattleboro – the creative work of an entire community, orchestrated by local artisan Teta Hildson in collaboration with WWHT. The Tile Project is a mosaic made up of 35 unique tiles, each displaying the creative expressions of multiple participants; each created under the theme of “Home.”

**Designed in part to raise awareness of the important work of WWHT, the project was inspired by Hildson’s own journey to homeownership. And to experience the full impact of the art, one first needs to know Teta’s story.**

“I’ve lived in this area since 1978,” she explains. “As I approached my late 40s in 2009, I knew I really wanted to own a home. I had a perfectly good job, but still didn’t make enough money to buy a house anywhere. I was aware of the Housing Trust, but made a lot of assumptions – like because I had a regular income I wouldn’t qualify. I also

assumed that they would have a years-long wait list. I was really getting ready to pull myself out of this area after so many years, because the need was so strong.”

Acting on a suggestion from her bank’s mortgage officer, Teta looked at the WWHT website and saw a home that was listed as part of their Shared Equity Homeownership program. Still doubtful, she contacted the Homeownership Center and started the application process.

“Then everything just fell into place,” she says. “I closed on that house at the end of 2009. This was a remarkable landmark in my life. What it did for my spirit was, I think, part of the rest of my story. I eventually decided I was going to do something during



### Celebrating Home

Local artisan Teta Hildson orchestrated the WWHT tile project for public installation.



**06** Staff & Board Spotlights

**07** Departments/ Announcements

**08** Project Summaries

[www.HomeMattersHere.com](http://www.HomeMattersHere.com) | [info@HomeMattersHere.com](mailto:info@HomeMattersHere.com)





**She gave a simple directive to do anything in the theme of “Home.”**



2 |

→ this next stretch of my productive life that I really cared about.”

And so, in 2018, Teta co-founded Wheelhouse Clay Center in downtown Brattleboro, where she spends her creative time both making and teaching pottery. It was here, at a donor event for WWHT, that the Tile Project began.

“We held the event in Teta’s studio because we wanted to let the folks who contributed to the organization really experience the impact of homeownership,” says Marion Major, Outreach Coordinator for WWHT. “We wanted to show how the Shared

**Equity program enabled Teta to take root in the town of Brattleboro, become a business co-owner, and then give back in this most meaningful way.”**

At this first event, Teta provided some wet tiles along with a basket of impression-makers for people to choose from. She gave a simple directive to do anything in the theme of “Home.”

“That single word gave everyone enough to get going,” she says.

A second event was held at the Snow Block, where residents, neighbors, staff, family and friends put their stamp on

more tiles. WWHT’s 35th Anniversary Block Party brought another opportunity for participation from WWHT staff, board members (both past and present), more residents and other community members in attendance.

**“This is just a wonderful, wonderful project that everyone enjoys participating in,” says Marion. “I really love how it crosses the entire community, and it’s a nice light touch on how housing is community development in a really organic kind of way. Once we put all these beautiful pieces together, everyone can interact**





and enjoy and think about what home means to them."

The journey to a completed tile is a multi-step process, beginning with an impression on a wet tile. Once the initial design is there, the tile goes back to Teta to fire and glaze. Then, the tile goes back out to the community, where even more folks are engaged to paint the tiles.

Elena Luring is the SASH For All Coordinator for WWHT, and has been instrumental in guiding participation during this phase of the process.

**"I would bring tiles to staff members, or to open community room hours, and just encourage people to paint," she says. "Each person picks out a tile, and paints it the way they interpret it, so each tile is really the work of several people, which is so interesting. It was wonderful, to see each person leaving their thumbprint on things, not worrying about doing it right or wrong, just enjoying it."**

Elena was struck by the amount of care that people put into their participation. "It was really touching," she noted. "They were very serious about it, and had very strong feelings about having a home."

After the tiles are painted, they are once again returned to Teta for a final coat of clear glaze and one last firing. "The tiles that are coming out are more beautiful than I ever imagined," she says.

"Each tile has its own story connected to it, which is super special," says Marion. She describes one of her favorite pieces. "One of our residents lives on Canal Street and he always feeds the birds. He took a feather from one of the birds that he's

friends with, and he made an impression. It's gorgeous. It looks just like this beautiful, simple feather, but it's actually a wonderful connection of this person and his story."

**The Tile Project that began just a year ago is now nearing completion. The vision is to install it on the outside of the Snow Block in downtown Brattleboro. The number of tiles, 35, was determined primarily because the project began during WWHT's 35th year. It's also the right number, says Teta, for a public installation.**

"I love public art," says Teta. "It makes me stop and look. It's something we don't have enough of in Brattleboro."

Teta also hopes the Tile Project might help raise awareness for the Housing Trust. "I still feel great about my experience. What I learned is that the Housing Trust is for people like me. We have steady jobs, we're reliable, we have incomes, but we're out of the regular marketplace."

It is the hope of all of the project organizers that the central theme of "Home" resonates with everyone who views the installation.

**"I hope people connect with it," says Elena. "I hope they have the same warm feelings I do when I see these tiles, just the wonderful feelings that people put into their tiles, about having a home, about being home, about feeling at home."**

**Teta herself has a tile in the display that was one of the first to be completed. It sums up the Tile Project with a simple, sincere sentiment. It says, "I love my home, I love my house, I love my neighbors."**



# Redeveloping the Chalet: Planning for the Future, Honoring the Past

**The West Brattleboro property known as The Chalet is entering a new chapter in its storied history, as Windham & Windsor Housing Trust begins the complex process of redevelopment.**



**B**uilt in the 1960's by German immigrants who aspired to replicate an authentic Bavarian banquet hall experience, the Dalem Chalet was originally established as an inn with just six guest rooms and housed the largest banquet hall in Brattleboro.

**In 2020, at the height of the COVID pandemic, after nearly six decades as a favored destination for lodging and special events in Brattleboro, the Chalet found a new purpose. Using COVID relief funds, WWHT purchased the Chalet to establish a permanent supportive housing community for people who were experiencing homelessness.**

"During the pandemic, everybody recognized that people who didn't have homes were at risk of getting, and spreading, COVID," explains WWHT Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater. "It was just imperative to get people out of congregate shelters and off the streets."

A number of key factors figured into the choice of the Chalet property, including its residential location, its capacity, and motel configuration of rooms at a scale large enough for meaningful impact while matching the existing capacity of both WWHT and Groundworks. Bridgewater says the conditions weren't great, but the existing facilities allowed for an accelerated rehab of living spaces. And time was of the essence.

"The atmosphere at the time was a sense of urgency," recalls Bridgewater. "We closed

on the property in September, and the time limit to spend the money was December. That gave us literally three months to do renovations. Because of that we had to scale back the scope of work we wanted to do, which meant that we focused only on life safety and some energy efficiency issues."

Among the essential upgrades were a new sprinkler system, an overhaul of the kitchen adding stainless steel appliances and addressing fire hazards, and replacement windows and some light cosmetic rehab in all of the living units.

"It was a true emergency measure project, not at all in keeping how we typically do things. Usually a project takes a couple of years, from design to construction to occupancy, and there is a lot of planning and thoughtfulness that goes into the process. We didn't have the benefit of any of that."

**Since 2020, the Chalet has provided 27 units of permanent housing with on-site supportive services coordinated by Groundworks Collaborative. Although the concept had already been working at Great River Terrace since 2018, the pandemic presented unforeseen challenges that brought hard lessons.**

"It's no secret that things were challenging in the beginning," says Bridgewater. "Although we had several years of experience partnering with Groundworks Collaborative at Great River Terrace, a community that was quite stable before

the pandemic, we didn't anticipate the labor dynamics that occurred during the pandemic or the impact of the motel program on organizational capacity and both organizations experienced staffing turnover. It was an extremely chaotic time, and our usual, deliberate process suffered. As a result, we ended up with some tenants that really weren't appropriate in that setting."

**Bridgewater says that even though there are still persistent, ongoing challenges relating to permanent supportive housing in general, they've come a long way.** "We've worked really hard, and if you talk to residents now, they'll tell you that it's so much better. I don't think any of us expected an explosion in homelessness, I don't think people expected folks would still be living in motels today, four years later. So much has evolved since then, but we remain committed to maintaining that community with better housing conditions."

There was one other major factor that influenced WWHT's decision to acquire the Chalet: the property included 17 acres and could accommodate a significant number of new homes through a future redevelopment effort. Now, that future is here.

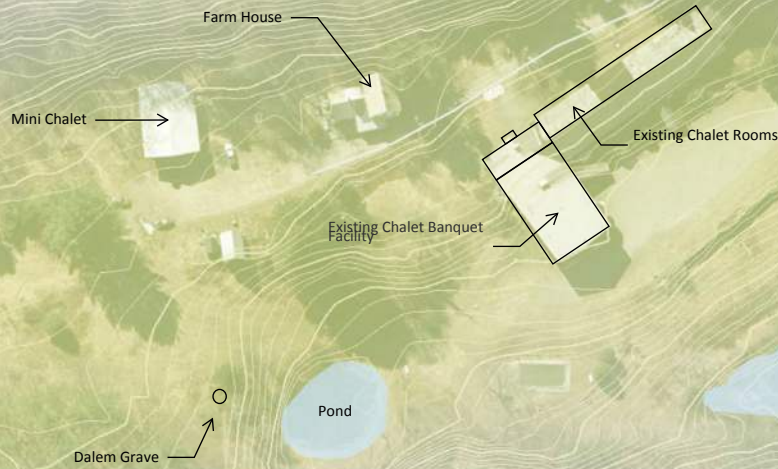
The firm of Vermont Integrated Architecture has been engaged to create a site design for the redevelopment that includes the continuation of the existing permanent supportive housing community, as well as new construction of multi-family





## EXISTING

**THE CHALET - CONCEPT SITE PLAN**  
BRATTLEBORO, VT  
01/10/24



housing for a range of incomes. There is also a homeownership component on the drafting table, which would be offered under WWHT's Shared Equity program. Although the site's topography and landscape does not allow for development to maximize zoning of units/per acre, in the area where the topography does allow, the development team is reviewing concept options which would be developed in phases and could allow even up to 86 units.

**"It's really exciting because there's opportunity to not only provide better homes for the people who already live there, but to actually increase the number of homes available to the greater community regardless of an individual's housing status."**

A recent housing needs assessment by the Town of Brattleboro identified that there is a pressing need for more than 500 units of affordable housing. While planning the redevelopment of the Chalet to address that great need, Bridgewater is also intent on meeting the needs of the current residents, neighbors, and other constituents and stakeholders. To do this, the Housing Trust has been hosting meetings with the residents, neighbors and resource leads (such as the neighboring school and emergency professionals) to talk about the needs on the property and to present the different concepts as a jumping off point. The process – spirited at


times – revealed common ground shared by residents and neighbors alike.

**"In spite of all the different personalities and styles of communication, more than one person has said at each meeting, 'It's really refreshing to realize we all want the same thing. We all want a safe neighborhood.' That's been really cool to watch," says Bridgewater.**

"In this process of bringing in residents, neighbors, and town officials and resources, it's been incredibly important to define what feedback is actionable. There's no question that this redevelopment

work has to take place. Feedback on accessibility features, transportation access, those are all really helpful in building our plans."

One unanimous design suggestion is for a building with a single entrance – a security measure which would offer greater control of who comes in and out of the property. Residents also want greater accessibility.

"The property is currently not accessible, and that's the biggest issue," says Bridgewater. "If that building could have an elevator, for example, that would be ideal. We will certainly add ADA" 



**Housing Trust and Groundworks Staff work together to build raised bed gardens June, 2023**

## Board Spotlight

Resident Member

### Samba Diallo

Samba was born and raised in Mali, West Africa but his family has been calling Brattleboro home for the past 20 years. He is currently the Executive Director for the AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, a nonprofit providing direct services support, prevention, and harm reduction programs in Southern Vermont communities. Very grateful that through his job he gets to work with different members of our community and be part of meaningful programs offering basic necessities such as affordable housing. As a current resident at one WWHT properties he is looking forward to offering his time and voice to advocate for equitable housing policies.



## Community Kudos for Molly Bennett, WWHT SASH Coordinator, Windsor:

We received the following letter from Alyson Delaney, Social Work Executive with White River Junction VA Medical Center detailing the direct impact of the SASH program has on individuals.



Two of our facility's social workers in Primary Care, brought to my attention the exemplary teamwork and care coordination provided by **Molly Bennett, SASH Coordinator**; Carla Kamel, Senior Solutions Case Manager; and Deborah Gelsi with Stewart Property Management. This group is to be commended for commitment and dedication to caring for a 77-year-old Veteran who lives alone and was decompensating into failure to thrive.

This team of emotionally intelligent, skilled, and attentive providers was instrumental in building a trusting and supportive relationship with the Veteran, which allowed them to speak openly and honestly about their concerns, including that his medical needs exceeded their ability to respond to and warranted a higher level of care. The team worked collaboratively with the Veteran to preserve his self-determination while also educating him about the impact of his choices. The team's sensitivity to this Veteran's complex medical and mental health needs was fueled by a deep sense of worry, which compelled them to reach out to the Veteran's VA Team to join efforts in finding a path affirming Veteran's choices while informing his direction towards getting the care he needed.

As a result of this collaboration, the Veteran agreed to be brought to the ED for care, which culminated in the effective delivery of urgent care he needed and restored Veteran's humanity.

The team's dedication to this Veteran's health and well-being is commendable, and there is no question that this Veteran's life was significantly, positively impacted by the actions of this wonderful team of caring providers whose contributions mattered so much.

Signed,

*Alyson Delaney*

## Staff Spotlight

### Katherine Freyenhagen, Human Resources and Operations Manager

For the past three years I have been the leasing agent with the Housing Trust. I've worked with families and individuals as they access housing and I really value when I can bring folks to see their new home. I look forward to continuing to support the full team and the mission at WWHT through my new and exciting role as HR and Operations Manager. When not at work I enjoy spending time with my husband, walks with our dog, Odin Jeffery and spending time with our large extended family including our 10 nieces and nephews and 2 godchildren.





## Chalet, continued from page 5

→ compliant entrance ramps, but residents also want better roads, better pathways with railings, so they can visit their neighbors and feel like they can move safely around the property.”

It’s also a priority to bring public transportation onto the property, so the proposed design options address traffic flow and include an easy-access turnaround for the Moover.

**Jennifer Hunt is the Permanent Supportive Housing Coordinator for Groundworks Collaborative. She reiterates the need for greater accessibility. “Groundworks staff have found accommodations to support those folks who have limited mobility by having case management meetings in the residents’ apartments and using our passenger van to drive residents who live on the upper level to the community space for meetings and events. While these accommodations work for the time being, they limit the independence of the residents who live there. Groundworks staff are eagerly awaiting the planned redevelopment and are excited about the positive impact it will have on those residents who struggle to navigate the challenging layout of their homes.”**

One thing that is clear, says Bridgewater, is that residents really love the location. “It’s absolutely gorgeous up there. It’s up on a knoll, close to Route 9 but not right on top of it. You can see rolling hills in the background, and there are big open fields. I’ve heard people talk about how much they really love living there.”

**In addition to the scenic setting, the main Chalet building itself will be an integral part of the property’s redevelopment. The original structure contains most of the historic features – huge beams, wood ceilings, huge windows overlooking the property – and also holds decades of community memories. All that will be preserved. It’s a history and a legacy, says Bridgewater, that is worth honoring.**

“We’re looking at our goals which are better housing conditions for the people who live there right now, and meeting the intense housing needs of the broader community, which includes homeownership and households who have a variety of income levels. We’re in a housing crisis, and this is a great opportunity to contribute towards mitigating that crisis.”



**SAVE  
THE DATE!**

Our Annual Celebration is coming up **June 27, 2024** with Guest Speaker Dr. Jim O’Connell featured in *Rough Sleepers*.

## Green Mountain Home Repair:

**Dave Grobe**, Home Repair Specialist is partnering with senior centers in Windsor County to present “Planning Ahead for Home Repair”. Dave draws on years of experience walking homeowners through the home repair process from defining the scope of work, lining up contractors, and getting the job done.



This presentation will give homeowners some strategies on how to plan for upcoming important project to avoid deferred maintenance issues that ultimately become health and safety issues. “Doing this kind of work keeps people in their homes, in their communities that they have connections to.” Dave shares, “That’s really important to maintain the fabric of our towns and villages.”



Roof, before



Roof repair, after

**WELCOME NEW STAFF!** We are pleased to welcome new staff members. We are excited about the strengths these individuals bring to the organization!



**Robert Tormaschy**  
Office Manager



**Jeff Rose**  
Social Emotional  
Wellness Clinician



**Elizabeth Lachapelle**  
Property Manager



**Rob Hoffman**  
Property  
Manager



**Drew Wark**  
Maintenance  
Technician



**Tony Paraspola**  
Maintenance  
Technician



## Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

68 BIRGE STREET

BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT 05301

Non-Profit Org.  
US Postage  
**PAID**  
Brattleboro, VT  
Permit No. 79

For more information  
**802.254.4604**

888-294-9948 (Toll free in-state)

[HomeMattersHere.org](http://HomeMattersHere.org)



## PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

### SINGLE FAMILY HOMEOWNERSHIP NEW CONSTRUCTION

**316 South Street, Springfield**

*Project overview:* 316 South Street will be a zero energy modular home in our Shared Equity Homeownership program. The burnt, blighted home on the site was demolished at the close of 2023, new construction will be getting underway in 2024. To be eligible for this affordable homeownership opportunity, the buyer must have completed the Homebuyer Education and have an income at or below 120% Area Median Income. For price, income limits, and the Homebuyer Education registration visit our website.



**JOIN OUR TEAM!**

We're looking for a mission-driven individual to focus on the long-term operational, resiliency, and financial planning for our buildings. This role is a critical part in keeping quality, affordable homes in our region. Give Katherine a call to learn more (802) 246-2104.

### CENTRAL & MAIN

**133 Main Street, Windsor**

*Number of Apartments:* 25 units (one and two bedrooms)

*Co-Developer:* Evernorth

*Project Schedule:* Environmental Remediation work began March, Construction to begin early Summer 2024

*Architect:* Duncan Wisniewski Architecture

*General Contractor:* Neagley & Chase Construction

*Project overview:* Central and Main is proposed new, highly efficient construction on a currently vacant lot in downtown Windsor. With 25 mixed-income residential apartments the building will be accessible to vehicles via Central St and accessible to pedestrians via Main Street. The building design references the history of Windsor's built environment while making the existing landscape inviting and accessible.



### PUTNEY

**Alice Holway Drive, Putney**

*Number of Apartments:* 25

*Co-Developer:* Evernorth

*Project Schedule:* Construction slated for fall 2024 given 4th appeal dismissed

*Architect:* Vermont Integrated Architect

*General Contractor:* ReArch Company

*Project Overview:* Two new buildings are planned that will provide 25 mixed income, highly energy efficient and accessible apartments in Putney's village center. The development will provide community space with a kitchenette and has been designed to accommodate existing community gardens and the Putney Farmers' Market on land that has been slated for development for 30 years.



**BE A YEIGHBOR.**

Say yes to more homes in our community. It's something that helps us all.

