

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED
TO
HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCE COMMITTEE
BY
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68 BIRGE STREET
BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT
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My name is Connie Snow, and I'm the Executive Director of the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust. Now in our 27th year, Windham & Windsor Housing Trust has created and preserved the affordability of 870 homes and apartments, serving over 1,300 low and moderate income residents in southeastern Vermont. What began 27 years ago as a neighborhood effort to preserve the affordability of three apartment buildings on Canal Street in Brattleboro has grown to become one of the most successful housing trusts in New England.

I wanted to talk to you today about the role the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the nonprofit housing network, is playing in assisting the State to meet the renewable energy goals articulated in the Comprehensive Energy Plan, resulting in net positive environmental impacts in our communities.

It is not new for nonprofit housing providers to incorporate the meeting of multiple social goals into the housing we develop. In our housing development work, not only do we add to the stock of apartments or homes that are affordable to average wage earners and to those living on fixed incomes, but we eliminate brownfields and hazardous materials, increase numbers of accessible apartments, restore and preserve historic buildings, revitalize villages and downtowns, and make connections between housing and social services to help the most vulnerable in our communities to succeed. To that list, we are meeting maximum possible levels of energy efficiency and

energy performance in the properties we develop, whether they be new construction or historic properties.

I wanted to highlight today two very different properties developed by the Housing Trust and Housing Vermont in the last three years: The Cooperative Building in downtown Brattleboro, and Windsor Village Apartments in Windsor Vermont.

In July 2012, a new downtown block opened on the south end of Main Street in Brattleboro, a collaboration of Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, Housing Vermont, and the Brattleboro Food Coop.

In 1988, the Brattleboro Food Coop—which had really been a buying club—moved into a vacant grocery store in a 1960's style strip mall at the base of Main Street in Brattleboro. By 2008, realizing the potential for their 16 million dollar businesses to be derailed by off-the-chart energy costs, the Coop made the decision to build a new building on the same site. Understanding the benefits of mixed used buildings in downtowns, and seeing the mission fit, they invited the Housing Trust to join them and build housing above the new retail store.

In the fall, 2010, ground was broken for the \$14 million dollar project. Funded by conventional financing and member loans on the Coop side, and tax credits and funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board on the housing side, the new retail store and 24 beautiful, energy efficient apartments opened in June 2012.

Designed by Gossens Bachman Architects, the green features of this impressive building include Vermont slate siding, a high R-value building envelope, triple glazed windows, heat recovery ventilation, a green roof, and solar electrical generation. The most innovative energy feature of

the building is a heat exchange system that captures the heat from the Coop's refrigeration units, and uses the reclaimed heat for heat and hot water for the apartments above.

While the building's performance for the first year is just being analyzed now, preliminary results are impressive. While the Coop's new retail store and offices are 60% larger than the former store, energy costs have risen only 20% . First year heating costs for the apartments have averaged \$550 annually, compared to a more typical \$800-\$900 per year per apartment.

The original grocery store occupied by the Coop sat back from the road, behind a parking lot. In the design process, the owners realized that there had always been a downtown block on that lower Main Street curve, and chose to move the new building out to the street once again.

Beyond restoring a historic streetscape, site components filter stormwater to protect the adjacent Whetstone Brook, and the site plan provides green space along the brook for the community to enjoy. At a time when you hear a lot about sustainability, the new building sets a high standard for any future development in downtown Brattleboro. And, because the building is such a focal point on Main Street, that sustainability statement is front and center.

Just after opening, The Cooperative Building won the 2012 EPA National Award for Smart Growth Achievement in the category of Main Street Revitalization. Wrote EPA, the seven 2012 winners "were taking innovative steps to realize a vision of American communities that are clean, healthy, environmentally responsible, and economically resilient."

I would like to take just a couple minutes to describe a second housing development, Windsor Village Apartments in Windsor, a building very different from the Cooperative Building.

Windsor Village was built in 1808 as the Vermont State prison, and was converted to apartments in 1978. It is home to 67 elderly households and 10 families. In 2012, Windham & Windsor Housing Trust and Housing Vermont renovated the facility, with a focus on reducing the extraordinary energy costs. Sharply cutting the annual consumption of almost 40,000 gallons of #2 fuel oil and improving resident comfort were priorities for the nearly \$5.5 million dollar renovation.

The rehabilitation focused on a deep energy retrofit and included the installation of energy saving windows; an upgraded thermal shell that brought this old masonry building to modern levels of insulation; a large solar hot water system (1,000 square feet of panels) to pre-heat domestic hot water; a wood pellet-fired boiler (the pellets are stored in former jail cells in the basement); sealing and ventilation improvements; and lighting and electrical efficiency upgrades to lower total electrical use.

Post renovation, there has been a 50% reduction in fuel costs per year. The renovation, designed by Banwell Architects, won a merit award in Efficiency Vermont's Best of the Best in Commercial Building Design and Construction contest. In the words of Housing Vermont, all going to show that you *can* tame an energy hog!

Over the years, the commitment of the nonprofit housing network to efficiency and a reduced environmental impact has strengthened, and this journey has been one we have taken with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. It has been a powerful and effective partnership with a great track record of success translating great policy objectives into award-winning community development efforts.

Thank you so much for your time today, your efforts, and for your ongoing support.

