

# VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD

## BEYOND THE NUMBERS

### STIMULATING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



The Environmental Protection Agency presented Housing Vermont, the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, and the Brattleboro Food Co-op with the 2012 National Award for Smart Growth Achievement for an innovative multi-use building in downtown Brattleboro. The building provides 33,600 square feet of retail and office space for the Co-op on the first two floors and 24 affordable apartments on the top two floors. A sophisticated mechanical system recaptures waste heat produced by the store's refrigeration equipment to heat the apartments.

VHCB-funded affordable housing creates jobs during and after construction. According to the National Association of Home Builders, 12.2 short-term and 3.2 permanent local jobs are created for every 10 housing units constructed. The passage of the \$37 million *Housing for All* revenue bond is estimated to leverage another \$65 million in housing investment. Affordable housing also helps to attract and retain employers by providing sorely needed workforce housing.

VHCB's housing and historic preservation policies give priority to projects in downtowns and village centers. Rehabilitating downtown buildings helps to maintain a mix of commercial and residential uses. VHCB has invested in the redevelopment of a cinema in downtown Springfield, restoration of theaters for the performing arts in Brattleboro, Putney, Rutland and Burlington, and the renovation of buildings for grocery stores in Richford and Guilford as well as a new facility for a community library in Groton.

Conservation of our working lands and natural areas is an economic development engine that helps protect local farms, creates recreational access, assists with flood protection, water quality and supports tourism and rural vitality.

Farm and farm-related sectors are responsible for 17% of Vermont's gross state product. The USDA reports that Vermont agriculture generates 11% of jobs in the state. The Vermont Dairy Industry brings \$2.2 billion in economic activity to Vermont annually, according to a study funded by the Vermont Dairy Promotion Council.

The Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program works to enhance the economic viability of Vermont's working lands businesses by providing business planning and targeted technical assistance to farm, food and forestry enterprises. In 2017, the Viability Program provided services to 91 farms, 9 forest products businesses and 8 forest landowner families with business and succession planning assistance. VHCB provided another 39 farms with grants for on-farm improvements – 25 dairy improvement grants with private funds from Ehrmann Commonwealth Dairy, LLC, and 14 water quality grants with state funds. The program enables business owners to make significant improvements in managing their business, generating profits, accessing financing, increasing production and implementing business expansions and ownership transitions.

Many farmers use the proceeds from the sale of development rights on their property to expand their operation, reduce debt, build new barns, or transfer the farm to the next generation. Farm businesses on conserved land produce over 500 value-added products, support many Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) enterprises and farm stands, and help to create food security for our state. Conserved farms also contribute to retail and wholesale markets, selling food both in and out of state. Protecting our forestland prevents fragmentation and secures the future for our forest and recreational industries.

Additionally, conservation supports Vermont's annual \$1.5 billion tourism industry by protecting our special Vermont brand which depends upon our world-class landscape and access to natural area recreation. These investments spur economic growth, in the agricultural and outdoor recreation sectors, maintaining Vermont's high rank as one of the world's great tourist destinations.



Photo credit: Nadine Berrini

In 2015, Paul Lisai purchased and conserved 100 acres in Albany after working with the Vermont Land Trust's Farmland Access Program. Paul had been renting land nearby to support his cows since 2011. Owning a farm was more than the realization of a lifelong dream, it meant sustaining his dairy business, Sweet Rowen Farmstead.

## PROMOTING ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND MINIMIZING CLIMATE CHANGE

VHCB has been a national leader in creating energy efficient housing both in new developments and in the existing portfolio of permanently affordable housing. VHCB spearheaded the creation of a “roadmap” which describes techniques and materials we can use now to build energy efficient apartments. Notably, VHCB secured additional federal and philanthropic funding to implement the roadmap, including the installation of solar hot water and wood-pellet boilers. These upgrades will produce energy savings averaging 39% and as high as 56%.

Housing and conservation mean energy efficiency, shorter commutes, carbon sequestration in our forests, and foods coming from our local farms. Also, many Vermont farmers are at the forefront of devising new methods for creating on-farm energy through methane digesters, wind turbines, and bio-fuels. By protecting working farms and forests we are creating options for future energy independence.

## RESPONDING TO EMERGENCY NEEDS

The recovery from Irene flooding and other severe storms continues, as do cost-effective activities to reduce the impact of further extreme weather events. VHCB and the network of affordable housing and conservation partners support our communities helping them relocate and rebuild housing, create riverside public parks, and conserve floodplains that absorb floodwaters.

## PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

VHCB’s investments in land protection are helping to protect and enhance water quality and reduce flood and erosion risks.

- In FY 2017, 91% of VHCB’s farmland conservation projects contained surface waters included additional water quality protections in the conservation easement.
- Conserved forestlands protect water quality by filtering sediment and nutrients from runoff before entering streams, producing clean water and the greatest reductions in downstream flood flows.
- VHCB has received USDA matching funds on a 1:1 basis for all farm conservation projects. All projects include management plans to address soil conservation and water quality protection.
- VHCB Conservation and Farm Viability funding is integral to the \$16 million grant from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to improve Lake Champlain Basin water quality. The State pledged \$5 million in VHCB conservation funding over five years to match these funds.



—photo credit: Caleb Kenna

Kingdom Trails Association (KTA), the group that established and manages the area’s bike trails, is an economic engine for the region. Annually, the organization logs 80,000 trail visits, and generates \$16 million in economic activity for businesses in and around Burke and Lyndonville. When 133 acres that help make up the Sidwinder trail, voted the “best-flowing trail” in the country, were at risk, VHCB and VLT helped KTA purchase the land.

Walter Putnam had been living in a tent in the woods before finding a permanent home with supportive services at Beacon Apartment South Burlington.



Kayakers enjoy The Nature Conservancy White River Ledges Natural Area. This past year, two miles of the shoreline was protected when the preserve expanded to 655 acres.



Photo credit: Paul E. Richardson

Ella Armstrong conserved a scenic and productive farm in Calais and sold to the land to farmer Mike Betit, who is moved his organic vegetable business to the property. The community was also interested in protecting wetland areas and public access to Pekin Brook for fishing and swimming. Recreational access to the brook and water quality were both incorporated into the conservation protections.

### Publication of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition

The more than 50 private, nonprofit organizations which are members of the Coalition represent a wide spectrum of interests from small, community-based land trusts which secure and steward public and recreation areas to statewide developers of affordable housing.