



**House Appropriations Committee
Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) Testimony 19 January 2023
Robert Little, Director of Community Development**

Good afternoon:

My name is Robert Little, and I serve as the Director of Community Development at RuralEdge, the nonprofit affordable housing developer in the Northeast Kingdom. I also serve as Vice-Chair of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition.

First, I want to thank you and your colleagues for the unprecedented, transformational investment you have made in affordable housing. Since CARES Act and ARPA funds have been allocated, RuralEdge has brought 74 new units on-line, and another 132 under construction or have funding secured. Overall, we have 14 projects in our pipeline for the next four years. We are proud of our accomplishments these past several years, and I am here today to tell you that we are not done yet. Today, I want to highlight just one of our projects in the pipeline.

Packard Court is currently several vacant lots on Main Street in St. Johnsbury and has been so since a significant fire destroyed the prior buildings in 2009. RuralEdge owns the site thanks to a federal appropriation from then-Senator Leahy in 2012. Our plan is to construct 30 units of senior housing to the site with on-site Support & Services at Home (SASH) services. The project has already been highlighted by Governor Scott as a significant shovel-ready project.

The site is ideal for senior housing, as it is in the designated downtown and close to many services and amenities, including the St. Johnsbury Senior Meal Site and the Good Living Senior Center, both of which are based out of the St. Johnsbury House, a housing development for seniors. Adding 30 units of senior housing to this area of the town will be a significant benefit, not just to the town, but for the residents of the building, as they truly will be part of the larger community.

RuralEdge is currently submitting an application for US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 202 funding. This is a national competition that, if awarded, will bring \$3.8 Million in federal resources to the state. We are also working on an application to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) for 9% tax credits totaling \$7.6 Million in limited partner equity. The Agency of Commerce & Community Development (ACCD) has already committed \$378,000 in Brownfield funds to clean the site, and the town of St. Johnsbury, knowing how important this project is to the town and its residents, has committed \$50,000 in local ARPA funding to the project.

We anticipate an ask to the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (VHCB) of \$4.1 Million to the project in May. We hear that funding could be limited at that time and, if these funds could not be committed, it would stall the project. If construction, which is anticipated to commence in the spring of 2024, were delayed, in this climate of inflating prices and limited availability of contractors, the delay in funding commitments could be the difference between this project happening or not.

RuralEdge, and similar organizations across the State, are not done yet. We are excited to see a \$5 Million addition to the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP), which we administer in the Northeast Kingdom and has already brought 30 units on-line. A \$50 Million appropriation in the Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) to VHCB will ensure that they can continue to do their transformational work to fund an increase of housing stock quickly during this time of crisis. It also sends a message to Vermonters that you understand the crisis and are doing everything possible to alleviate it as much as possible. In short, it tells Vermonters that *you* are not done yet.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this important request.