

# Senate Committee on Natural Resources

January 28, 2025



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Housing &  
Conservation  
Board

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**Gus Seelig**  
Executive Director

**Pollaidh Major**  
Director of Policy & Special Projects

Birdseye Wildlife  
Management Area, Poultney





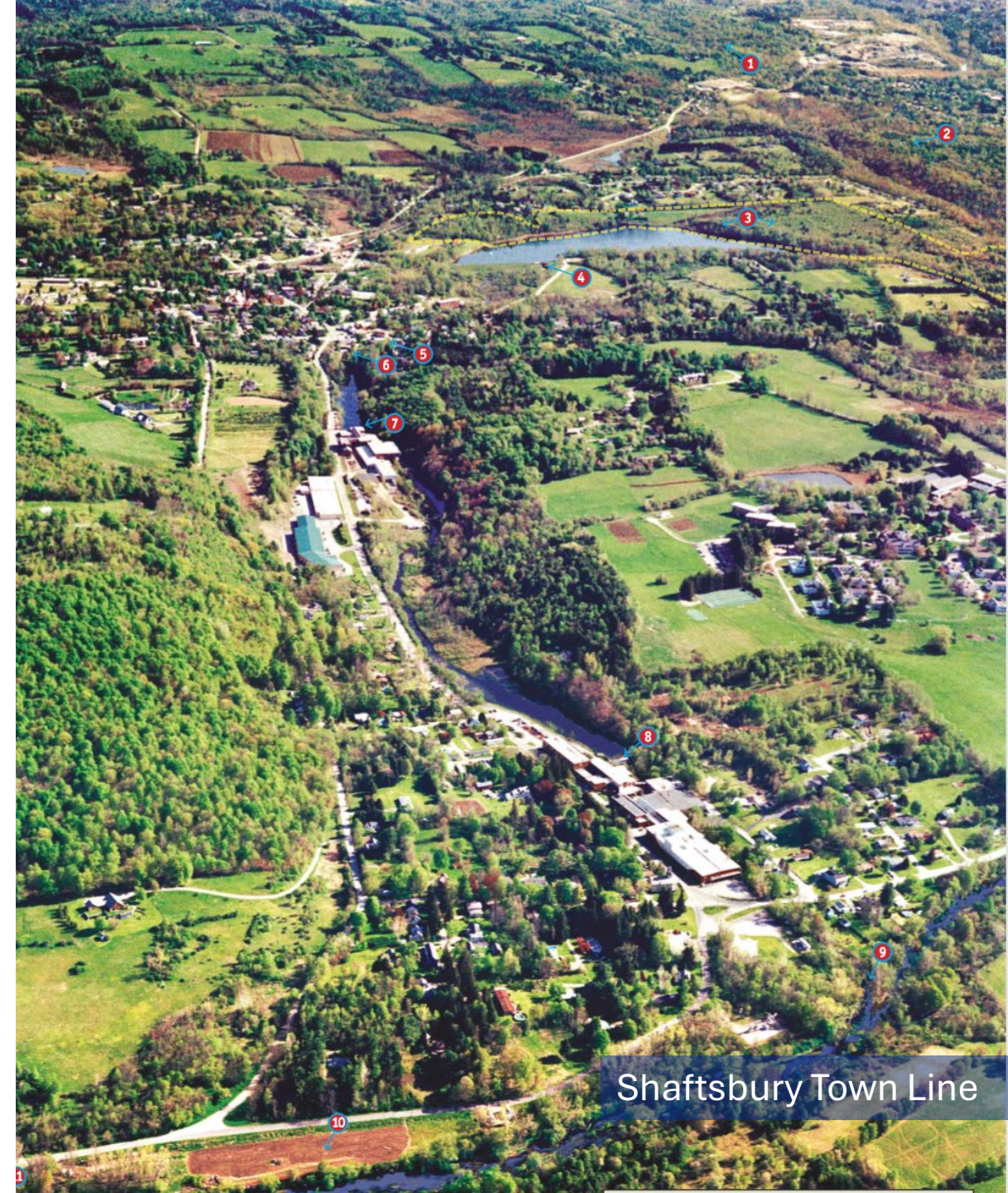
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# Statutory Purpose

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“the dual goals of creating affordable housing for Vermonters, and conserving and protecting Vermont’s agricultural land, forestland, historic properties, important natural areas, and recreational lands of primary importance to the economic vitality and quality of life of the State.”

10 V.S.A.15 §302



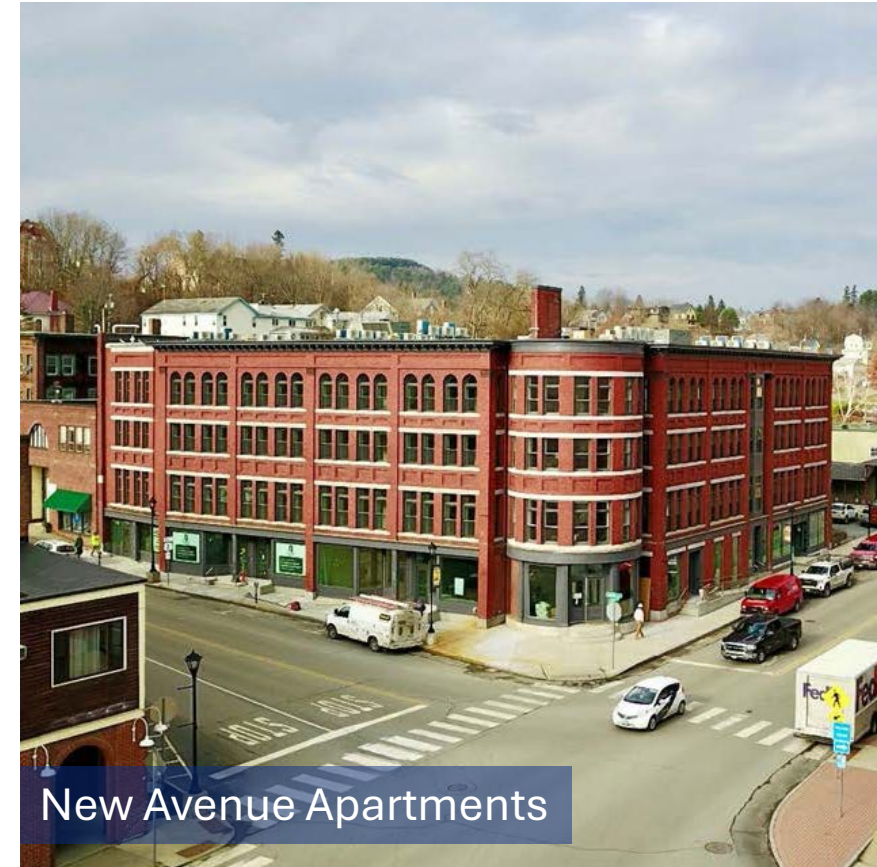
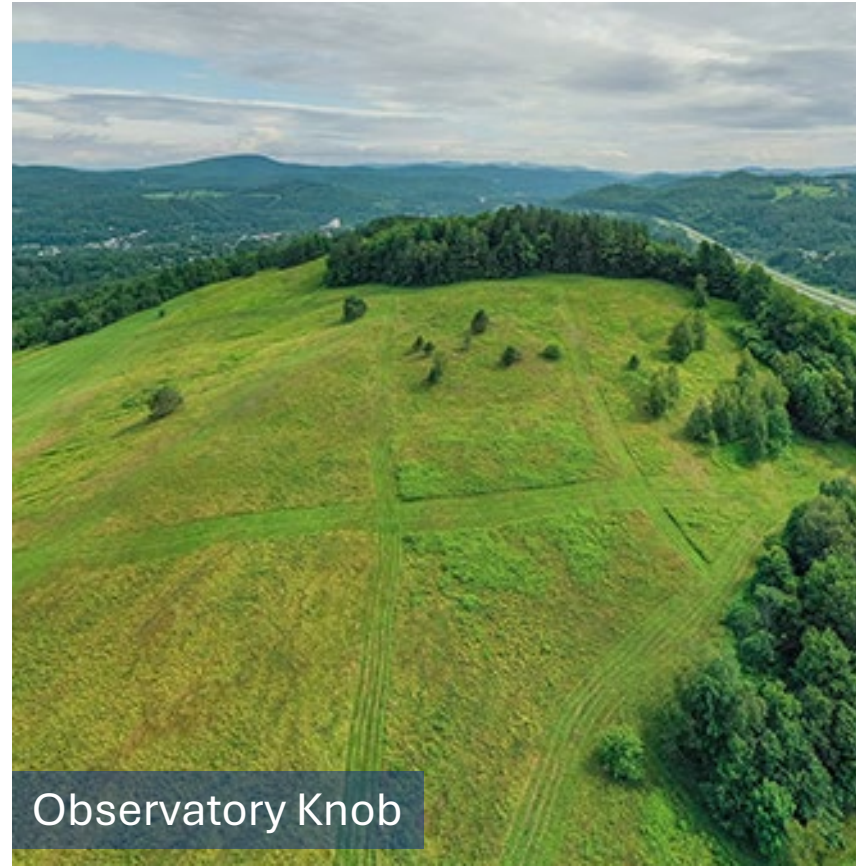
Shaftsbury Town Line

# Dual Goal Impact



## Dual Goal Projects in Shaftsbury

# Dual Goal Impact



## Dual Goal Projects in St. Johnsbury



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# VHCB All-time Results\*

State Investment: \$552M | Leverage: \$2.4B



**16,335** permanently affordable homes  
(rental & homeownership)



**822 farms conserved**  
across 175,755 acres



**278,741 acres conserved**  
natural areas, forestland & recreational lands



**87 historic preservation projects**



**1,300 working lands businesses served**

Camp DREAM, Fletcher

\*Since inception through June 30, 2024



Jim Jeffords State Forest, Mendon/Shrewsbury

## Conservation & Other Programs

- Recreational Lands, Working Lands, Forests, and Natural Areas Conservation
- Historic Preservation
- Water Quality
- VHCB AmeriCorps
- Farm & Forest Viability Program
- Rural Economic Development Initiative
- Land Access & Opportunity Board

# Natural Area Conservation Programs

- **Municipal Lands:** conservation of town forests, parks, and recreational areas
- **Private Forests:** protection of working forests to ensure sustainable forestry practices, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection
- **Non-Profit Lands:** collaborations with land trusts and non-profits to protect ecologically significant natural areas, foster biodiversity & strengthen community engagement
- **State-Owned Lands:** state agencies conserve lands of ecological, historical, or recreational importance



Arlington Town Forest



Willoughby Peaks, Westmore



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Maidstone Bends, Brunswick

## Conservation Easements

- **Land Protection:** permanent restrictions on development of the land
- **Flexible Agreements:** landowners retain ownership and can customize easements based on personal preferences and funding requirements
- **Financial Benefits:** easement donations can provide tax benefits, and selling an easement may yield financial compensation
- **Long-Term Stewardship:** qualified organizations monitor and enforce easements to ensure compliance and preservation in perpetuity
- **Legacy Planning:** easements can be donated during a landowner's lifetime or within nine months after their death, providing financial and conservation benefits for heirs while fulfilling the landowner's preservation goals



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# Flood Resilience



**Water Street River Park, Northfield**



**Seminary Street, Barre**



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# Energy Equity



## Design standards that meet and exceed state building energy standards

- Allow multi-family buildings to utilize off-site net metering for solar
- Enhance energy efficiency incentives for affordable housing to better align with costs

McKnight Lane, Waltham

# Farmland Conservation

When 70 acres of cropland went up for sale in Waitsfield, conservation facilitated a generational transfer to Dave DeFreest of **DeFreest Farms**, a local dairy farm undergoing a period of expansion.

## Project Highlights:

- 63 acres of prime agricultural soil.
- 10,000 feet of 50' buffers on the Mad River.
- 38 acres of Mad River frontage
- 8 acres of riparian protections
- 6 acres of permanently retired cropland
- Over a mile of public trails - extension of the Mad River Path

# Farmland Conservation

Becca Knouss, Bennington resident and owner/operator of **The Goat Project**, used conservation funding and business planning support through the VHCBC Farm and Forest Viability Program to expand her operation by adding an on-site creamery.

## Project Highlights:

- 61 acres of prime and statewide agricultural soils.
- 33 acres of managed forest.
- 5 acres of wetlands.
- 50' riparian buffers along tributaries of the Brown's Brook.

- Financially supports farmers in diversifying their operation, succession planning, or making critical infrastructure improvements
- Enhances farmland affordability through the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value
- Includes extra levels of protection on surface waters, historically significant infrastructure, archeological resources, or other unique natural features
- Encourages collaboration and ongoing support from partners, agencies, and community members



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# Farm & Forest Viability Program



Sunday Bell Farm, Danville

- In-depth, individualized business assistance
- Succession planning, financial management, access to capital, land search and access, bookkeeping, improving profitability
- 108 clients in 2024 represented \$42 million in economic activity and over 300 jobs
- 36% average increase in profitability

# Farmland Conservation



C&K Butler Beef, Middlebury

- 128-acre hay farm in Middlebury conserved in 2022
- Farm transfer to the next generation – Calihan and Kristen Butler
- 78% of the land is state important soils
- VHCB Viability clients

# VHCB Housing Impacts since 2020\*

4,964 households served (rental & homeownership)

Total VHCB investment: \$377.4M → Total leverage: \$680.6M

## RENTAL

2,303 total units  
1,925 new units  
694 homes for unhoused Vermonters

## SHELTER

24 shelters served total  
10 new shelters  
571 beds  
269 new beds total

## HOMEOWNERSHIP

389 households supported  
169 new construction  
single-family homeownership units

## ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

384 households received accessibility improvements

## MOBILE HOME COMMUNITIES

27 infill units  
944 lots in 11 communities

## FARMWORKER HOUSING

59 repair projects  
6 replacement projects  
237 farmworkers to be served

## RECOVERY RESIDENCES

4 projects  
59 residents benefitted

## LEAD ABATEMENT

77 households served  
58 apartments  
19 single-family homes

\*January 1, 2020 – December 31, 2024



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# VHCB Housing Programs

- Home Ownership
- Manufactured Home Communities
- Multi-Family Rental Housing
- Home Accessibility Improvements
- Career Technical Education (CTE) Program
- Farmworker Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Recovery Residences
- Shelter Improvement and Expansion

**16,335 homes  
across all 14 Vermont counties**



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East Montpelier Habitat Home



Bennington Habitat Home with TNC



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# Smart Growth



Canal Street Veteran Housing, Winooski



Cambrian Rise, Burlington

# A Conservation Vision for Vermont

**Act 59 of 2023, The Community Resilience and Biodiversity Protection Act, set forth a vision to maintain an ecologically functional landscape that:**

- Sustains biodiversity
- Maintains landscape connectivity
- Supports watershed health
- Promotes climate resilience
- Supports working farms and forests
- Provides opportunities for recreation
- Supports historic settlement patterns



Pownal Town Forest



Green River Reservoir, Hyde Park



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# THANK YOU

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