

Installment One: Everyone is part of "Housing"

Hello Thetford,

Did you know that starting today our neighbors to the east (NH) will be promoting Housing Week? This aligns nicely with positive momentum currently experienced by the Thetford Housing Committee. I am not a member of the Committee but have been attending the meetings and will provide this first installment in a series of Housing posts which will occur on the listserv and Facebook this week.

Let's talk about Housing; create a real narrative where all are welcome to participate!

Maybe a good place to begin the discussion is to ask, "What IS meant by "Housing"?"

For me the term "Housing" is quite sterile. Perhaps this works well in the world of politics or on the nightly news. What is this term really getting at? For me, I like to think about a Home.

My second grader recently mentioned to me the requirements for survival - air, water, food, and shelter. A shelter, or "Home" as I prefer, is a basic necessity.

Of course, Home can have different detailed meanings to different people. For some it might be that place you visit between work hours, and for others it might be the new workplace. Or it might be a place you go to see your parents. Maybe it is just one stop along the path of one's future. Some might think of Home as a place to plant a garden. Some might think of Home as a place to raise a family. Some might think of Home as a place to grow old. Yet others might think of Home simply as a place to rest a weary head after a long day.

Whatever your defining details are for a Home, I believe there is a common thread of security. At Home you should probably feel relaxed, free to be yourself, and safe.

The problem is that many communities do not have sufficient housing or homes. Many cannot afford homes, and this jeopardizes our people > workforce > business > economic development and prosperity. And housing is not just about business, but also about engaging and effective schools and access to vital services. Housing is about community development.

Thetford has an opportunity to help and benefit from the current housing situation.

What is your definition of Housing or a Home?

Do you have thoughts on how Thetford should posture itself in this question of Housing?

Are you aware that one third of households in the Upper Connecticut River Valley are "cost-burdened" (i.e., spending more than 30% of their income on housing)?

Share your thoughts, become part of the conversation, and stay tuned for the upcoming installments.

Damien Cushman

## Installment 2 -- Why Housing Matters

Hello! In this second installment of our weeklong Housing related posts, I'm writing about Why Housing Matters.

Like a lot of community volunteers, I've spent time with various human service agencies trying to make lives and communities better. A frustrating thing for lots of volunteers is the feeling that not enough of their efforts produce sustainable, long-lasting effects. Housing is one of those efforts that, if done well, can produce generational positive change for individuals and communities.

Study after study shows us that affordable housing is essential to strong, vibrant families and communities. When families pay more than a third of their incomes for rent, they have less for food, healthcare, education, and disposable income expenses that add to a rich quality of life.

However, having a decent, stable, affordable home has been shown to be more than just about shelter. It provides important benefits for children's socio-emotional development and well-being and has profound health effects for people of all ages. There is ample evidence that unplanned residential moves are harmful to children, as they disrupt important relationships and force them to move schools. But, secure homes serve as critical havens for families and children, providing them with a safe place to retreat, rest and restore.

Homes also provide an important platform for economic success while the people they shelter provide businesses with the required diversity of workers they need to thrive and grow.

Homes come together to form neighborhoods and communities and there is very strong evidence that neighborhoods matter. When you talk to people about what they like about where they live, they almost always lead with, "There's such a nice sense of community here." Communities also largely determine access to schools and other critical institutions, shape exposure to violence, and offer access to critical social networks. Consider your childhood and how your neighborhoods and wider community shaped your activities, relationships, and world view.

Tomorrow you'll hear about Housing and the Economy. Thanks for reading!

Cathee Daum Clement

Many thanks to the following for the information included above

- <https://www.macfound.org/programs/housing/>

<https://localhousingsolutions.org/bridge/why-housing-matters/>

### Installment 3 -- Housing and the Economy

For the third installment of Housing Week posts, we want to highlight the connection between economic vitality and housing.

Early last Sunday morning, a day after talking to lots of Thetford residents at the Recycling Center about the work of the Thetford Housing Committee, I spent some time thinking about this post while glancing at the Valley News. The timing was perfect as there, on page one, was an article titled "Lack of Housing Hinders Hiring" -- the most recent piece the newspaper has published describing the impacts of our regional housing shortage.

The ripple effects of high housing costs and shortage of units are widespread. Small locally owned businesses and large employers alike are forced to adjust their hours and their operations because they are short-staffed. A listserv post is not the place, nor am I the person, to write an analysis of how we got here and all possible approaches to change course. My goal is to stress how the situation affects every one of us whether we are looking for housing or not. When we want to pick up a prescription, but the pharmacy is closed because they are short-handed; when a needed emergency oil delivery is delayed because there aren't enough drivers; when our work schedule must be changed because the child care provider doesn't have coverage to comply with regulations; when the visiting home health aide isn't available as often as we need when recuperating from surgery. These are just a few examples; I am sure we each can think of others.

We all want Thetford, and our region, to thrive. Working collectively and creatively to solve the housing problem is an essential step.

Tomorrow you'll hear about Advocacy.

Thanks,

Sarah Martel

## Installment 4 -- Advocacy

This fourth installment of Housing Week introduces a short listing of advocacy resources related to housing needs.

There are many ways to advocate for housing. Some advocates volunteer in the community and in town government, while others are neighbors able to rent space on their property for affordable rates.

Housing advocacy supports are available at lots of levels: local, state and federal. Here in Thetford *The Thetford Housing Committee* is part of the town government and meets the first Wednesday of each month. Their mission states: *The Thetford Housing Committee plans to focus on promoting housing that supports current residents and people who wish to join our community and are dedicated to improving housing choices for residents.*

At the regional level, *Vital Communities*, a nonprofit, advocates to strengthen Upper Valley networks by bringing people together to create programming for positive change. A related organization, *Thriving Communities*, coalesces statewide organizations to promote “affordability and inclusiveness as a mainstay of flourishing communities.” They’ve created the *Housing Committee Toolkit* which includes a “First Steps” plan for addressing the housing crunch. The *Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission* (TROC) with their *Keys to the Valley* initiative offers educational events and a “toolbox of strategies and policies” to promote affordable homes.

Two exceptional housing advocacy websites at the state level are *The Vermont Department of Housing Coalition* (VAHC), and the *State of Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development* ([accd.vermont.gov](http://accd.vermont.gov)). ACCD provides multiple programs and grants for housing, community and economic development.

Lastly, the federal government supplies funding streams for affordable housing with tax credits and rental assistance programs. *The National Housing Trust Fund* is worth exploring since it has been mobilizing advocates across the country since 1974 and is committed to “good housing policy.”

Most importantly, listening to and understanding our neighbors means we can create proposals and projects that are relevant and practical for our town. This work makes our community stronger.

Pippa Drew

## Installment 5 -- Successes and solutions

This week, the Thetford Housing Committee has been posting stories and information to raise awareness of our region's housing situation. Today's theme is successes and solutions.

In our own backyard, COVER Home Repair helps people with improvement projects such as weatherization and accessibility projects so they can stay in their homes. Twin Pines Housing Trust builds and provides affordable housing. Communities such as Chester, Brattleboro, and the Mad River Valley, have developed creative solutions that we could consider adapting for Thetford. Businesses throughout the Twin States realize they need to be involved, too.

On the town level, the foundation is being built for different approaches to alleviating the housing crunch. Thetford's Planning Commission is updating the town zoning bylaws with assistance from Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission. During their review, the group is consciously focusing on changes that make housing solutions easier to develop in ways consistent with our Town Plan. Our Town Manager is collaborating with Thetford's water districts to submit a grant proposal for a study of their respective infrastructures and capacities. Understanding water and septic access is essential. And representatives from Fairlee, West Fairlee, and Thetford have come together as the Tri-Town Housing Committee to share ideas and work together.

Throughout the week we have posted that housing is about "home," why housing matters, how the shortage touches all of us, and ways to be involved. We look forward to continuing the conversation at forums scheduled in the coming months.

Thanks for your time.

Sarah Martel, Thetford Housing Committee