

BELMONT HOUSING TRUST

Creation of the Belmont Housing Trust, Inc. was authorized by Town Meeting in 1999. The Trust was then created by special legislation enacted by the Massachusetts state legislature (Chapter 126 of the Acts of 1999). The purposes of the Trust include, amongst other things: (1) to investigate and implement alternatives for the provision of and providing affordable housing for persons of low, moderate and middle income; (2) to enhance the Town of Belmont, Massachusetts and lives of its residents, and so lessen the burdens of government, by promoting and undertaking the development and maintenance of affordable housing for the benefit of persons of low and moderate income within Belmont and adjacent communities; and (3) to foster and promote community-wide interest and -involvement in the problems associated with the under-development of affordable housing, and toward that goal, to sponsor and participate in public symposia and discussions involving governmental officials, real property developers, and community organizations and institutions; and (4) to assist parties in obtaining financial support for affordable housing projects from state and federal agencies, foundations and other sources; and by any other means, to cooperate with, encourage and contribute to the efforts of parties in the accomplishment of affordable housing purposes.

In April 2005, the Housing Trust presented a Request for Proposals to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) through which to select a developer for the 1.34 acres of land donated to the Town as part of the McLean Hospital redevelopment agreement. After interviewing five potential development proposals, in July, the Trust recommended and the BOS adopted the recommendation to choose Affirmative Investments, a Boston-based developer. Affirmative Investments will develop 40 units of affordable rental housing. Affirmative Investments, working in collaboration with the Trust, submitted a funding proposal for state and federal dollars in September 2006.



Work begins on a "Habitat for Humanity" home at 315 Brighton Street

Photo: Roger Colton

In September 2006, the Housing Trust, working in collaboration with Habitat for Humanity—Greater Boston, broke ground on a single family Habitat for Humanity home at 315 Brighton Street. The Belmont home is the first Habitat for Humanity—Greater Boston home to be developed in a suburban community. At the groundbreaking, Habitat introduced the Mei family who will become the owners of the new home. As part of the development of the home, the Mei family is required to devote at least 400 hours of "sweat equity" to the construction of the home. The Habitat—Belmont home is being supported through the volunteer labor of Belmont individuals and organizations, as well as through the donations of funds, goods and services by Belmont businesses and the Belmont faith community.

In March 2006, the Belmont Housing Trust hosted its annual affordable housing forum for Town Meeting Members and other interested members of the public. The forum explored elements of density, in a forum titled "Visualizing Density." Presentations were made by Julie Campoli, a landscape architect, land planner and principal of Terra Firma Urban Design in Burlington, Vermont, and Alex MacLean, a photographer, trained architect and principal of Landslides Aerial Photography in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In April 2006, the Belmont Housing Trust closed the books on its development of housing units at B Street. The Trust, in collaboration with Waltham Alliance to Create Housing (WATCH), a nonprofit housing developer, constructed four units of new housing, three of which were affordable. Constructed using state and federal funds, the units were occupied in the summer of 2005 with financial reporting completed in 2006.

Throughout 2006, the Housing Trust remained involved with the comprehensive permit hearings before the Belmont Zoning Board of Appeals regarding the proposed Acorn Park development at the Belmont Uplands. The Trust focused on the issues that fell within both its expertise and institutional mission, addressing technical issues involving the affordable housing units. Agreements were reached with the developer regarding the treatment of mandatory fees in determinations of affordability, along with requirements that affordable units were to mirror the same size and quality as market rate units. Issues remaining open at the end of the year involved the payment of utility allowances for home energy costs and the unit mix.

Throughout 2006, the Housing Trust continued to represent Belmont in tri-community discussions involving Belmont, Waltham and Lexington regarding the development, marketing, and occupancy of affordable housing units at the Avalon Bay development at the old Metropolitan State Hospital grounds. The Town of Belmont is slated to receive 30 units of affordable housing in the new Met State housing development.

In December 2006, the Housing Trust met with the Board of Selectmen to propose convening a Community Preservation Act (CPA) Exploratory Committee. Through the CPA, the Town of Belmont would raise local funds through a property tax surcharge, which funds would then be matched by state dollars. These funds can be used for three primary purposes: open space acquisition, affordable housing, and historic preservation, along with the acquisition of recreational lands. The Board of Selectmen, while indicating its decision did not imply a necessary endorsement of enactment of the CPA for Belmont, agreed to appoint an exploratory committee with representatives of different stakeholders and neighborhoods through the Town. A final recommendation is to be completed for action at a fall 2007 Town Meeting.

Throughout 2006, the Trust promoted its participation in the American Dream Downpayment Initiative (ADDI) Program. The West Metro HOME Consortium pooled its allocation of ADDI funds for FY 2005 and anticipates receiving subsequent allocations in future fiscal years. Belmont was the first Consortium member to access these funds. The funding is used to provide downpayment assistance to enable low-income households to purchase housing units in any of the Consortium Member communities at an affordable price. Recipients of ADDI assistance are eligible for up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for downpayment assistance, which is provided in the form of a non-interest bearing loan and must be repaid to the ADDI fund pool at the time of resale of the property by the homebuyer.

Throughout the year, the Belmont Housing Trust continued its work with the Belmont faith-based community to raise funds for, and disburse funds from, the Belmont Affordable Shelter Fund, a fund providing financial assistance to Town residents who face crisis situations threatening their ability to stay in their homes. Working in collaboration with Belmont's outreach worker in the Town's Department of Health, throughout calendar year 2006, the BASF distributed more than \$5,000 through grants to more than 20 Belmont families. Most grants went to pay home heating costs, with a fewer number used to pay past-due rent and electric light bills.

Respectfully submitted,
Roger Colton, Chairman