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Building Homes Together Campaign Releases Progress Report

*Affordable housing production picks up in 2019, but the need persists;
Coronavirus has an impact, and future housing development looks anemic*

Burlington, Vermont – The Building Homes Together Campaign, formed in 2016 to encourage production of housing in Chittenden County, released its annual progress report that showed continued overall success in new housing being created, but a persistent lack of affordable homes.

“Over the first four years of the campaign, we have seen steady development of housing even as we have not kept pace building housing for those having trouble making ends meet,” said Charlie Baker, Executive Director of the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, which along with the Champlain Housing Trust and Evernorth (formerly Housing Vermont) leads the campaign.

The campaign, supported by over a hundred local and state officials, nonprofits, businesses, and individuals, set a five year goal of 3,500 new homes in Chittenden County with 20% of them permanently affordable. This amounts to an annual target of 700 overall homes with 140 affordable; the average over the first four years is 787 homes, and only 112 of them affordable.

“We did see a spike in 2019 of new affordable homes with 169 built, but that followed three years of missing our target,” added Nancy Owens, co-President of Evernorth. “The increase in 2019 demonstrates that new capital from the Housing for All Revenue Bond passed in the State of Vermont in 2017 was essential to meet this critical housing need, but it hasn’t been enough.”

Other economic, social and public health factors are in play. “While 2020 has been consumed by the coronavirus and calls for racial justice, it’s also been a year where safe, decent and affordable housing has been even more obviously lacking in our communities. We need to do better,” said Brenda Torpy, CEO of the Champlain Housing Trust, noting that at one point this summer there were 2,000 homeless Vermonters living in hotels and motels.

In fact, projections on the number of homes that will become available in 2020 look grim, according to data compiled by Allen, Minor and Brooks. They estimate 255 apartments will be completed, though these projections were made before CHT’s planned motel conversion into 68 apartments was understood, and do not include single family homes. Still, the total of 323 is significantly below the average number of homes added over the past four years.

“While housing production has been steady, we are still not at a good vacancy rate and must build even more housing to get to a healthy housing market in Chittenden County. We call upon all policy makers – local, state and federal – to make housing, especially for low-income households, a priority as we move forward. For the future of learning, health, the economy, racial justice, and more, housing must be at the center of a response as we look to 2021 and beyond,” the three organizations said in a joint statement.

The Building Homes Together campaign was initiated by the Champlain Housing Trust, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and Housing Vermont, now Evernorth, in 2016. The campaign’s goal is to increase the production of housing, setting a target of 3,500 new homes created over next five years, with 700 of them permanently affordable. Over 100 local and state officials signed on to the campaign. More information can be found at <http://www.ecosproject.com/building-homes-together/>.