

—Slug:.....COMM-0848.bratt.housing\_report  
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—For section.....News  
—Format.....News - byline and dateline  
—Dateline.....Brattleboro  
—Article Number:.....42909

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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

G, please see email. I took out the Susan Fillion reference but can easily put it back with a little more information.

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**HEADLINE ELEMENTS:**

#####BEGIN HED#####

1 More housing is available in the region. But can renters  
2 afford it?

#####END HED#####

#####BEGIN SUBHED#####

3 One real estate agent sees less demand for apartments as  
4 'the availability of jobs has changed'; WWHT has made changes  
5 to fill housing more expeditiously

#####END SUBHED#####

6 TEXT BODY:

#####BEGIN TEXT#####

7 Opportunities for available "workforce" housing seem to  
8 have taken a positive turn in town. But there's a problem. Not  
9 many are applying to rent them.

10 "It's an interesting dynamic because a few months ago —  
11 four to six months ago — that was not the case," says Susan

12 Bellville, principal at Bellville Realty. "There were no available  
13 units. I wasn't putting anything out because I would have been  
14 inundated [with calls from potential renters]."

15 Bellville, who also manages five properties with a total of  
16 36 units, watches the real estate market assiduously. About a  
17 month ago she says there were at least 33 available apartments in  
18 Brattleboro that she considers "workforce" housing.

19 The term has come into vogue with town planners,  
20 government, and organizations concerned with housing policy or  
21 advocacy, as well as real estate agents, developers, and lenders.

22 "Workforce housing" can refer to any form of housing,  
23 including ownership of single- or multi-family homes and  
24 occupation of rental units. It is generally understood to mean  
25 affordable housing for households with earned income that is  
26 otherwise insufficient to secure quality housing reasonably near  
27 the occupants' workplace.

28 Bellville sets the bar for workforce housing at \$1,200 to  
29 \$1,800 per month for one- and two-bedroom units.

30 "Generally, what owners are looking for is three times  
31 rent for income to qualify for occupancy," she explains.

32 That means a renter would have to be earning at least  
33 \$50,000 annually — a guideline as to how much annual salary  
34 should be in hand to manage such rental costs.

35 From there being 33 apartments available here at the  
36 beginning of September, by New Year's Day there were still 27  
37 listed on Zillow and other sites.

38 "I was getting no interest for two months, then modest  
39 interest, so I was curious why," says Bellville.

40 She says she checked and double-checked inventory, and  
41 "there were still 27 in town. That's a lot," she says.

42 "To find there are that many units available is interesting.  
43 We've got the housing, but not the people to take them up. From  
44 my perspective, it feels the income in Brattleboro isn't supporting  
45 workforces. The jobs aren't paying enough. But to have very few  
46 inquiries, it feels like there aren't that many people looking.

47        "Because I have such a broad-reaching sphere between  
48    rentals and sales, I pay attention to the dynamics of why people  
49    are here and leaving ... it's a puzzling time," she continues. "It's  
50    the cost of living here that's the problem."

51        Bellville thinks a potential 7% town operating budget  
52    increase is "too much for people who want to live in this  
53    community, and it makes it harder for rentals."

54        Adding to the cost, due to the size of some properties,  
55    dumpsters are needed — and Bellville says costs for those  
56    containers recently "just went up at least 10% across the board."

57        Generally, Bellville thinks "availability of jobs has  
58    changed."

59        "There aren't that many in the category of [earning]  
60    \$50,000-plus," she says. "We now have the housing for people to  
61    come here for the good-paying jobs, which seemed to be the  
62    battle cry for a long time [...] now we have the housing, but we  
63    don't have the good paying jobs."

## 64        **WWHT changes from waitlist**

### 65        **to notification list**

66        The Windham & Windsor Housing Trust (WWHT), which  
67    owns a number of workforce housing units in Brattleboro and in  
68    the region, no longer has a waiting list.

69        WWHT Executive Director Elizabeth Bridgewater says  
70    that's not because the demand for affordable housing has  
71    diminished. Rather, the Trust has changed its approach "to make  
72    the process more efficient and to open up the opportunity for  
73    more people to access our rental homes."

74        Bridgewater explains that about a year ago WWHT  
75    began transitioning from the waiting list mode to a "notification  
76    list to fill housing vacancies."

77        "The old wait list approach was very inefficient because  
78    many of the people who were on the list were not responsive  
79    when we had vacancies available, but the wait list policy

80 required us to reach out in the order people appeared on the list,"  
81 she says. "We found that we were sending out a lot of letters  
82 announcing vacancies, but the response was low."

83 A deeper look "revealed that some people had moved  
84 out of the area or they were not looking for housing at that  
85 particular time, or the vacant apartment didn't meet their needs,"  
86 she says.

87 "With the transition to a notification list, the process of  
88 getting the word out is more efficient, and vacancies are being  
89 filled faster," she adds.

90 Bridgewater describes the move as a "transition"  
91 deliberately, she says, because WWHT offered everyone who had  
92 been on a waitlist the chance to remain on it, keeping their same  
93 place in line. However, if they were unresponsive or declined an  
94 opportunity offered, they were removed from the waitlist and  
95 placed on the notification list.

96 "Over time, the number of people on the waitlist for any  
97 given property has declined and in most cases, we're now fully  
98 utilizing a notification list," she says.

99 The way the notification list works is that when a  
100 vacancy becomes available, WWHT sends a notification to  
101 everyone on the list. "We then review completed applications on  
102 a first-come, first-served basis. In addition to being more efficient,  
103 this new process has opened the door to people who may qualify  
104 to rent a home through the Housing Trust, but who assumed they  
105 would never get the opportunity because the waitlist was too  
106 long," says the director.

107 "The one exception to this approach is if there is a  
108 project-based voucher attached to the rental home," she adds. In  
109 these cases, the WWHT is still required to use a waitlist at the  
110 Brattleboro Housing Authority, which administers the voucher  
111 program.

112 The Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston has awarded  
113 \$47 million in grants, loans, and interest-rate subsidies through  
114 its Affordable Housing Program to support 49 affordable housing

115 initiatives in New England and beyond. These projects will create  
116 or preserve 1,532 rental and homeownership units for individuals  
117 and families earning up to 80% of the area median income.

118 As part of this funding round, Vermont received nearly  
119 \$3 million to fund 124 affordable housing units in Brandon,  
120 Brattleboro, Grand Isle, and Newport.

121 For the WWHT's Alice Holway affordable housing  
122 project, now under construction in Putney, buildings at 48 and  
123 50 Alice Holway Drive are nearly completed. In December,  
124 Bazin Brothers Trucking, from Westminster, dug a portion of Alice  
125 Holway Drive in order to connect the new complex to the town  
126 water system.

127 Applications to rent these apartments will be opened in  
128 the spring. If you are a Putney group, organization, school,  
129 business or other entity and would like applications on hand  
130 when leasing begins, email [mmajor@homemattershere.org](mailto:mmajor@homemattershere.org).

131 Anyone can sign up to receive notifications for WWHT's  
132 available apartments in Putney (Putney Landing, Noyes House,  
133 and Laura Plantz House) at [homemattershere.org/how-to-apply](http://homemattershere.org/how-to-apply).

## 134 **Tip of a trend?**

135 While WWHT's waitlist changes aren't related,  
136 Bridgewater says Bellville's hunch that folks can't afford  
137 "affordable housing" isn't wrong.

138 "I think Sue is onto a trend due to a number of factors,"  
139 Bridgewater says.

140 "In general, because of persistent inflation for the cost of  
141 basic goods, renters' budgets are being squeezed more than  
142 ever," she says. "And in Windham County, renter median income  
143 is much lower than those who own their homes."

144 According to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency's  
145 2025–2029 [Housing Needs Assessment](#), renter median income in  
146 Windham County was \$37,231, compared to owner median  
147 income of \$77,651.

148 Bridgewater says in addition, 74% of all households in  
149 Windham County have a household income of less than  
150 \$52,378.

151 The final factor: "Windham County has a higher  
152 percentage of households led by someone 65 and older than the  
153 rest of the state, and more often these households are single-  
154 person households," she says. "These trends point to a highly  
155 cost-burdened renter population that may not be able to afford  
156 market-rate housing.

157 "In addition, the cost to provide housing is more  
158 expensive than ever with large annual increases in property  
159 insurance, health care costs, and diminishing labor force. There is  
160 also the factor of the winter season, when folks don't tend to  
161 move as often so there is usually a buildup in inventory during  
162 this time."

## 163 **Board to talk housing Feb. 3**

164 Still, Selectboard member Amanda Ellis-Thurber feels  
165 optimistic that there's more available affordable housing.

166 "It sounds like in Brattleboro, at least, we may be moving  
167 out of the housing 'crisis,'" she says.

168 Her board colleague Oscar Heller, who is also a housing  
169 provider with five units on Elliot Street, says it's early to say for  
170 sure, "but if the rental market is loosening up, that's outstanding  
171 news."

172 "It may be a sign that recent pro-housing steps taken by  
173 the town may be taking effect," he says. "More available units  
174 leading to lower rents would be a huge help to Brattleboro, and I  
175 say that as a landlord who has certainly benefited from the tight  
176 housing market of the last few years."

177 He says that more apartment housing "leads to economic  
178 growth, workforce development, and attracting younger people  
179 who often prefer rentals."

180 "And, of course, more housing means less homelessness  
181 and less housing insecurity," Heller says. "I'll continue to monitor  
182 the housing situation with great interest and with hope."

183 The board is tentatively set to meet with town Planning  
184 Director Susan Fillion, who was not available at press time, on  
185 Feb. 3. Check out the WWHT notification list online at  
186 [homemattershere.org](http://homemattershere.org).

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