

## Report to the Town

Housing Authority FY 2011

### WAYLAND HOUSING AUTHORITY

As you likely know, the WHA provides, maintains, administers, and advocates for housing for low- and moderate-income people in Wayland. Our housing programs include Bent Park Elderly Housing; Cochituate Village Apartments Elderly Housing; Family Scattered Site Public Housing; and the Section 8 Voucher Rental Assistance Program, a federal program that pays rent to private landlords for qualified low-income tenants.

This year lacked the celebration of the 2010 WHA 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, but we certainly kept busy. The most notable change, as we anticipated in last year's report, was that the 56 units at our Bent Park complex were accepted into the federal portfolio by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Now, all of the Wayland Housing Authority's 111 apartments, 25 scattered site homes, and Section 8 rental vouchers are governed by HUD; the WHA no longer has housing units subject to state jurisdiction. By consolidating all of the programs under one authority, the WHA has been able to standardize and simplify its policies, accounting, budgeting, and overall administration.

The WHA accomplished several repairs and improvements at Bent Park to be eligible for federal consideration, so the property is in good condition. The Cochituate Village Apartments got a facelift and, more important, structural preservation as we re-pointed its circa 1910 façade. We are hopeful that our previous capital improvements and ongoing maintenance program enable us to keep our properties safe, clean, and in good condition as we adjust to shrinking funding from the federal government.

In a related matter, one of our biggest disappointments came when we received notice that because of cost cutting measures, HUD was discontinuing its funding of our successful Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program, through which participating Section 8 rental assistance recipients received guidance and support in taking charge of their lives and working toward independence from public subsidy. Our FSS Coordinator, Katherine Provost, helped several tenants find their way, whether through returning to school or finding employment. We believe that our successful program should not only have been continued but opened up to public housing tenants, the Wayland program should have been a model for other housing authorities, and initiatives like the FSS program are essential to address the systemic issues that keep people dependent on government subsidies. Despite the lack of HUD funding, the WHA continues to maintain FSS services for existing participants. The WHA has re-applied for 2011 FSS grants to make the program available to more tenants.

Many tenants would say that the Board's most significant action was to ban smoking in WHA properties, including individual apartments, a decision that would take effect immediately with new tenants and upon lease renewal with existing tenants. The WHA was one of the first housing authorities in the nation to adopt a comprehensive smoking ban. How we will enforce the ban, and whether the courts will support this policy if we must act against a non-compliant tenant, remain to be seen. The WHA is designating a smoking area and erecting a small structure at each of its apartment complexes to provide smokers with protection from the elements. The WHA is also

providing smoking cessation programs and information and resources for smokers who seek to quit smoking. The WHA has already noticed an improvement in air quality in the buildings since the announcement of the smoking ban almost a year ago.

During the past year, we had some personnel changes. We welcomed new bookkeeper Betsy Roszko after the departure of longtime WHA employee Cindy Mills. The WHA is grateful to personnel from nearby housing authorities who helped us through a staff shortage stemming from an employee's ill health.

Our other significant change is that Charlie Raskin, a WHA Commissioner for nearly two decades, member of the Community Preservation Committee, and tireless advocate for affordable housing, has moved from Wayland and is no longer a member of the Board. Charlie received a "Local Housing Heroes Award" from the Massachusetts Housing Partnership, presented to him by Greg Bialecki, the Massachusetts Secretary for Housing and Economic Development. We are fortunate to have had Charlie's dedicated service for so long; the cause of increasing the number of affordable housing units in Wayland loses one of its most ardent and passionate advocates. We thank him and wish him all the best in his new community.

The WHA is pleased to see Habitat for Humanity MetroWest/Greater Worcester moving forward with its project on land donated by the Town on Stonebridge Road. The plan anticipates groundbreaking in April 2012 and construction volunteers will be welcomed then. In the meantime, because Habitat projects are built by the community, there are a number of opportunities for townspeople to be involved, including outreach to the town and communities of faith, fundraising, and planning. The WHA Board invites interested people to contact local project committee chair Beth Rust at 978-639-3388 or [rustb@sudbury.ma.us](mailto:rustb@sudbury.ma.us). We also ask for your support at Town Meeting when there are requests to appropriate Community Preservation Funds for this housing. It is exciting to have a viable local non-profit's affordable housing initiative gaining momentum.

Elsewhere in the community, the WHA is supporting a study of the Dudley Pond area with the hope of confirming its suitability for construction of affordable housing units on Town-owned land there. In the late 1970s, the Town Meeting authorized construction of up to 75 affordable units; though we would not seek to create so many, we are optimistic that the Town will honor its longstanding commitment to create new affordable housing units in the area. We believe that this area can support well-planned housing, the Town can take advantage of the process to address septic-related problems with existing private homes, and land can be designated for preservation and passive recreation. WHA Commissioner Russell Ashton represents the WHA and housing interests on the committee.

Finally, the WHA is engaged in finding ways to encourage and perpetuate the creation of affordable housing in our community. One possible solution lies in the adoption of an affordable housing trust, with its members appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Another approach may be through an independent non-profit organization dedicated to development and preservation of affordable housing in Wayland. We look forward to the townspeople's examination and discussion of our options, and we appreciate your continuing support of the WHA and affordable housing.

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