

Housing Coordinator

“If you want something new, you have to stop doing something old”

– Peter F. Drucker

The City of Berlin has made some tremendous strides on the Housing front and sometimes it's good to take a step back and reflect on where we've been to remind us of how far we've come, and to keep us focused on where we're going. Following are some of the key highlights and accomplishments of the past 10 years.

2005 - The position of Housing Coordinator came into being ten years ago on September 20, 2004 with few models to follow and many challenges facing the city. The groundwork was laid to begin inventorying and cataloguing burned and dilapidated buildings, assessing the backlog of tax deeded properties, studying the underlying causes and developing a plan of action. The beginning of the housing initiative was underway to remove/demolish blighted buildings.

2006 - A revamping of both the Housing and Code Enforcement ordinances got underway, providing additional tools for enforcement; and two full-time inspectors were hired to inspect commercial rental properties. Key state legislation was crafted to expedite the tax deeding process and allow the City to lien a portion of insurance proceeds to insure that owners, not the city, are responsible for burned properties. Although passed in the State Senate, the city would continue to push for approval through the House. Assessment of our current housing stock became a key focus and Berlin partnered with AHEAD (Affordable Housing Education & Development) to initiate an assessment of 820 properties.

2007 – Now able to effectively provide statistics that reflected the housing needs in Berlin, we became the recipient of our first CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) to implement the Berlin Revitalization Project, an initiative that provided assistance to qualified homeowners for badly needed repairs. With a surge of fires in 2007, demolition activity was

redirected from blighted buildings to burned properties. Aggressive tax-deeding for non-payment of taxes continued with 18 properties taken by the City.

2008 – The amendment of the NH RSA 155B (Hazardous and Dilapidated Buildings) gave the City and Fire Department additional “teeth” to recoup costs for fire damaged buildings and implement a more aggressive timeline for clean-up. A dramatic reduction of properties taken by tax deed (only 5 in 2008), appeared to reflect the aggressive stance by Berlin to follow through on delinquent tax payers.

2009 – Having exhibited their commitment to addressing blighted properties, Berlin finally received recognition from several state and federal agencies and received \$5,300,000 in grants to continue the removal of blighted and burned properties and address the rehabilitation of target neighborhoods in partnership with a private developer.

2010 - The influx of additional funding allowed great strides in 2010 for the Housing Initiative. Neighborhood Stabilization Funds provided for the demolition of 11 buildings and a partnership with TKB Properties, LLC for the acquisition and rehabilitation of 14 other properties in key neighborhoods. With the successful revitalization of 25 homes under the Berlin Neighborhood Revitalization project, the City competed for and obtained an additional \$500,000 in CDBG funds with the goal of assisting 35 additional homeowners. Brownfields Assessment Grant Funds of \$200,000 allowed the City to begin the environmental assessment of key properties such as the former Notre Dame High School and Norge Village building (former McCready Dairy).

2011 – The dramatic transformation of lower Champlain Street and upper School Street was a testament to the partnerships established in 2010 and brought further attention from Senator Shaheen, Governor Lynch and others throughout the state. Strategies implemented in Berlin were becoming a model throughout the region and state. These projects also provided badly needed work for local craftsmen and

introduced newer methods of energy conservation to Berlin and throughout the region. On the environmental front, with work well underway at the former Notre Dame High School, the City competed for and obtained \$400,000 in funding from NHDES/USEPA AARA for the continued clean-up of asbestos, lead, and PCB's at Notre Dame.

2012 - Both challenges and successes marked 2012. The City obtained 38 properties through Tax Deed: the largest number in its' history. Meanwhile progress continued with both demolitions and rehabilitation under NSP, with now 23 properties (53 units) rehabilitated and 14 blighted properties demolished.

2013 - On the Tax Deed front, the city continues to see high numbers with 31 additional properties taken in 2013. The upside has been the ability to transform some key locations in the city. The south entrance to the city was dramatically improved with the completion of a landscaped patio area and additional municipal parking at 3 Glen Avenue. The present pocket park at the corner of Mason and Granite Street was expanded to include a children's playground and community gardens for the neighborhood.

2014 - Some encouraging highlights and statistics:

- Significant reduction in properties taken through tax deed - **only 13 in 2014**
- Demolitions to date : **254 units plus 40 additional units projected for 2015**
- De-densification: **26 lots** (former demolished properties) sold to abutters
- Rehabilitation: **159 units** (with potential for a total of 207+ units by the end of FY15)
 - 63 homeowner units –CDBG grants (+ 35 units for FY15)
 - 53 units - Neighborhood Stabilization Funds
 - 43 units - City property sales (+13 units for FY15 – Bartlett School)
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The shining star of 2014 is the final completion of the former Notre Dame High School scheduled for this December. Eleven

applications have already been processed for the 33 living units. The combined efforts of the City of Berlin, Project Rescue Notre Dame, EPA, NH Dept. of Environmental Services, Tri-County Community Action, NH Housing Finance Authority, Community Development Finance Authority,



Northern Forest and AHEAD, have been a testament to what great partnerships can accomplish. I am reminded though, that the impetus behind every great project is a great leader. The City of Berlin and I will always be indebted to the vision of Andre Caron whose love for the City and this project in particular, helped motivate and guide all those involved!

Respectfully submitted,

Linda White

Housing Coordinator