

# New programs aim to ease local workforce housing shortage

By Tom Ayres  
Senior Staff Writer

The Woodstock Community Trust (WCT) and the Woodstock Economic Development Commission (EDC) are implementing two separate initiatives aimed at easing the workforce housing shortage in the region.

Modeled after “Vail Indeed,” a successful housing program operating in the Colorado resort community, the WCT’s “Local Deeds” effort has already helped two new home buyers with down payments in exchange for a deed restriction. During this initial pilot phase, the WCT will consider helping home buyers with down payments of up to 16 percent of the market value on a single family, multifamily or condominium property in move-in-ready condition. The down payment is in exchange for a deed restriction that transfers with ownership and permanently requires that one occupant works or will work locally for a business or organization within a 16-mile radius of the Woodstock Town Hall. Short-term rentals are strictly prohibited.

On the EDC front, the commission is kicking off a new “Lease to Locals” rental incentive program in collaboration with Placemate, a California-based consulting and placement agency whose mission is to help local employees secure housing in tourism-based communities. Placemate currently runs rental incentive programs in seven significant tourist destinations, including Vail and Breckenridge in Colorado; Truckee, South Lake Tahoe, and Placer County in California; Sun Valley in Idaho; and Nantucket in Massachusetts.

## The WCT’s “Local Deeds” program

Dechen Sirianni, the human resources manager at the Woodstock Farmers Market, is one of the two new home buyers who’ve already taken advantage of the WCT’s recently

established “Local Deeds” program. He brings the perspective of both a new homeowner and an employer to the question of making housing more accessible and affordable for everyday working people in Woodstock and the Upper Valley.

“I kind of knew about the work of Jill Davies and the Woodstock Community Trust through the work that one of the WCT programs, The HUB, did with many of our employees recovering from the financial impacts of the flood last summer,” Sirianni said Monday morning. Early this year, Sirianni said, Davies reached out to him and said, ‘Here’s this program that I’d like you to consider telling your employees about, because one of the goals of the program is to keep local workers in the area and build the working class through providing them with affordable housing. I met with Jill for a cup of coffee, she told



**“It took me from a place of scarcity to a place of thinking about abundance. For the first time, I didn’t have to use all of my savings on something. It’s a very human part of this story to note that if you use up all of your savings, you are one emergency away from poverty.”**

— Local Deeds participant Dechen Sirianni

me more about the ‘Local Deeds’ program, and I said, ‘Jill, the person you are describing is exactly what I am going through — I’m going through the negotiations on a house.’ And she said, ‘We could totally use you as a participant and then you’ll have first-hand knowledge of how the program works.’”

Sirianni, who is single, closed on his new home in Bridgewater Corners on March 4. “It could not have been easier,” he said enthusiastically when he spoke with the Standard earlier this week. “It was really wonderful. They did pay for 16% of my down payment, which really helped seal the deal. It allows me to do so many other things financially — it took me from a place of scarcity to a place of thinking about abundance. For the first time, I didn’t have to use all of my savings on something. It’s a very human part of this story to note that if you use up all of your savings, you are one emergency away from poverty.”

The Woodstock Farmers Market human resources manager added that he was particularly thankful for the support that financially able people in the community have shown for the WCT housing initiative. “We have so many people in our community who need this kind of assistance and so many people in our community who have the resources to provide this kind of assistance,” said Sirianni. “The spirit with which they want to provide it is just wonderful. I’m hopeful that many of my other employees and coworkers who are in a position to purchase homes will consider it.”

Davies said Sunday that in addition to the one other local resident who has been helped by the “Local Deeds” program thus far, four other applicants are in the pipeline. “Three of the four are school teachers within the Mountain Views School District, which is exactly the kind of working people that are at the center of our mission,” Davies commented.

If you are interested in purchasing a home in the area — specifically including the communities of Barnard, Bridgewater, Hartland, Plymouth, Pomfret, and Woodstock — and are not eligible for the Twin Pines Housing Homeownership Program — you are eligible to apply to the WCT for funds to defray some of the costs of the down payment for properties located in the designated areas around Woodstock. According to the deed restriction, at least one occupant of any property must work an average of 25 hours or more per week within the qualified

area, which is within a 16-mile radius from Woodstock Town Hall. Each unit in a multi-unit setting is treated the same as a primary unit. No part of a property may be used as a short-term rental. If additional units are later built on the property, the same rules apply.

To learn more about the qualification processes and details of the Local Deeds program, and to begin the application process for potential down payment support, visit woodstockcommunitytrust.org/current-projects/local-deeds.

## The EDC’s “Lease to Locals” program

The Woodstock EDC’s collaboration on a “Lease to Locals” program with the Truckee, California-based tenant placement organization Placemate will get underway in early May. EDC Chair Jon Spector confirmed last weekend that the commission is committing \$87,000 in new 2024 major grant funding to the program, plus an additional \$6,500 remaining from the EDC’s own rental incentive program in 2023, for total funding for the year of \$93,500.

Any rental properties participating in the program must be within the Woodstock Town limits. A limited number of cash incentives are available to homeowners who convert a unit currently used as a short-term rental or that is in an underutilized property to a new seasonal or long-term lease. The number of qualified tenants housed will determine the total grant amount. Property owners must agree to rent to a household with at least

50 percent of qualified tenants for a minimum of five months for no greater than the maximum monthly rent, which is set at no more than \$800 for a private room, \$1,000 for a studio unit, \$1,500 for a one-bedroom, \$2,500 for a two-bedroom, and \$2,800 for a 3-plus bedroom unit.

A qualified “local worker” tenant is defined as follows:

- A person who claims the address as their primary residence and continuously occupies the property as their principal place of residence and is not a blood relative of the property owner.
- A person who works, or will work, an average of 25 hours or more per week at a business, organization, or public or private entity located in the “Qualified Area,” which is defined as Woodstock, Barnard, Bridgewater, Pomfret, Reading, or Hartland.

Self-employed people participating in the program must provide a service or have a business that serves the Woodstock community, hold a valid and current business license, pay sales taxes, and provide sufficient documentation to substantiate income and full-time employment.

Here is a chart detailing the incentives that will apply to property owners who apply for, are accepted, and participate in the “Lease to Locals” program:

Lease to Locals incentive per qualified tenant (max 3 per unit)		
Unit Size	Annual	Seasonal
Private Room	\$2,400	\$1,200
Studio	\$3,000	\$1,500
1bd	\$3,000	\$1,500
2bd	\$3,000	\$1,500
3bd	\$3,000	\$1,500

Property owners and prospective tenants who would like to learn more about the Woodstock EDC’s “Lease to Locals” program in collaboration with Placemate should contact the California-based placement consultants directly when the program begins in early May via the organization’s website at placemate.com or by sending an email to hello@placemate.com.



Marcelle Leahy, center left, and Patrick Leahy, center right, pose on the steps of the Patrick J. Leahy House following the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Courtesy of VLGS

## Vermont Law School unveils Patrick Leahy