



connections

SUMMER 2023

CONSTRUCTBERKSHIRES.ORG

YES IN OUR BACKYARD!

In the past year, Construct has seen the southern Berkshires take leaps of faith from “Not in My Backyard” to proclaiming “Yes in OUR Backyard!”

NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) is the acronym that describes the sense that while affordable housing is needed, many don’t want it in their community. Many reasons for this are based on negative misperceptions of what happens when affordable housing occurs in a neighborhood.

Great Barrington and New Marlborough residents have seized the moment and supported the Windflower Inn and Cassillis Farm being converted to workforce affordable housing. In both cases, opportunities arose that required a quick response. While Construct is nimble enough for that, we don’t have deep pockets.

AT TOWN MEETINGS, THESE COMMUNITIES SAID YES IN OUR BACKYARD:

- Becket, Great Barrington, Lenox, and Stockbridge Community Preservation Committees recommended advancing key affordable housing initiatives.
- Egremont established an Affordable Housing Trust.
- Great Barrington and Stockbridge increased inclusionary zoning.

WE SAY THANK YOU!



Cassilis Farm, a Gilded Age estate in New Marlborough, was purchased at auction with over 90% of the acquisition funds raised by residents. Residents have continued active participation through the special permitting process, and over 60 neighbors toured the estate and voiced support in May. Offering guidance and narrating Cassillis’s storied past, neighbors enthusiastically said, “Yes in OUR Backyard!”

BANDING TOGETHER, WE CAN OVERCOME THE HOUSING CRISIS WHILE ENHANCING ONE ANOTHER’S LIVES.

Promoting affordable workforce housing is also a concerted effort at The Windflower, with backyards abutting Egremont, Great Barrington, and Sheffield. Greylock Federal Credit Union provided favorable financing, the Town of Great Barrington provided ARPA funds, and private donations flowed from across Berkshire County. Because Windflower was funded privately, Construct accepted its first occupants within a month of closing on December 1st, 2022, and was able to safeguard the homes of the two existing cottage residents.

Banding together, we can overcome the housing crisis while enhancing one another’s lives. That’s what it means to be good neighbors. That’s what “Yes in OUR Backyard” means. Thank you in advance for continuing to take these leaps of faith.

RENTERS' CORNER

Since July 2022, Construct has contributed over \$125,000 to provide community members with rental assistance.



Forest Springs, Great Barrington

Construct's permanent housing locations have provided safe and affordable shelter for hundreds of people, but the waitlist is long and slow-moving. There are currently **462 households waiting**, and the list grows by the day. Creating new permanent affordable housing will always be at the heart of Construct's mission, however the need for stabilizing services such as rental assistance, are becoming increasingly necessary in order for households to retain their housing. Currently, 46% of all renters in Great Barrington (where Construct offices are located) are considered cost burdened, meaning they are exceeding the 30% annual income spending cap recommended by most financial institutions.

“Since July of 2022, Construct has contributed over \$125,000 in rental assistance.”

The goal of our **Rental Assistance Program** is not simply to cover a month's rent, but to help families work towards sustainability and long term housing security. Due to the lack of housing in the area, this is essential. If rental payments are missed and a family loses their housing, it is nearly impossible to find housing elsewhere.

SUMMER 2023

Know Your Rights

If you are facing eviction, you do not have to move out just because your landlord told you to, sent you a notice to quit, or sent you a Summary Process Summons and Complaint. You only have to move out if the court orders you to move out.

If your landlord wants you to move out, they must:

- Send you a letter called a Notice to Quit telling you they want you to leave.
- Go to court.
- Win the eviction case.
- Get a court order from the judge.

If served with court papers called the Summons and Complaint:

- Read the papers carefully.
- File an answer three business days before your first court event.
- Go to court, or else you will automatically lose your case.

The Summons and Complaint will tell you:

- The name and address of the court that is hearing your case.
- The date and time of your first court hearing
- Whether the court hearing is in-person or over Zoom.

If you have bad conditions in your home:

- It is important to document them and alert the landlord.
- If the landlord knows about these conditions, you can prevent your eviction if you face a nonpayment or no-fault eviction.
- A tenant's duty to pay rent is based on the landlord's duty to keep the apartment in good condition.
- In Massachusetts, renters can use the state Sanitary Code to defend against eviction.

Questions about renter's rights?

Email Kate at kcoulehan@constructberkshire.org

Next newsletter: "Your Rights as a Landlord"

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TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

In the Berkshires, nearly 1 out of 2 renters and 1 out of 3 homeowners cannot afford their current housing costs - leaving them at risk of eviction or foreclosure. Many households forego other basic needs to stay housed.

What is Affordable Housing?

Housing is considered “affordable” when associated costs are 30% or less of a household’s income. “Affordable Housing” is usually deed-restricted and reserved for income-eligible households. It is regulated and monitored to ensure compliance.

How is Eligibility Determined?

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines the area median income (AMI). This data is used to assess who is eligible for deed-restricted housing. Typically, households must earn 80% AMI or less. In most towns in the southern Berkshires, the 80% AMI for one person is \$55,800; a 4-person household is \$79,700.



Pinewoods, Stockbridge

What is Workforce Housing?

Workforce Housing is defined as housing affordable to households earning between 80% and 120% of AMI. It targets middle-income workers, including police officers, firefighters, teachers, and healthcare workers.

What is Section 8?

Section 8 is a federally-funded program that awards housing vouchers to very low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities to subsidize monthly housing costs. Tenants receiving a voucher generally pay 30-40% of their income towards housing, and a housing authority or other subsidizing agency covers the balance.

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



If your child ever played Great Barrington Little League or was involved in Housy Hoops basketball, chances are Sam Handel was the coach. A father to two, our newest Board Member is an award-winning filmmaker and photographer whose work

has graced the screens and pages of many film festivals and print publications across the globe. Sharing parenting duties with his wife, actress Lauren Ambrose (*Six Feet Under*), Sam’s love for family and community permeates everything he does. A resident of Berkshire County for over 20 years, we caught up with Sam to ask him a couple of questions.

Why did you join Construct?

I want to help address the area’s need for more affordable housing. Over the years, I’ve watched friends and businesses struggle to find staff, and I have seen the erosion of the idea that a person should be able to live in the community where they work. That is not a condition where a community can be healthy, functional, and resilient.

As a new Board Member, what do you want to accomplish?

Construct is doing so much good work in the community. Even though my family has been involved in many fundraising campaigns over the years, I was unaware of the scope of services Construct provides in our community. I want to be a good ambassador and help raise awareness.



THANK YOU FOR BRINGING HOPE TO SO MANY THIS YEAR!

**Acknowledges donors who have given to Construct during fiscal year 2023 (July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023)*

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FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET

JULY 1, 2023 - JUNE 30, 2024

To every Construct supporter and partner—thank you! You're bringing hope and stability to hundreds of people struggling with housing insecurity.

INCOME

WHERE WILL THE MONEY COME FROM?

Major Gifts	46%	\$830,000
Fees for Services	25%	\$453,971
Government Grants	16%	\$293,412
General Gifts	9%	\$160,000
BUILD Campaign	4%	\$ 75,000

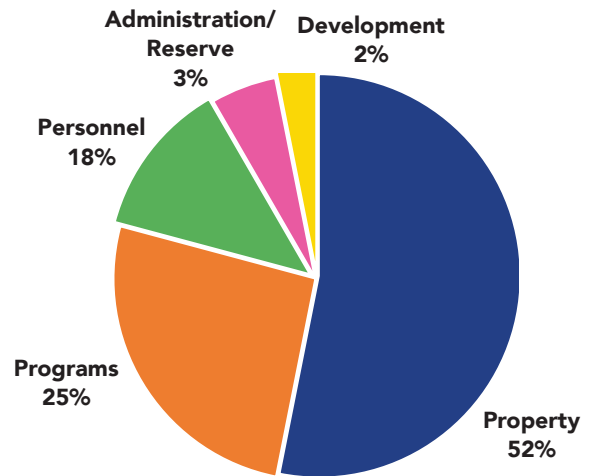
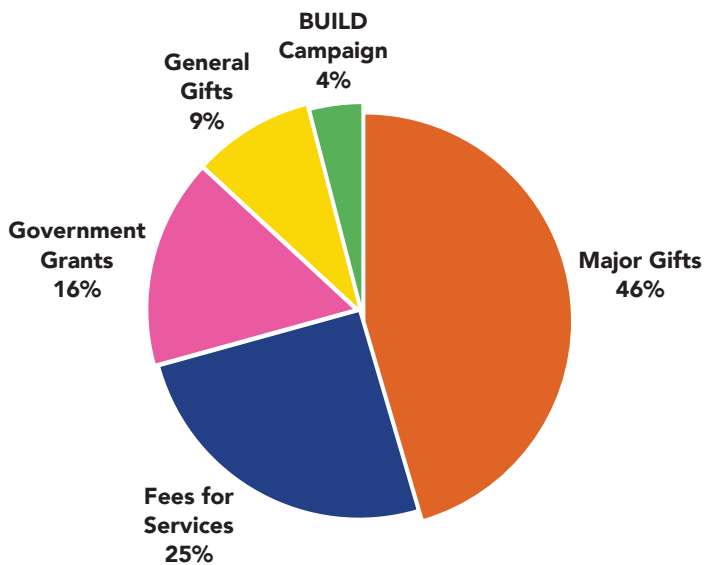
TOTAL INCOME **\$1,812,383**

EXPENSES

HOW WILL THE MONEY BE INVESTED?

Property	52%	\$935,273
Programs	25%	\$451,927
Personnel	18%	\$318,829
Administration/Reserve	3%	\$ 53,000
Development	2%	\$ 40,500

TOTAL EXPENSES **\$ 1,799,529**
NET **\$ 12,854**



THE POWER OF DONATIONS

\$8

Cost of shower at Berkshire South Regional Community Center.



\$400

The average monthly utility bill for a two-bedroom unit.



\$1200

The average rental assist to keep a family who has lost income safely housed for another month.



\$250

A meal and emergency motel stay for a family to come in from the cold for one night.



\$500

100 gallons for fuel—the minimum fuel companies will accept to refill a tank.



\$5000

The minimum for most families to get into a new apartment over-and-above the cost of the rent.



CONSTRUCT PAVES THE WAY

CREATIVE SOLUTIONS FOR WORKFORCE HOUSING

In the wake of COVID-19 and the subsequent shift in the housing market, Construct has turned to a creative and innovative housing solution for our South County workers. Located three miles from the center of Great Barrington, the Windflower Inn has become the backdrop for Construct's first-ever workforce housing site. This co-living model provides much-needed housing to South County essential workers through a unique, community-based design. The 13-bedroom main house provides fully furnished rooms with private baths, air conditioning, laundry facilities, and shared indoor and outdoor common spaces.

"I'm putting money into savings for the first time... The Windflower has had an immense impact on my life."

On January 1, 2023, the doors at Windflower officially opened, and Construct welcomed its first four occupants. Kodi Sullivan, a 31-year-old South County native, was among the first to sign on. Working seven days a week, Kodi holds down two jobs—as a carpenter and stonemason on the weekdays and as a server at a Great Barrington restaurant on the weekends. He is still working hard to pay off substantial student loans and has had to move six times since graduating, living in a laundry room at one point to keep his living costs manageable. He has never had his own apartment. Now, with a room at Windflower, he says: "This is the first time I've been able to live completely on my own. I'm putting money into savings for the first time in a long time. The Windflower has had an immense impact on my life."

Finding hope amid a crippling housing crisis can be difficult, yet Windflower generates hope. At Construct, we like to say, "Home is where the hope lives," and lo and behold, Windflower has proved us right.



Windflower Fast Facts

ADDRESS: 684 South Egremont Rd,
Great Barrington

PURCHASED: December 2022

OPENED: January 2023

OF UNITS: 13 bedrooms w/ bath;
three-bedroom and four-bedroom house

RATES: \$800-\$950 / mo (rooms);
\$2700-\$3700/ mo (houses)

VACANCY: 100% Inn occupancy with waitlist

Who lives there?

- 5** rooms for Great Barrington workers
- 5** rooms for households below 65% of AMI
- 3** rooms for workforce housing (over 80% AMI)
- 2** houses for South County families

Occupants at Windflower include a farmer, a server, an artist, a grocery store clerk, and a senior citizen on a fixed income.

For information about Windflower, contact Property Manager Kathy Wiggins at kwiggins@constructberkshires.org
Applications can be found on Construct's website at: constructberkshires.org/windflower-inn-application



CONSTRUCT

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Great Barrington MA 01230

413.528.1985

info@constructberkshires.org

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TWO YEARS IN A ROW!

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Susan Plotz

Deborah Ryan

Anne Schnesel

Barney Stein

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June Wolfe – *Housing Director*

Leigh Davis – *Community Engagement Director*

Courtney Kimball – *Program Director*

Kathy Wiggins – *Property Manager*

Denise Rueger – *Property Management Admin*

Kate Coulehan – *Housing Navigator*

Hillary Howard – *Business Manager*

Jeanne Keesler – *Bookkeeper*

Sammye Keeling – *Grants Manager*

Mike Howard – *Maintenance Manager*

Joe Bercier – *Maintenance*

Rusty Coe – *Maintenance*

Dan Hayden – *Maintenance*

President's Advisory Council

Suzanne Crerar, Steve Picheny, Marcie Setlow, Elaine Silberstein,
Lisa Sloane, Susie Weekes Roeder, Janet Zimmerman

FOUNDED IN 1969 Construct is the leading nonprofit provider of affordable housing and supportive services to residents in fifteen towns across the southern Berkshires. Construct is committed to providing affordable housing to strengthen and diversify communities, stabilize lives, and empower individuals to build a better future.

MISSION To change and save lives through housing options and a continuum of related services.



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