



Governor's Proposed Budget FY2021-23
Appropriations Hearing
HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Housing
Friday, February 19th, 2021

Testimony of Dara Kovel, CEO
Beacon Communities

Chairperson Osten, Chairperson Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to create quality affordable housing for all of our residents in Connecticut.

I am writing to share my support for the Agency's budget and the \$305 million in affordable housing bonding under consideration by the General Assembly and to thank you for your unwavering leadership in moving these commitments through the legislative process so these dollars can be put to work for the residents of Connecticut.

Beacon Communities is a 50-year-old institution, known for creating quality living environments for residents, young and old, families and seniors, people with special needs and managing properties with a standard of care that is second to none.

I am personally committed to Beacon's work here in Connecticut as a resident of New Haven of over 30 years and having also served the State at the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority. My affinity and pride in the State has made it tremendously gratifying to transform communities Ninth Square in New Haven and the Montgomery Mill in Windsor Locks, further detailed below. It has meant a lot to me to fulfill our commitment to creating places where people love to live in towns and cities in Connecticut.

In Connecticut, we currently own over 1,200 units of affordable and mixed income housing in the communities of Stamford, New Haven and Windsor Locks. We also manage another 1,000 units for other affordable housing owners. We believe housing is a right not a privilege and that every person should be entitled to a safe, comfortable place to call home.

Beacon has a strong track record of making good on this belief. Our work in Connecticut started with two major public housing redevelopments, one at Monterey Place in New Haven and the other at Southwood Square in Stamford. In our more recent work, we are preserving and renovating 335 mixed-income apartments in downtown New Haven, half of which serve extremely low-income families. The recently completed renovation of Montgomery Mill, a mixed income adaptive reuse of a historic factory

in downtown Windsor Locks which remediates a brownfield, stands next to the site of a future train station, creates a new entrance to a State park and exchanges a blighted structure for 160 beautiful apartment homes overlooking town and the Connecticut River, would not have happened without .

The Montgomery Mill project would not have been possible without the support of numerous state agencies as well as general obligation bonding from the State of Connecticut, but if you ask any resident or business owner of Windsor Locks or the region, they will attest to the fact that it was money well spent. The resources that the State provided to this project were leveraged with \$5 for every \$1 invested by the State. Let me reiterate that, a 5:1 leveraging of the state's investment. Both construction and permanent jobs were created; over 60 construction jobs were created, 52% of subcontractor job hours were furnished by minorities as of March 2019, 16% of construction subcontractors were Small Business Enterprises, 45% of subcontractors were CT-based and 23% of construction workers were classified as New Hires.

Most important, the property now provides homes for 160 households from single people to families (and quite a few dogs), with incomes ranging from \$0 to well over \$100,000, in diverse professions, including teachers, technicians, bank tellers, Cigna employees, research associates, accountants and retirees.

We are thrilled to be planning for the imminent renovation of Edith Johnson at 114 Bristol Street in New Haven that serves 95 vulnerable elderly residents and sorely in need of improvements to preserve its viability for decades to come. This project was made possible from last years commitments from DOH and the State.

These types of projects have dramatic effects on local and regional economies. We are committed to continuing efforts like this, as long as the state of Connecticut remains a willing partner. We are grateful for the support of the Governor and the General Assembly in continuing to infuse funding for this critical component of infrastructure and investment.

Projects awaiting funding that could benefit from the continuing strong affordable housing investments in Connecticut:

- A redevelopment of state public housing in Branford where 50 households who are elderly and disabled are living in deteriorating conditions. The budget will support turning this property into 67 modern, accessible, spacious one and two-bedroom units with common amenities, fitness and computers rooms and gardens.
- An exciting opportunity at State and Chapel in New Haven that will create a mixed income, mixed use project and add over 50 much needed affordable housing units next to the State Street Train Station serving Metro North, Shoreline East and the Hartford/Springfield line.
- Beacon is actively considering several transit-oriented sites within historic downtown districts that could serve hundreds of additional lower income households who could live near where they work and in communities where they want to stay.

All of these projects will be made possible by the investment of funds and supported by the Department of Housing. I want to recognize the energy, focus and expertise brought by Commissioner Seila Mosquera-Bruno. It has made a big difference to the State to have someone with her talents and background leading the housing policy of the state. It is exactly this combination of talent and investment that will continue to make Connecticut a leader in affordable housing development.

We are deeply grateful to the State of Connecticut for its continued leadership promoting sustained and meaningful funding for housing that will serve lower income residents and generate multipliers of strong economic returns through jobs and investment with every dollar spent.

Thank you for allowing me to share my testimony and thank you for your support to efforts to increase housing opportunities for all Connecticut's citizens.