

## The preciousness of land: HRB and the Land Trust find common ground

There are two land trusts on Bainbridge Island: the Bainbridge Island Land Trust and Housing Resources Bainbridge (HRB). One conserves land for environmental protection and the other for affordable housing. Both appreciate the preciousness of land and its potential to realize their respective—and complementary—missions.

In the following conversation, executive directors Cullen Brady of the Land Trust and Phedra Elliott of HRB explore the intersections in their work to build a sustainable and healthy Bainbridge.



Bainbridge Island Land Trust's Cougar Creek Preserve  
 Photo by Sue Larkin



### How is affordable housing a part of the Land Trust's vision for a healthy Bainbridge?

A vibrant and healthy Bainbridge Island community is core to the mission of the Land Trust. The Land Trust's current strategic plan seeks to increase opportunities to better reflect the historic and present-day diversity of local people and communities through fairness, justice, and equity. Connection to nature is proven to boost physical and mental health; however, affordable housing is too often sited in areas with little-to-no access to nature, negatively impacting a community's health. Affordable housing within a community that values conservation, such as Bainbridge Island, makes access to nature more equitable.

The lands we protect provide ecosystem values for the entire community, such as watershed protection, parks for public access, educational opportunities, scenic vistas, and open spaces. The Land Trust's mission is to conserve and steward the diverse natural environments of Bainbridge Island for the benefit of all.

**How does the Land Trust select properties to conserve and how might this conservation strategy support the construction of affordable housing?**

To achieve our conservation goals, the Land Trust utilizes mapping and data rooted in science to identify lands having significant or potentially significant conservation values such as shorelines, streams, wetlands, forests, tidelands, and unique plant and animal habitat networks.

This strategy helps the Land Trust identify lands with high conservation value and informs where development impacts can be avoided. This data and strategy can further determine the best construction locations for additional affordable housing that retains a connection to conserved lands while protecting critical habitat and natural areas.

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### CHI and HRB partner for permanent affordability at Wintergreen



HRB is acquiring 31 of 73 units at Wintergreen Townhomes for our community land trust, where they will be kept affordable forever for households earning at or below 80% area median income. To find out if you qualify for homeownership and to learn more about these new homes, visit [housingresourcesbi.org](http://housingresourcesbi.org) or contact Marta Holt at [marta@housingresourcesbi.org](mailto:marta@housingresourcesbi.org) or 206.842.1909, ext. 10.

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Dear Neighbor,

We don't typically produce themed newsletters, but if we did, this one would be the Partnership Issue. As you'll see in these pages, we do not work alone. Only with an engaged community and the combined resources and expertise of our partners can we hope to make meaningful progress in creating affordable housing.



Phedra Elliott

Some of our partnerships may come as no surprise. Of course we look to our longtime partner Helpline House to deliver the social services component of our Housing Stabilization Program. But we also seek perspectives from organizations outside our field, such as the Bainbridge Island Land Trust. Contrary to popular narratives, we are not rivals but two nonprofits concerned with sustainability. Neither stand back and watch growth happen but aim to direct that growth with ecology and equity in mind. We look forward to learning more about the work of the Land Trust and to finding opportunities for partnership.

We are excited to share that HRB is acquiring 31 of 73 units at Wintergreen Townhomes, a development by Central Highland Homes (CHI), for our community land trust where they will be kept permanently affordable. This acquisition required that CHI develop a more affordable unit and that HRB, CHI, and Housing Kitsap partner on an innovative financing package involving grants, subsidies, and sweat equity.

Finally, meet Maggie Rich, our new public policy specialist. They'll be tracking and analyzing developments at the city and state level so that HRB and our supporters can be effective advocates for affordable housing. After all, the city is arguably our most powerful partner in tackling the housing crisis.

HRB is the only organization on the island focused exclusively on affordable housing. That's quite a distinction and responsibility, as well as an opportunity to draw others into this work. Join us.

With gratitude,

*Phedra Elliott*

Phedra Elliott  
Executive Director



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**How does HRB see a collaboration with the Land Trust to protect nature and provide for affordable housing on Bainbridge Island?**

Land is expensive, and land is limited. To build affordably and realize the potential of our typically small parcels, the HRB model of development calls for smaller homes clustered in multifamily developments. In contrast to more suburban-style sprawl, this density and small footprint free up land for conservation.

Our model of permanent affordability also supports sustainable land use. HRB homeowners must sell to other income-qualified families at prices determined by a formula. These measures ensure that HRB land serve the community's affordable housing needs in perpetuity. We are seeing peer organizations without such resale restrictions run out of available land on which to build.

This kind of development invites collaboration. For example, a transfer of development rights program would support denser development in more urban areas while enabling the conservation of ecologically valuable lands. In areas zoned for lower density, we could combine more affordable, compact development with natural buffers.

**How does conservation and a connection to nature make for better affordable housing?**

Our mission is rooted in equity and inclusion. Where we live is one of the most powerful determinants of health and future prosperity. By creating affordable housing on Bainbridge Island, HRB is providing more than shelter, but access to strong schools, safe neighborhoods, clean air—and natural lands. We have great appreciation for the work of the Land Trust. Conservation and restoration mean a healthier environment for both natural and human communities, and trails and parks cultivate a stronger connection to the natural world, a boon to mental and physical health.

We would love for all HRB residents to receive these benefits. The Wintergreen development, where we will be acquiring homes for our community land trust, is situated in a busier neighborhood, but with

in walking distance of beautiful Sakai Park and Hawley Cove Park and a short drive to the Grand Forest and other preserves. The homes in the HRB-designed Ferncliff Village surround community gardens and encompass a section of the parks and rec trail system.



Trail at HRB's Ferncliff Village

## Friends and neighbors, HRB and Helpline House help residents pursue financial independence

"We are more than a landlord, but a partner and advocate," says Marta Holt, HRB rental property and homeownership programs manager.

HRB focuses on housing stability, which means building relationships with residents and often, helping with rent. About half our families receive rental assistance. Our Housing Stabilization Program keeps housing costs at 30% of household gross income, ensuring that there is money for food, healthcare, and other basic costs. The program ties rental assistance to individual support services intended to increase earning potential, which are provided by Helpline House.

Executive directors Phedra Elliott of HRB and Maria Metzler of Helpline House are close colleagues, leading organizations with complementary missions.

"Helpline House is the only organization on the island providing this range and level of service," said Elliot. "A stable and safe home is essential—we've got that covered. But we can't meet all the other essentials for a healthy and fulfilling life, such as access to fresh food, affordable transportation, and support with the tasks of daily living."

"Housing insecurity undermines the wellbeing and future success of the people who seek out Helpline House services," Metzler said. "Housing status is one of the first things to establish with anyone coming in the door. How can you talk about low-cost internet when someone is living out of their car?"

Helpline House social workers meet with program participants to develop an action plan so that they might one day earn enough to pay rent on their own or move to open-market housing. Shawn Nigh, who sees the bulk of the participants, finds that stable housing emboldens her

clients, giving them the foundation from which to take on professional goals and pursue dreams. One client, for example, plans to resume a nursing program, while another is researching business programs so that she might one day own a business of her own.



A Helpline House social worker delivers virtual services

Roughly a third of the 455 households receiving social work services at Helpline House are housing insecure. "Their housing can be taken from them in a heartbeat," said Nigh. Not so for her HRB clients. One, a mother of two, is contending with mental health challenges that were exacerbated during the pandemic. She only just returned to work one day a week with plans to gradually increase her hours, but even with this reduced schedule, she enjoys housing security.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to leave the Housing Stabilization Program, with many telling Nigh that that they don't want to be asking for help. For some, like an employee at an assisted living facility who was able to increase her hours after Nigh helped her secure a daycare subsidy, independence is possible. She just moved into an apartment in the open market. For others, even those working full-time at essential jobs, the reality of wages and the real estate market makes it impossible. The solution here is plain—more affordable housing.

### What is middle housing anyway? Let's ask Maggie.



Maggie Rich is HRB's new public policy specialist. Before joining HRB, Maggie worked in legislative advocacy at Planned Parenthood and IslandWood. They currently serve as vice chair of the Bremerton Planning Commission. With their analytical mind, inexhaustible curiosity, and passion for affordable housing, Maggie will be a tremendous asset to HRB and a resource to the community. So what is middle housing, Maggie?

"Not to be confused with middle-income housing, this term has nothing to do with income and instead refers to the size and type of home. Middle housing includes duplexes (side by side or stacked), larger multifamilies, townhomes, and cottage courts and offers more potential for affordability than single-family housing. At HRB, we look at affordable housing in the context of a larger housing ecosystem. A functional ecosystem encompasses housing of a variety of sizes and types and at a variety of price points to support a healthy and diverse community."