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## When buying local isn't enough: Bainbridge businesses speak up for affordable housing

"The people who work here should be able to live here" has become an increasingly common refrain on Bainbridge. Some of these housing advocates focus on the toll long commutes take on the environment. Others want to live in a whole and balanced community, one that embraces its essential workers and seeks more than a culture of wealth and privilege. But what does it mean when the employers themselves adopt this refrain? This spring HRB reached out to the business community to understand how the lack of affordable housing on Bainbridge impacts their operations. The stories of five local businesses can be found on our website.



In the factory at Far Bank Enterprises, a Bainbridge-based business. Courtesy of Far Bank Enterprises.

Across the board, business owners related the challenge of attracting and retaining talent when many of their employees commute from more affordable towns and could find work closer to home. Add a winter storm or bridge construction to an already long commute and filling a dinner shift and staffing a front desk become that much more tenuous. While invaluable and deeply appreciated, local patronage alone cannot keep businesses open. They require supportive infrastructure, specifically housing on the island that is affordable to workers.

and owner of Eleven Winery. "Diversity of ideas and opinions is going to be critical to finding our way through the changes that are coming our way. And we're at risk of losing that."

The business leaders we spoke to are invested in the health of the community and share HRB's vision of a Bainbridge Island made strong and vibrant by the social connections across generations, cultures, and classes that develop when people live where they work.

Lani Sordello, who last year joined her husband Pino in running his Rolling Bay Italian eatery, Via Rosa 11, spoke fondly of one employee. "He works so hard and is so proud of the work he does. What if you were able to not only have that pride—'Hey, I work here, I work with this team, this is my work'—but also 'I live in this community, these are my customers, I see them when I go to the grocery store?'"

"As things change, as the environment changes, and the climate changes, resilience is critical," said Matt Albee, founder

Bainbridge strikes an enviable balance between ample parks and natural lands with a lively downtown and abundant amenities. To have it all, we need low-impact development and workforce housing. Go to [housingresourcesbi.org/news](http://housingresourcesbi.org/news) to hear it straight from the business community.

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## designing for COMMUNITY

A HOUSING RESOURCES BAINBRIDGE FUNDRAISER



Photo by Juan Hernandez, Ibarra Media, courtesy of Mithun

5:00 – 7:00 pm  
 Thursday, September 23, 2021

KEYNOTE BY ERIN CHRISTENSEN ISHIZAKI, ARCHITECT AT MITHUN

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A pioneer in designing for health and wellbeing, Mithun architect Erin Christensen Ishizaki will share her experience in creating inclusive, beautiful, and sustainable housing that contributes to community resilience.

Register by September 9, 2021 at [housingresourcesbi.org](http://housingresourcesbi.org) or contact us at [info@housingresourcesbi.org](mailto:info@housingresourcesbi.org) or (206) 842-1909, ext. 13.

### IN THIS ISSUE

- Businesses call for affordable housing
- A mental health advocate comes home
- Stewarding the HRB community
- City council candidates on housing

Dear Neighbor,

With the American Jobs Plan, the Biden administration showed us affordable housing for what it really is—infrastructure. Intended to invigorate the economy, the plan proposed investing not only in the systems one typically associates with infrastructure, such as roads, public transit, and the power grid, but also in constructing and preserving housing, expanding rental assistance, and reforming the zoning and land use policies that escalate home prices.

When we think about the value of infrastructure, we need to assess more than the structure or technology itself but what it enables. In this issue of The Front Porch and on our website, you'll hear stories of how affordable housing undergirds a strong and healthy community. When Brittany Wisner of Bainbridge Youth Services moved into an HRB apartment and now lives in the community she serves, affordable housing means better mental health support for Bainbridge teens. As you'll hear many times over in our series on local businesses, highlighted here and published in full on our website, workforce housing keeps businesses strong and our downtown vibrant by making recruiting and retaining workers easier and staffing more reliable.

Ultimately, affordable housing is the infrastructure of equity. With strong schools, clean air, safe neighborhoods, and quality healthcare, Bainbridge residents fare comparatively well in the world. Children are given what they need to prosper as adults, and older adults have the resources they need to enjoy optimal health. When housing is as expensive as it is, these benefits are bestowed on only the most affluent, widening the gap between rich and poor, when what we really need to thrive is an inclusive and cohesive society.

With gratitude,

*Phedra Elliott*

Phedra Elliott  
Executive Director



Phedra Elliott

## Thanks to an HRB apartment, a youth mental health advocate comes home

Brittany Wisner grew up on Bainbridge and today coordinates mental health support for high school students at Bainbridge Youth Services (BYS). The price of housing on Bainbridge keeps out people like Wisner and so many of the teachers, counselors, and others who, as she puts it, “walk alongside [students] in their adolescent journey.” It also creates the conditions for homelessness. BYS sees homeless students who’ve been asked to leave by their parents over gender identity, alcohol and drug use, or other conflicts and who end up couch surfing, moving from one friend’s house to another. But BYS also sees students who are the children of homeless parents.

“There’s this idea that we’re not Seattle, we’re not Bremerton, we don’t have homeless people here, we don’t have homeless youth here, and that is absolutely not true,” said Wisner.

In April, Wisner moved into an HRB apartment. “I don’t know where life will take me,” she said, “but I know that right now I love my job. I love serving this community, and it is really important to me to help shift the world of mental health and help make mental health resources more accessible to youth in particular ... I love [Bainbridge]. I have no plans to go anywhere anytime soon.”

To read the full story, visit our blog at [housingresourcesbi.org/news](https://housingresourcesbi.org/news).



Brittany Wisner of Bainbridge Youth Services.

## “It’s a heart thing”: Marta Holt’s work at HRB is highly technical and deeply personal

Marta Holt has been the rental property and homeownership programs manager since 2018. She has worked as a transportation planner for King County, run her own essential oil business (she made six custom scents for Prince before the Great Recession ended the business), and worked as a low-income and homeless housing program manager, analyst, and advocate in Kitsap County. She holds a master’s in public administration and is a licensed real estate broker. For a couple years, she worked as a realtor and at HRB at the same time, but when there weren’t enough hours in the day, she had to choose. “I chose HRB,” she said. “It’s a heart thing.”

**With the community land trust model, a nonprofit owns and stewards land to ensure that affordable homes are available to the community in perpetuity. A meaningful but lesser-known aspect to this kind of land trust is the stewardship of the homes and the homeowners. Describe how this stewardship shows up in your work.**

HRB provides financial stewardship to the homeowner’s association, ensuring that taxes and bills get paid and helping with budgets. We support individual homeowners during the process of qualifying for and buying a home and keeping up with mortgage payments and home maintenance. When homeowners experience temporary financial hardship, HRB can provide low interest loans and walk them through refinancing if they choose. We also offer protection from foreclosure by preemptively buying the house. When owners are ready to sell, we find a buyer who meets our income qualifications and facilitate the sale without charging a commission.

**Many people may not realize that rentals are also part of the HRB community land trust. Describe how stewardship comes into play with these residents.**

We see our tenants as clients to be supported and advocated for, not as assets or liabilities on the bottom line of the books. The Housing Stabilization Program helps working adults



Marta Holt manages HRB’s rental property and homeownership programs.

become more financially self-sufficient by supporting them in achieving goals, such as finding higher paying employment, arranging childcare, obtaining professional certifications, or consolidating debt. Our Permanent Supportive Housing Program offers ongoing rental assistance to our seniors and tenants with disabilities who are on fixed incomes, leaving them with more money for expenses such as food and healthcare. HRB staff work with all our tenants to help them remain stably housed.

**What do you love about your job?**

I love the people! I love working with our tenants and homeowners. I love seeing people strive and succeed and being a part of helping them make that happen. I love having people tell me that they feel safe, stable, and secure in their housing. I love my co-workers who all have a heart for the mission of providing safe and affordable housing to promote economic diversity and access to opportunity.

## HRB asks city council candidates to take a stand on housing

As the island’s only nonprofit affordable housing provider and advocate, HRB is committed to making sure that affordable housing remains front and center during this election season and beyond. So that you can cast an informed vote, HRB reached out to the candidates with the following two questions:

**1. The council formed the Affordable Housing Task Force in 2017. What initiatives in the task force report would you champion? And how would you implement these initiatives?**

**2. HRB advocates for housing development on Bainbridge Island that**

**is judicious and environmentally sustainable. How can Bainbridge best balance its environmental sustainability and affordable housing goals?**

Visit our blog at [housingresourcesbi.org/news](https://housingresourcesbi.org/news) to read the responses.