

Happy First Residents Move into April's Grove Townhomes

The first nine households moved into April's Grove at the beginning of September. It was a day filled with joy, exuberance and relief. Two single parents now have homes with bedrooms so their kids can live with them. A number of tenants had been couch-surfing or homeless. Now they no longer face those uncertainties.

Sixteen more households moved in later in September and October. Over the next six weeks more Orcas families will move in until all 45 townhomes are occupied. Construction was completed in October, with landscaping to continue through the end of the year.

Planning for April's Grove began in June 2015 when OPAL signed a purchase and sale agreement for the land. Next, as with all OPAL neighborhoods, the staff and architects hosted listening sessions to determine the greatest needs, and then held community meetings to create preliminary designs. The next three years were filled with studies on traffic, archaeology, wetlands, stormwater detention, soils and tree health to name a few.

It took those four years and into 2019 to secure all the necessary county, state and federal funding as well as generous private donations from the Orcas community.



April's Grove begins to look like a neighborhood – 45 families are moving into their new homes at a rate of 10 to 15 families per month.

The project – the first new affordable rental housing of significant size in San Juan County in nearly 30 years – has weathered some difficulties and benefitted greatly from the support of many islanders over the five-year journey to completion.

Thanks to the voters of San Juan County who adopted a new Real Estate Excise Tax in November 2018, a legacy contribution from Bob Henigson, and creative problem solving by many, construction of April's Grove began in May of 2019.

Now, as April's Grove is on the cusp of completion, that long journey of twists and turns will soon fade into the background as families

move into their new homes. **“I would like to express immense gratitude to the generous Orcas community who contributed support, time and resources to create this permanently affordable housing,”** said OPAL Executive Director Lisa Byers.



Virginia Erhardt



Barbara Brown

Two OPAL Supporters Leave Their Homes as Legacy Gifts

Several years before she died, Virginia Erhardt told us that she planned to leave her OPAL home in the Oberon Meadow neighborhood to OPAL. She was so grateful to have bought the house and she wanted to give back. She knew that because of the ground lease, the next homebuyer would be someone who, like her, could not afford to buy in the traditional market.

That is exactly what will happen. An Orcas family will buy the home. Virginia’s bequest will enable a couple with a young son to achieve their dream of owning a home and having stability for years to come.

OPAL is also one of three nonprofit organizations to benefit from Barbara L. Brown’s legacy gift of a portion of the proceeds from the sale of her home. Barbara grew up in Deer Harbor, was an avid photographer and served for years on the County Planning Commission. She was a quiet, clear and persistent advocate for equity and environmental stewardship.

Barbara started supporting OPAL early on and served on the board of trustees for several terms. She was particularly aligned with OPAL’s values of serving people’s needs in the present, as well as over many generations.

Reporting Back: OPAL’s COVID-19 Response

Beginning in late February, OPAL joined the island’s response to COVID-19 by channeling donations – made mostly through the Community Foundation’s Emergency Response Fund – to cover rent and mortgage payments for local residents who lost income due to COVID-19 closures.

Thanks to OPAL’s robust database system, the OPAL team was able to create an online application. Having the tools in place made a world of difference as **more than 100 applications were submitted in the first four weeks.**

“Staying nimble and shifting to providing rental and mortgage assistance really helped to lower the anxiety level of folks in the aftermath of the first wave of the pandemic,” explained OPAL Housing Manager Julie Brunner.

As of early October, OPAL has processed **223 months of direct payments for 127 households** to landlords and banks for **\$206,194**. In addition, OPAL staff members have assisted another **57 requests for \$68,388** that did not result in direct payments, because counseling intervention found another solution.

Moving forward, Julie anticipates ongoing need from people who continue to have limited work due to COVID-19 or who are not eligible for unemployment. If you know someone who is in need, please refer them to OPAL’s website, **www.opalclt.org**.

As we enter into the unknowns of winter, OPAL will continue to act quickly and with care to whatever lies ahead. Your generosity of spirit, time, talent and dollars will ease the burden of others, and that will help us to innovate and be stronger together.

April's Grove: What It Took to Make It Happen

Give yourself a big pat on the back!

Five years, two months, 29 days.

From signing the agreement to buy 3.8 acres of land on North Beach Road (June 2, 2015) to the first tenants moving in (September 1, 2020).

The hard, hands-on work of more than 150 people.

From the federal tax-credit consultants to the folks at the state Housing Trust Fund to the county permit department and building inspectors; plus architects, engineers, local excavation crews, the general contractor and subcontractors – carpenters, roofers, electricians, plumbers, drywallers, painters; island arborists and landscapers; OPAL staff and trustees; and countless others who worked to make it all possible.

852 donations totaling \$3.38 million from generous individuals and private foundations.

Plus substantial dollars from federal, state and county programs. Plus bank and state loans to be repaid over time. Total budget: \$15.5 million.

Passage of San Juan County's first real estate excise tax for affordable housing, contributing \$1,750,000 over two years to the construction of April's Grove.

Unprecedented grants totaling over \$450,000 from the Orcas Island Community Foundation because affordable housing remains a critical Orcas need.

Qualifying for federal low-income tax credits to become the first new rental housing project of scale in San Juan County in 30 years.

4,809 tons of dirt moved and underground pipes installed to manage 226,284 gallons of rainwater runoff from roads, parking areas and buildings.

42,176 square feet of living space constructed to affordably house 45 island households in 11 buildings. Plus a commons building with laundry facilities, small conference room and office.



377 exterior and interior doors, 291 energy-efficient windows, 76 water-saving toilets.

66 covered spaces for storing bikes, 45 outside storage closets.

Nearly 96 trees and hundreds of shrubs and plants still to be put in the ground: trees include flowering cherries, crabapples, dogwoods, hawthornes, maples and incense cedars.

The processing of more than 140 applications for the 45 new townhomes.

The estimated 100 islanders who will live in April's Grove: infants, children, moms and dads, seniors, singles, couples, families.



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The OPAL family is growing – your gifts are opening doors.

A House Moves and Becomes a 'Forever Home'

On the morning of August 27, Nickel Bros. House Movers started the process of transporting a donated house to its new location on Lydia Lane near Rosario. By late that evening the house arrived in its new neighborhood.

It rested in a temporary location through September while its new foundation was prepared, and in October the house was permanently settled onto its new site with a view of the west side of Mt. Constitution.

“A particular joy for me was seeing both the donor of the house and the new OPAL homebuyer meet one another and together watch the house move,” said OPAL Executive Director Lisa Byers. “The former owner lovingly handed off the house to its new owner, who had dubbed this their ‘forever home’.”



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