

Another Way You Are Keeping Islanders in Their Homes

When a privately owned apartment building in Eastsound was put on the market earlier this year, staff members at the Community Foundation and at OPAL were worried. Maybe the property would be bought by someone who would allow the current tenants to stay, and maybe the rents would

remain affordable. But the more likely scenario was that renters would be evicted, or the rents raised, and the adults and kids would have no place to go.

That’s why OPAL’s recent acquisition of the Mt. Baker Apartments – made possible by the vision and generosity of two island families – is such a positive outcome for the Orcas community.

Of the six households currently living in the Mt. Baker Apartments, most have been on the island for more than a decade. In fact, one tenant

grew up on Orcas and another has called this property home for over 20 years. Four of the families have children, ages 8 to 18, living

“When the property went on the market, the residents knew what was at stake.”

– Julie Brunner, OPAL Housing Director

at home and attending the public schools. The adults work in a variety of professions including construction, landscaping, caretaking, housekeeping, hospitality and retail.

Most of the families are originally from Mexico and they have formed their own small community, with neighbors helping each other, going back and forth between apartments, like an extended family.

“When the property went on the market, the residents knew what was at stake,” explained Julie Brunner, OPAL’s housing director. “The tenants were very nervous about what would happen with the sale – they really hoped the OPAL team would be able to buy it. Fortunately, OPAL was in a good position to pivot and take this on, the community had its eyes open and was on the lookout, and some very generous donors made it happen. OPAL was alert for at-risk, available rental properties and was actively working on acquiring another property. **Part of our job at OPAL is to be nimble and responsive to opportunities like this one.**”

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Two of the tenants at the Mt. Baker Apartments who are excited to be able to remain in their home.

OPAL Board Adopts Long-Range Plan for the Next Decade

In late July, the OPAL board adopted a long-range plan for the years from 2021 to 2030.

A planning committee composed of OPAL board members and staff gathered information and met regularly over the course of the planning period.

An important element of preparing the plan involved conducting numerous conversations with OPAL residents and other interested parties, including representatives of the local business community and supporters.

Work on the plan began at the annual board retreat in 2019. Although the planning process was delayed at times by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the extended period allowed for a thorough assessment of OPAL's role and responsibilities in continuing to provide permanently affordable housing on Orcas Island.

Highlights of the plan are that by 2030 OPAL will:

- Add an estimated 80 to 100 more permanently affordable homes.
- Keep stewardship as the core responsibility. Stewardship is the work to maintain the existing ownership and rental homes and to support residents.
- Continue to respond to ideas from islanders for how to address the needs for housing.

An interesting feature of the plan is the inclusion of three alternative scenarios for the future. Each scenario – “The Big One,” “The Eternal Optimist” and “Steady as She Goes” – describes in a storytelling way how the next 10 years might unfold.

Additional information about the recently adopted long-range plan is available at [Plan Toward 2030 | OPAL Community Land Trust \(opalclt.org/about/plan-toward-2030\)](https://opalclt.org/about/plan-toward-2030).

Mt. Baker Apartments

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Besides the needed improvements that are being made to the apartment buildings, the rentals will now – as part of the island's community land trust – remain permanently affordable into the future. OPAL converted the month-to-month rental agreements to year-round agreements, and after completing a one-year renovation, will maintain the buildings, work with the tenants and manage the rental process.

Julie, who speaks Spanish, said the Mt. Baker residents appreciate OPAL staff members' efforts and are delighted to be part of OPAL. Even before the Mt. Baker acquisition, OPAL had translated leases and forms into Spanish to better serve islanders for whom English is a second language.

“This really couldn't have happened without everyone who supports OPAL and the work we do,” said Julie.



Thank You All!

Please patronize and thank 2021 OPAL Gala sponsors Island Market, San Juan Insurance Services, David Dotlich and Douglas Ellwood, WaFd Bank, Doe Bay Wine Company, Banner Bank, Rainshadow Solar and Orcas Auto Tech.

The event could not happen without our faithful dessert bakers and volunteers. You are greatly appreciated. Mark your calendar for **June 25, 2022** to celebrate OPAL!

You Have the Power To Change the Future for Local Residents

The recent purchase of the apartments on Mt. Baker Road is proof of the impact that you as an individual, or as a family, can have on the lives of others in our community.

Without the generosity of two local families, the fate of those tenants' futures would have been hanging in the balance. Instead, these island residents will continue to have a roof over their heads and a guarantee that their rents will remain affordable.

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Private donations make all the difference in situations such as this. To both apply for and get approved for government funding would have taken far too long, and OPAL did not have the ability to take it on alone. So, when two island families got in touch to say they wanted to help facilitate the transaction, OPAL quickly stepped up to the plate. With the rental market on Orcas strained as it is, this was an opportunity not to be ignored.

Thanks to local support, and within a month of going under contract, OPAL was able to close on the Mt. Baker Apartments and bring some much-needed relief to the families living there.

Although OPAL now owns and manages the apartments, there is much more work to be done. Each of these apartments needs to be renovated, which is scheduled to start in November. The focus is on replacing building components that are past their useful life, removing hazardous materials, making the spaces more comfortable and energy efficient. The plan is to work in one unit at a time, relocating residents to a vacant, stand-alone unit while their apartment is under construction.



Photo by Crystal Mossman

The Mt. Baker Apartments today. Construction and updates start in November and are planned to be completed within one year.

Local contractors Ken Katz and Silas Beardslee will head the work and are thrilled at the chance to partner with OPAL on the project. As Ken stated, “The work may not be glamorous to some, but I am happiest working on a project like this because it has such a broad impact for the community. To me this is better than just building one house for one family.”

Scheduled Improvements

1. Remove hazardous materials
2. Replace selective areas of roofing and siding
3. Upgrade ventilation in bathrooms and kitchens
4. Replace aluminum windows with vinyl
5. Install egress windows in all bedrooms
6. Install new Energy Star appliances
7. Upgrade heat sources to ductless heat pumps
8. Replace flooring where needed
9. Replace plumbing feed lines; install new water heaters
10. Renovate laundry area; install new machines
11. Improve the site drainage and parking



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IN THIS ISSUE

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“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.” - John F. Kennedy

Will You Help Preserve Affordable Rental Housing?

Situated in the center of Eastsound Village, the Northern Heights apartments are a prime location. Motivated by the desire to preserve this rental housing, in an already impossible rental market, OPAL entered into a contract to purchase the property earlier this year.

After a lengthy process of assessing the physical condition of the apartments, OPAL applied to the San Juan County Home Fund and was recently awarded a grant by the San Juan County Council.

With local support and backing, the process now continues to the



Northern Heights apartments in Eastsound Village.

Photo by Crystal Mossman

State Housing Trust Fund, where OPAL's application will be reviewed by mid-December.

If you believe this rental housing is worth preserving, please consider donating today.

Visit us online at www.opalclt.org