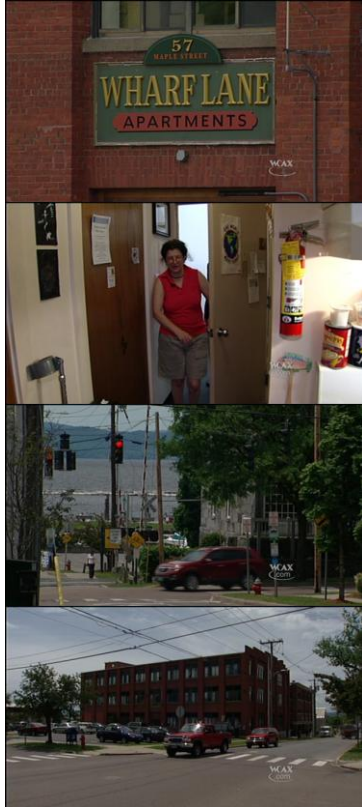


Why some low-income residents may lose their homes



Burlington, Vermont - June 9, 2010

Not far from Lake Champlain, Wharf Lane Apartments in Burlington is home to 44 low-income renters, including Dian Mueller. She's been here for nearly 7 years.

"Seven years in September," she said.

Reporter Jack Thurston: And you want it to be 8 and 9.

Mueller: I figured I'd be 99 before they took me out of here!

But Mueller may have to move sooner. Wharf Lane was developed nearly 30 years ago by a private contractor using public

funds-- subsidies from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. The deal back then was that after three decades as low-income housing, the developer could sell the property to any customer at the going market rate.

"I just want my home," Mueller said.

If the owner, Pizzagalli Properties of South Burlington, does sell to a private buyer when the old contract expires in 9 months, it could force Mueller and her neighbors to move. Many of them are elderly or have disabilities.

"I'm not being 'housed,'" Mueller said. "This is my home."

"It's a large public investment and we really should steward it to make sure it remains a public investment," said Sarah Carpenter of the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

VHFA works closely with federal housing officials so gets a chance at public properties put up for sale. It hopes to find the resources to keep Wharf Lane the way it is.

"We're going to have to use public resources to preserve this property," Carpenter said.

The building is now under review by appraisers. It could be worth millions to luxury apartment developers, businesses, or area colleges because of its prime location near the waterfront. Champlain College has looked at the property, but Champlain's Senior Vice President David Provost tells WCAX News that should not be seen as any indication that it will buy the building, as the

school regularly assesses area real estate. Provost says it is in fact unlikely Champlain will buy the property.

VHFA says there are hundreds of other low-income housing projects around the state with 1980s public use contracts about to run out. "We have a number of other properties where our community partners like Champlain Housing Trust and Burlington Housing Authority have purchased them from the private owners and have committed to keep them affordable for the long term," Carpenter said.

Dian Mueller hopes the same happens for Wharf Lane.

"I made a life here-- I like it here," she said.

WCAX News asked Pizzagalli Properties for comment. They declined an on-camera interview but said there's no deal in place yet, so all options are on the table, including working to keep the low-income renters in Wharf Lane. Pizzagalli calls this just a business decision and under the deal signed with the federal government, they have every right to sell their property.

There are some other housing units with uncertain futures. There's a place called Bobbin Lane not far from Wharf Lane that has a deal expiring in 2012. VHFA says properties within Chittenden County are most desirable to private buyers, but they'll do what they can to make sure low-income people can stay where they are.

[Jack Thurston](#) - WCAX News