Shumlin delivers federal housing dollars

By HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN / Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO -- Gov. Peter Shumlin delivered $1 million in federal grants Wednesday to the town of Brattleboro and the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, which will be used throughout the two counties to improve housing for low income home owners.

Shumlin also awarded $271,000 to the town of Wilmington to help the housing trust rehabilitate a seven-unit Main Street apartment the trust owns.

"Our goal is to ensure that we have affordable housing in Vermont," Shumlin said before he announced the funding at a ceremony held at Brattleboro's Municipal Center Wednesday. "One of the things that helps to prime the pump, and helps Vermont immensely is the fact that we are getting affordable housing right."

Shumlin said the federal money goes a long way toward leveraging additional public and private investments in the housing stock of southeastern Vermont. And he said the investments, in the long run, help reduce homelessness by helping keep low income home owners in their properties.

"It's much cheaper and a much better investment and a much more humane approach to ensure we are doing the financial counseling and the intervention to keep people in their homes, than the dire alternative of having them removed from their home because they can't make ends meet," Shumlin said.

Windham & Windsor Housing Trust Executive Director Connie Snow said the $1 million grant will help the housing trust fund its Rehabilitation Loan Fund Program, which provides counseling and construction advice to low-income home owners, as well as low-interest loans and energy efficiency upgrades.

"All of these improvements help home owners remain in their homes," Snow said. "They keep the homes in our community safe and well maintained."

She said the housing trust has run the program for seven years and more than 200 home owners have taken advantage of the services which are funded by the U.S Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant program.

The money goes toward projects such as water wells, roof replacements, high efficiency furnaces and ramps and elevators.

Snow said about half the money will be used to pay for a consultant the housing trust employs to work with home owners on the projects while the rest will go into home repairs and upgrades.

"This revolving loan fund doesn't only provide for housing that's owned by the land trust but rather allows people to stay in their homes, and to make sure those homes are safe, and affordable and energy efficient," Brattleboro Selectboard Chairman David Gartenstein said. "When we had the chance to co-sponsor this fund we jumped at the opportunity."

Wilmington will use the federal money to upgrade a seven-unit apartment the land trust has owned for 17 years.

Snow said the building will get a top to bottom renovation, including energy efficiency upgrades.

She said the federal money will be more than doubled in private investments for the project.

"The two ventures being funded today demonstrate the breadth of our effort to support not only the well being of local citizens but also the health and vibrancy of the communities of southeastern Vermont," Snow said.