

# HOUSING NEWS

## Goshen Housing Trust

December 2021



**Goshen  
Housing Trust**

*For a Stronger Community*

### **GHT Spotlight: Robert Layer and the Goshen Free Food Pantry - Giving Back**

Robert Layer is well-known to Goshen residents as The Farmers Insurance representative at Robert Layer Agency in the Goshen Village Marketplace. He handles a complete line of insurance for the home and business that includes a specialty line for the many collectors of fine and antique automobiles in the Litchfield area.

We recently spoke with Robert about the food pantry out in front of his offices. He told us that the idea first came to him in February 2020, as COVID was starting to become a pandemic. He wanted to give back to the community.

He had seen a similar food pantry built by a craftsman who wanted to help his community. Robert asked about who had created the food pantry and was surprised to quickly receive a message that a pantry box was waiting for him if he wanted it.



Robert picked it up – it was sturdy and well designed for purpose – but it was plain unfinished wood. So, he posted on Facebook on Goshen Chatter that he was looking for ideas on decorating the Food Pantry. Goshen resident, Tammy Valentine, spoke up and turned the sturdy chest into the beautiful Food Pantry you see today.

Since its start in 2020, the Goshen Free Food Pantry has been located right outside the Robert Layer Agency at Goshen Village Marketplace. "It was a space where a newspaper machine had been located, so it was a logical place to put it. It is under the roof overhang and protected from the weather," Robert noted. It is also in a lit area and available for people to access at night.

Robert says that the community has been very generous in providing food for the pantry. "It has never been empty since we started it," said Layer. "And it has been used fairly consistently."

More recently, the Little Free Library was moved to the Robert Layer Agency and located right next to the Free Food Pantry. Robert noted that some individuals bring food items to leave at the pantry and take a book to read away with them. So it is a good pairing.

Robert noted that they had a wide range of goods available from the pantry. The staple item is non-perishable canned foods. But they often get fresh-grown produce. One individual who works in a butcher store wanted to offer meat occasionally; Robert says they arranged to keep the meat in the Agency freezer for those who wanted it.

During the pandemic last year, when students were at home and trying to learn, Robert says they received donations of school supplies that were needed and were extremely popular. Occasionally, they will find that a well-meaning person has dropped off something unsuitable - one morning, Robert says they found cans of beer which Robert pointed out they promptly removed for fear of kids getting access!

We asked Robert what he knows about people who use it. "Well, some who use it prefer to do so in off-hours or quietly during the day. So, we have set it up to be self-serve and available anytime." Layer added, "But, I know some users are from Goshen, and some come from the surrounding communities."

A report issued by the Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research (OLR) in December 2020 discussed the impact of COVID on "food insecurity" - defined as households needing to eat a less varied diet, participate in food assistance programs, or get food from community food pantries.

They estimate that the number of households experiencing food insecurity in Litchfield County increased during the pandemic to 24,760 or 13.5% of the total Litchfield population.

While OLR expects the number impacted to improve as the pandemic ends, data shows the pre-COVID food insecurity affected was 17,890 in 2018.

Donations of non-perishable food and household items can be left at the Free Food Pantry at any time. Essential food items are best. Robert will take monetary donations but prefers in-kind food donations.

GHT is pleased to have the Robert Layer Agency as a tenant and the Goshen Free Food Pantry located at Goshen Village Marketplace. Robert Layer has clearly succeeded in his goal of giving back to the community.



And So, It Begins ...

# An Update on Goshen Village Marketplace

On May 19, 2021, the Goshen Housing Trust became the proud owners of Goshen Village Marketplace (GVM). We are often asked if this includes the gas station and convenience store; the answer is “no”, but everything else.

The first order of business for us was to assume day to day operations. Fortunately, we had planned for this and retained Connecticut Real Estate Management, LLC. (CREM), a well-respected Connecticut property management firm who manages over 3,000 units of rental housing around the state. We have a dedicated team consisting of a Site Manager (Tammy Broderick) and an Office Manager (Kim Erdely) who work together to ensure that GVM operates smoothly.

CREM is also responsible for renting the residential apartments. We started taking applications for our units in June. An application package is downloadable on our website. CREM processes each application, conducting the required income limits, background checking, and maintaining a wait list.

We currently have a small number of vacant units. As these have been recently vacated, we are taking the opportunity to make updates and renovations needed before renting them out, again.

Beyond this, there is a wide range of work to be done at GVM from minor to major. Besides the usual “turnover” of a unit when a tenant moves out, some units need major renovations and update, and there are some structural repairs needed. We are also planning upgrades to the energy efficiency of the residential units, including replacing baseboard electric heating with heat pump HVAC, improved insulation, and replacement of doors & windows.

GHT has retained a Construction Manager who will be planning and overseeing this work. We will work with him to put together a prioritized list of work to be done based on a Capital Needs Assessment previously conducted by an engineering firm and our own observations. Renovations will take over a year to complete, but the good news is that we are getting started!

Work has begun. You may have noticed the “bump out” area on the large building that long-time residents will remember as part of the old grocery store under repair. Work was done rebuilding the walls and rear stairway. A new roof will be installed on this portion soon. We hope to eventually lease this space to additional commercial customers. Renovation work on the residential units will be starting soon. Specifications for the work are out for contractor bids. Plans are to completely renovate 7 of the units by the April/May timeframe. A second phase of renovation will be planned in 2022.

Most of the funding sources we have available are restricted to being used for renovation work on the residential and systems portions of GVM. So, GHT will need to raise other funds to work on some aspects of the work, most notably the appearance of the buildings. We have started two projects for this: a Lighting Project designed to improve the complex in evening hours, and a Landscaping Project for the spring to improve the “greenspaces” of the complex.

We will continue to share more details as the work progresses.



## Help Light the Way!

In April, when we were still trying to close on the purchase of the Goshen Village Marketplace, we realized that improving the appearance of the complex was important. Unfortunately, the funding sources we have for renovating the residential units cannot be used for this purpose. So, we started a fund-raising campaign.

Our first target is to improve the lighting of the complex, hopefully before the short days of winter end. The goal is to improve the lighting in the evenings for residents and for customers of the businesses. This will include improved walkway lighting, parking lot lighting, and signage lighting. This lighting will be carefully designed to avoid creating excessive glare. This project will make visiting GVM in the evenings safer and will enhance its evening appearance.

So far, we have raised about \$8,500 through GiveLocal in April 2021 and through a generous grant from the Torrington Savings Bank Foundation. Our goal for the project is \$20,000.

If you wish to help us toward our goal, please consider an end of year tax-deductible donation to Goshen Housing Trust, Inc. You can mail a check to us in the enclosed envelope, or you can give online at <http://www.GoshenHousingTrust.org/donate>. Thank you!

