



VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL

The Campaign for Vermont Commons

Building the Future

Expanded Campuses at
Green Mountain Drive and the
Outdoor Education Center



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The building at 75 Green Mountain Drive was erected in the mid-1970's and, as legend has it, was run as a concrete batch plant for a time. It was subsequently purchased by George and Pammella Starbuck to house their environmental testing and consulting firm, Aquatec. They transformed the warehouse structure into offices, laboratories, and equipment storage.



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The Starbucks were extraordinary philanthropists, so when their business outgrew the space, they opted to rent out portions of 75 Green Mountain Drive to various nonprofit startups, rather than sell the building. Vermont Commons School was one of those fortunate organizations, and so we got our start in a suite of rooms on the south side of the second floor. The Starbucks were huge champions of VCS and not only prioritized us as a tenant, giving us more space as we needed it, but they also renovated spaces into classrooms for us along the way. VCS grew over the first ten years to the point where we became the only tenant and were renting the entire building from the Starbucks.



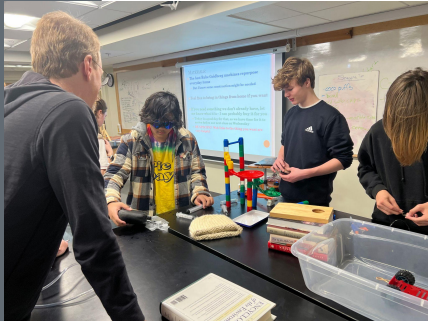
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At an historic meeting in 2010, the VCS Board made the decision to keep VCS in its historic home for the long term and also—thanks once again to the Starbucks—to **purchase** the building at 75 Green Mountain Drive. In 2012, the school built the first state of the art “model classroom” in what is now Tonya’s room—212, complete with projector, screen, wired internet access, and speakers. Simultaneously, the Media Lab was constructed, including wood treatments made from wood harvested by students at Shelburne Farms, and creating another state-of-the-art space for student learning.



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The building at 75 Green Mountain Drive sits on 1.4 acres of land, the majority of which is paved.



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In 2015, the Campaign for Arts and Science resulted in a two-story addition on the east side of the building that added three new classrooms, including the new art and music rooms, the original 6th grade room, and a customized physics lab. This new addition gave us a total of 27,500 ft² of space.



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We opened the newly renovated space in the fall of 2015 while also adding the 6th grade to our program. We surpassed 100 students and continued to grow, which brought wonderful energy into our building but also cramped the space, even with the new additions.



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In 2019, a “quiet” capital campaign allowed us to renovate a portion of the second floor—the old area in the middle nicknamed “The Maze”—giving us two new classrooms, the college counseling office, the E-Week closet, and the learning center.

In spite of these improvements, there were still many ways in which Vermont Commons was “just getting by.” Our sports teams had spent more than 20 years practicing in off-site gyms and on outdoor courts; our faculty doubled or tripled up in limited office space; our students lacked dedicated spaces to read, study silently, or spread out to collaborate on projects; we had no storage space; and the VCS library was really just a handful of bookshelves around the edges of the Commons Room. And having a campus whose outdoor footprint consisted primarily of a paved parking lot also spoke little to the school’s focus on engaging students with the natural world. For these reasons, the Board identified a long-term strategic goal of “expanding the current campus by acquiring additional land and buildings in order to have more green space, increase enrollment, and offer the highest level educational experience.”

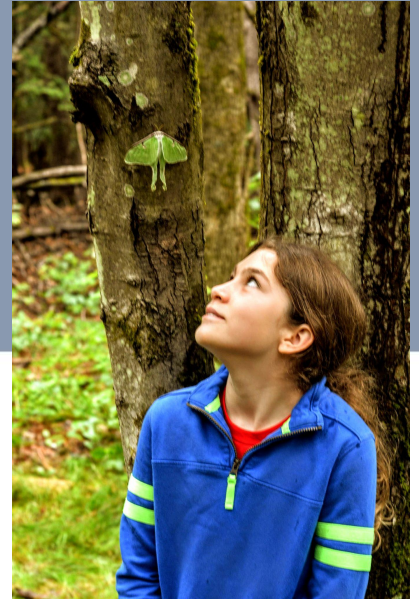


Outdoor Education Center
55 acres on Spear St.
in Charlotte



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Enter the Outdoor Education Center—more commonly known as the “OEC.”



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In the summer of 2020, having just faced a complete lockdown for the last three months of the school year, school leadership wanted to do everything in their power to secure outside learning space for all our students. The Board of Trustees fast-tracked the purchase of a 55-acre tract in Charlotte with a privately held loan, repayable within five years. A stunning combination of fields, wetlands, woods, and streams, with an incredible biodiversity, the land holds a wildlife corridor that moves north to south through the woods and wetlands.



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Over the last two years, we've used the O.E.C. for classes, student research projects, a successful Diploma Certificate by a member of the Class of 2022, a community garden, and every Encounter Weeks since we bought it. Last summer, a National Science Foundation grant allowed Peter Goff and a team of teachers, students, and scientists to install climate-monitoring sensors. The OEC is at the heart of VCS's historic mission and future responsibility to our community and planet.

The site plan approved by the Town of Charlotte allows for a parking lot, a learning pavilion and playing fields in the grassland, a boardwalk crossing the wetland, a trail system throughout the 55 acres, and two yurts and a composting toilet. Initial donations are covering the permitting costs, and we have an anchor pledge towards the cost of the new driveway access and parking lot. We have two and a half years to raise the \$300,000 to pay off the purchase cost of the loan. We also need to raise funds to build out the rest of the infrastructure.



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In August 2021, shortly before the first day of school, we were contacted by Pizzagalli Properties and informed that their property next door at 55 Green Mountain Drive was going up for sale in two weeks unless we told them that we intended to purchase it. We knew that such an opportunity was unlikely to come again.



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Emergency Board meetings and rapid due-diligence work determined that the property was not just viable, but actually *fantastic* for our purposes, and we moved ahead, raising enough capital with which to acquire the building. A secret meeting involving Peter Goff, volleyball court measurements, and a tape measure confirmed that we would indeed be able to use the former warehouse/great room to house volleyball courts. The woods surrounding the building were also a huge draw.

75 Green Mountain Drive

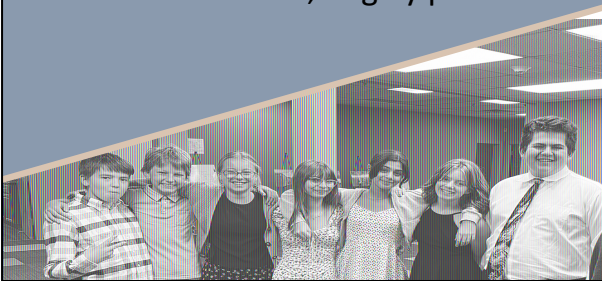
(original building)

- Built 1975
- Originally occupied by Aquatec
- 27,500 sq. ft.
- On 1.4 acres, largely paved

55 Green Mountain Drive

(acquired December 2021)

- Built 1978
- Original tenant was Karhu Skis
- 16,700 sq. ft.
- On 2.8 acres, mostly wooded



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The school closed on the purchase of 55 Green Mountain Drive in December 2021 for \$1.6 million. Approximately \$800,000 remained on the mortgage for the original property at 75 Green Mountain Drive. A new, single mortgage for both properties extended the period but kept the school's monthly payment the same as it has been since we bought the original building in 2010. The new property has added 16,700 ft² of indoor space, as well as 3 acres (including 1.8 acres of wooded land) to the overall Vermont Commons campus.



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In 2022, the former warehouse portion of 55 was converted into VCS's first-ever gym, just in time for the volleyball team to hold practices. On Nov. 1, we held our first homecoming game and celebration in our new athletic home. The girls varsity volleyball team won their game against Enosburg Falls, and the boys varsity Flying Turtles outplayed the "Creeping Tortoises," a team of faculty, parents, and alums.



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Along the way, it's been quite a journey. We've learned that 55 once was the corporate headquarters for Karhu cross country skis. We've learned that one of the best ways to grind away old carpet adhesive is to sprinkle all-purpose flour on it. We've learned that you can beam the internet across buildings through radio towers to run an entire building's telephone lines and wifi.

And we've learned that a community can be transformed positively by giving it some of the basics—elbow room, green space, indoor recreation space, quiet places.

VCS has never been stronger, never been more itself, never been more filled with laughter, joy, learning, and community than it is now.

The Campaign for Vermont Commons

- \$1.2 million has gone toward closing costs on 55 Green Mountain Drive and renovations. Of that, \$950,000 has already been raised.
- \$250,000 will close the books on the work already completed.
- \$300,000 will pay off the loan on the OEC (due September, 2025).

E.E. Ford Foundation Grant Deadline:

- We must raise \$200,000 by July 31, 2023 to receive their full grant of \$100,000.
- Of that, we have raised \$86,500.



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What lies ahead? Important work and incredible opportunity. First and foremost, the donations and pledges made over the last year allowed the school to make the downpayment on the property at 55, get the permitting, update the fire alarm system, and pay for a good portion of the gym. The down payment and closing costs totalled \$400,000. Everything we've completed to this point at 55 Green Mountain Dr. has cost \$800,000. To finish paying for that total amount we as a community still need to raise \$250,000 in donations. We must also raise the \$300,000 to pay back the short-term loan to purchase the OEC.

In June 2022, we received a 1:2 matching grant from the E. E. Ford Foundation; the Foundation will provide \$1 for every \$2 we raise **this school year**, up to a \$100,000 total match.



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On every tour that we've given at 55, the question often raised is, "What are you going to do with the rest of the space?" Many wonderful and creative ideas have emerged, and it's time for us to come together and identify our priorities for Vermont Commons in the future. But rather than asking ourselves what we're going to do with the rest of our space, let's ask ourselves ***what it is we dream of our students being able to do***, now and in the future, and from that, create a collective vision of how to design spaces to support their endeavors.



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What we identify over the next several months will form a Master Plan of future facilities, program development, and fundraising efforts needed to accomplish our goals. We begin today to chart the path we will share for safeguarding and fulfilling the meaningful, beautiful, and enduring learning and growth of every Vermont Commons Student, now and in the future.



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For more information about the Campaign for Vermont
Commons or to discuss making a gift,
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