

2025-2029 Consolidated Plan Public Hearing

Monday, February 24, 2025, from 3:30-4:15 pm

Meeting Notes

Attendance:

Mary Ellen Griffin, Vermont Legal Aid
Gabbie Rae, Department of Housing & Community Development
Shaun Gilpin, Department of Housing & Community Development
Cindy Blondin, Department of Housing & Community Development
Ann Karlene Kroll, Department of Housing & Community Development
Julia Connell, Department of Housing & Community Development
Jayme Bauer, Department of Housing & Community Development
Patrick Scheld, Department of Housing & Community Development

Presenters:

Nathan Cleveland, Department of Housing & Community Development
Lily Sojourner, Office of Economic Opportunity
Ari Kisler, Office of Economic Opportunity
Ron Ruff, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

A Power Point Presentation was provided.

Discussion:

Nathan Cleveland highlighted the following:

- There was extensive public outreach, with 5 public meetings across the state.
- The Statewide Consolidated Plan is used to prioritize \$14 Million in federal funds including Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnership Program, National Housing Trust (NHT), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS Program (HOPWA).
- The draft plan will be published by March 15, 2025, for public comments.
- To date, there have been over 200 survey responses from across the state.
- The state develops the Consolidated Plan with input from an Advisory Board. The Advisory Board represents a broad spectrum from housing providers to individuals that are dealing with homelessness to mental health issues to our economic development corporations and Regional Planning Commissions.
- The city of Burlington is a HUD "Entitlement Community" and receives their funds separately.

Ann Kroll said that CDBG funds should potentially be looked at for more housing preservation rather than trying to spread funding too thin. The Scattered Site Program preserves owner occupied housing through rehabilitation. Currently, there is a set aside of 35% of the \$7 Million of CDBG funds for the Scattered Site Program. The question is whether that should be increased. She added that it would reduce the overall allocation available for multi-family rental projects. Currently, CDBG funds represent 2%-5% of overall funding for multi-family projects and staff is managing up to 60 open grants for very small amounts of funding.

Ann Kroll said that funding fewer larger projects would make a bigger impact and make more sense in terms of managing and reporting federal funds. She added that the "Build America Buy America" (BABA) requirement greatly adds to construction costs and projects need more funding to mitigate this. In public engagement meetings, it was observed that it's not just the cost of steel and iron being impacted but all the lumber products imported from Canada are impacted by BABA.

Shaun Gilpin welcomed Maryellen Griffin and added that DHCD works to be collaborative and views the Consolidated Plan as a tool, not just a HUD requirement. The state is limited by HUD regulations for making many desired changes, but public feedback can inform legislative initiatives.

Maryellen Griffin provided staff with a letter expressing concern about what she considered a high rate of evictions from subsidized housing. In the letter, she urged the Consolidated Plan to prioritize the following:

- **Data Collection:** Gather comprehensive data on eviction rates among subsidized housing providers, identifying those with the lowest rates and the strategies they employ.
- **Funding Priorities:** Allocate funding to support and expand programs that have proven successful in reducing rates of eviction.
- **Policy Tools:** Explore and implement policy tools that incentivize eviction reduction measures and support services that reduce rates of eviction.

Mary Ellen Griffin cited her colleague at Vermont Legal aid Jean Murray who determined that 30% of cases of eviction in court are from subsidized apartments owned by nonprofit organizations. Evictions from subsidized units have severe consequences, most people who are evicted can't access subsidized units again. She adds that from the data it looks like about 500 people a month entering Coordinated Entry and about half of those are returning. She asked why the recidivism rate was so high. Even worse, a quarter of people returning to Coordinated Entry are returning from permanent housing. So people are being placed in housing and becoming homeless again.

Lily Sojourner thanked Mary Ellen Griffin for bringing this to the state's attention. She asked for a chance to review the letter and provide a thoughtful response rather than hypothesizing on the spot. She added that she appreciates Mary Ellen's passion and support and wants to give it the respect it deserves. She added that her points were well taken, and that it is important to consider the "three legs of the stool" - housing units, support services, and rental assistance. She said this ties into the Housing Needs Assessment that the Department of Housing and Community Development contracted with the Vermont Housing Finance Agency to create. Over 50% of renters are experiencing a housing cost burden i.e. over 30% of their income goes to housing. 26% of those are paying 50% or more of their income for housing.

Lily Sojourner added that her team was excited to have a new Medicaid supported Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance Program.

Shaun Gilpin thanked Mary Ellen Griffin and the panel for participating in the public hearing on the 2025-2029 Statewide Consolidated Plan.

The letter submitted to the 2025 Con Plan Advisory Board is attached as part of the minutes. The meeting adjourned at 4:15pm.