

2025-2029 Consolidated Plan Community Outreach

Berlin on February 19, 2025, from 3:30-5:00 pm

Meeting Notes

Presenters & Staff Support: Nathan Cleveland DHCD, Ann Kroll, DHCD, Lily Sojourner, OEO, Ronald Rupp, VCHB, Jayme Bauer, DHCD (staff support)

In-Person Attendees:

Christian Meyer, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission
Deb Reed, Montpelier (works for Barre City)
Edward Johnson, Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity
Eli Toohey, Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission
Emily Wheeler Reynolds, Barre Town (school board)
Heather Hurlbert, CVEDC
Ismina Francois, Barre City
Joe Camaratta, Waterbury Housing
Joe Tanguay, Capital Plaza
Jon Copans, Montpelier Commission for Recovery and Resilience
Josh Hanford, Vermont League of Cities and Towns
Juliann Sherman, East Randolph
Karen Hatcher, Plainfield
Karl Rinker, Barre Area Development Corp.
Kristin Cantu, Greenway Institute
Melissa Bounty, CVEDC
Mitchell Yacavoni, Town of Barre & Habitat for Humanity
Molly Mahar, Ski Vermont
Nat Winthrop, Montpelier
Rae Carter, Plainfield
Shannon Trainor, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Sonya Spaulding, Barre City Council
Tess Taylor, Barre City
Vince and Vania Muraco, Montpelier
Wuillene Paul, Barre City

Power Point Presentation by Nathan Cleveland, Ann Kroll, and Lily Sojourner.

Discussion:

Ron Rupp cited Granite City Apartments in Barre and Marsh House in Waterbury as projects supported by federal funds. 49 new or rehabbed affordable apartments were created with these 2 projects.

Lily Sojourner noted that while Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) are a small piece of OEO's funding, they fund the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) which serves the whole Continuum of Care and shelter networks.

Melissa Bounty asked who could apply for CDBG funds. Nathan Cleveland replied that cities/towns apply to the state CDBG for funds, and they can subgrant funds to nonprofits and developers.

Nathan Cleveland stated that the median income for renters in Vermont was \$43,000 and \$95,000 for homeowners. He added that households need to earn at least \$24 an hour to afford a 2 bedroom apartment in Washington County.

A participant said they had just moved to Vermont from San Francisco and wondered if Vermont looked to other states for best practices to bring housing costs down. Ann responded that the state does look at best practices for a whole host of things including subsidies for rent. There are a lot of factors driving the increases in housing costs, including construction cost. Ron Rupp stated that VHCB staff attends national conferences for information and idea sharing. He added that Champlain Housing Trust was one of the first land trusts in the nation and their mission is to create affordable housing. There is a new land trust forming in the Glover/Albany area.

Nathan Cleveland noted that the median housing price in 2010 was \$210,000 compared to \$300,000 in 2022. Incomes just haven't kept up. Pandemic era moves and 2nd home purchases dwindled the already tight housing stock, making it more difficult to find and afford homes.

Melissa Bounty asked if taxes could be made higher for 2nd homes to address this. She added that senior living communities were desperately needed. Older Vermonters want to downsize but have nowhere to go. Nathan Cleveland agreed and said that multi-generational housing was another opportunity to serve this need.

Christian Meyer of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission said a better understanding of permitting and codes for Accessory Dwelling Units was needed to help create additional units.

Emily Wheeler Reynolds said that infrastructure was also a barrier. In Barre Town, there are 3 different water departments and they all need to be repaired and updated. Josh Hanford added that all new construction depends on infrastructure and the missing piece was who/how it would be funded.

A resident of Plainfield noted that Vermont's geography limited construction, especially with recent floodings. They asked how communities could short-cut hoops and meet housing needs more quickly, and how they can more quickly adapt for the future. Nathan Cleveland said that DHCD has to operate within federal guidelines for CDBG funding and unfortunately, we won't be able to speed it up overnight.

Melissa Bounty said feedback that Central Vermont Economic Development Corporation (CVEDC) received from smaller, private developers was that profits were unpredictable even with Act 250 reforms because of workforce and construction costs.

A participant asked about cooperative purchasing and co-housing. She also asked how the system could shift from relying on volunteers to being paid to better engage with marginalized Vermonters.

Nathan Cleveland said that upcoming zoning updates are aimed at making development easier.

Christian Meyer of the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission said a study was conducted showing more opportunities to grow "up", and that the City of Winooski was having success with adding more stories to existing buildings. Nathan Cleveland added that it is more profitable to grow up than grow out.

A participant said that the town of Waterbury has programs that promote flood resilience and wondered if the state could help make recovery faster. Nathan Cleveland replied that the State has flood plain review and that it was an 8-step process (down from 16 steps).

Jon Copans stated that downtown Montpelier and its businesses and residents are greatly impacted by flooding and asked if there were resources for identifying how to make their structures more flood proof.

A participant asked how communities like Plainfield and Barre City could make up the lost funds from properties removed from their grand lists from flooding, and if there were conversations with flood resiliency organizations. Ron Rupp said that VHCB is doing flood resiliency work as part of their mission.

A participant suggested that the Land Access Board should be part of the process because it was BiPOC led to ensure better equity. Emily Wheeler Reynolds asked if there was an “equity lens” when evaluating proposals. Nathan Cleveland said that fair housing is a key part of evaluating projects.

Nathan Cleveland said that DHCD also considers project need, feasibility and impact and added that the State is trying to attract younger families. Projects like multi-use recreation with housing daycares, laundry services, etc. are ideal. Melissa Bounty said in the Northeast Kingdom there were community centers with laundromats.

Wuillene Paul said that Barre City needs something like a YMCA to give older kids something to do and to have opportunities for mentoring. There is an influx of Haitians looking for leadership and resources. Melissa Bounty said that CVEDC did a feasibility study of developing a children’s museum and there is a lot of need for kid-centered facilities and activities. Nathan Cleveland said projects like these could be prioritized, especially in downtown Barre where poverty is more concentrated.

A participant said that in 2023 the state helped with flood applications and planning and asked if CDBG funds could help communities with this. Nathan Cleveland replied yes the Rural Economic Development Initiative allows communities to hire a grant writer to access larger pools of funding. In 2023, the River Program helped identify projects and move them forward.

Josh Hanford advocated for larger CDBG awards. The current practice of awarding smaller grants creates the need for stacking funding and is inefficient. The state will get fewer projects done but often the projects with smaller grants can take years to get fully funded with other sources. Nathan Cleveland said that DHCD receives approximately \$7M of CDBG funding and awards about 20 communities with an average grant of \$400,000.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10pm.