

2025-2029 Consolidated Plan Community Outreach

Bellows Falls/Rockingham January 9, 2025 (11:30am – 1:00pm)

Presenters & Staff Support: Nathan Cleveland, DHCD, Arthur Hamlin, DHCD, Ari Kisler, OEO, Lily Sojourner, OEO, Jayme Bauer, DHCD (online)

In-Person Attendees:

Bob Flint, Springfield Regional Development Corporation bob@springfielddevelopment.org

Erin Ladd, Mount Ascutney Regional Commission (MARC) eladd@marcvt.org

Gary Fox, Town of Rockingham development@rockbf.org

Jamey Berrick, Resident

Joel Lose, Resident

Josh Davis, Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) jdavis@sevca.org

Matt Bachler, Windham Regional Commission mbachler@windhamregional.org

Stephanie Vandal, Springfield Supported Housing Program (SSHP) svandal@sshpvt.org

Online Attendees:

Ann Kroll, DHCD

Cheryl Jackins, Pathways Vermont

Cindy Blondin, DHCD

Dan Handy, Ground Works

Erika Hoffman, Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation

Ernest Caswell (Buster), Milton, Farm Worker Advocate

Jean Hopkins, Resident, Burlington

Jennifer Tolaro, Resident, Bellows Falls

Karissa Myers, Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless

Kristin Prior, Agency of Human Services

Robert Oeser, Resident, Brattleboro

Sarah Teel, Resident

Scott Sharland, DHCD and Resident, Brattleboro

Steve Hayes, Brattleboro Planning Department

Presentation. A power point was provided highlighting the purpose of the Statewide Consolidated Plan, the process and timeline. Link to the presentation:

https://vermontgov.sharepoint.com/:p/s/ACCD/Housing/EZFF0xUUuDhCo3oiefP9sPwBgn_Z_wQLhoiohzjEX1g4YQ

Discussion:

Jamey Berrick asked if DHCD had reached out to other communities for public meetings. Nathan Cleveland replied that the meeting in Bellows Falls was the first of five community meetings being held across the state and that there would be 2 HUD mandated public hearings on the 2025 Consolidated Plan.

Josh Davis asked if the state looks back at previous consolidated plans to see if goals were being met.

Lily Sojourner stated that Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) are a small part of the overall funding used for emergency shelters. She added that HUD limits what activities their funding can be used for.

There was a general comment about the survey. The questions are multiple choice without sufficient opportunities for comments or suggestions. Nate stated that community meetings are a way for residents to share ideas.

There was a question about whether funds were allocated by region/county. Nathan Cleveland responded that funding is statewide and awards depend on applications that are submitted. He added that the state can prioritize based on downtown status, historic districts, etc.

During the presentation, Nathan Cleveland discussed data regarding cost burdened renters and homeowners. Renters earn far less income than homeowners and over 50% of renters are cost burdened (over 30% of income goes to housing) or extremely cost burdened (over 50% of income). 35% of homeowners are cost burdened.

An audience member asked if the state could add a graph showing hourly wages and housing costs over time.

Bob Flint said there is not enough housing of any kind (price point, rental, and owner-occupied). The Springfield Regional Development Corporation would like to build 25 units without rental covenants, but it is cost prohibitive without subsidies. He asked if the state could consider the percentage of households receiving services when evaluating applications. He was concerned about concentrating poverty and towns becoming “service hubs”. Nathan Cleveland stated that Act 250 reforms focused on designated downtowns.

_____ commented that a subsidized housing project doesn’t necessarily pay taxes equal to private development. Adam Grinold provided an example where taxes for a vacant building were \$2,000 compared to \$20,000 after being redeveloped with subsidies. Nathan Cleveland clarified that HUD only requires that 51% of CDBG funded units be for low/mod households. The Bellows Falls Garage has 27 units and 14 of those are reserved for low/moderate income households and the rest can be market rate.

Lily Sojourner discussed Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) which currently funds emergency shelters and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) projects.

Joel Lose said that housing data/maps should have a business and jobs overlay for information on proximity of jobs to houses and how job wages compare to housing costs. Adam Grinold agreed that this data was needed to assess if communities have the kinds of jobs needed that allow people to comfortably afford housing. And if not, whether job training or some other program could help with a gap between wages and housing costs.

Adam Grinold observed that small towns and/or smaller developers don’t have the capacity to apply for many of the state’s programs using HUD funds due to the competitiveness and complexity of the application and approval processes. He asked if the state could change target applicants to regional organizations with better capacity. Nathan Cleveland replied that the state has to follow federal guidelines, but with DHCD’s guardrails. He added that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds can pay for administrative costs to help build capacity for smaller communities that want to apply for funds for a project. This could include hiring a consultant to find ways to deliver more collaborative/regional projects.

Ernest Caswell (Buster) said he would like to see off-farm housing built for farm workers. He added that data on farm worker housing was limited and was needed to enable workers to have housing stability and work on any farm in their area. He said that according to the data he knew of, there are approximately 60,000 farm workers and 11,000 farm worker housing units.

Josh Davis pointed out that a lot of funds were being used to create new housing units and he would like to see access to funds for repairing existing homes owned by low-income households. Nathan Cleveland said that the state was investing in home repairs through the 5 homeownership centers that serve all 14 counties. They offer grants and low interest loans to repair owner-occupied homes. Nathan added that CDBG funds were designed to serve more urban areas so there can be a mismatch with the needs in more rural states like Vermont.

Ron Rupp stated that the primary use of HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) and Housing Trust Fund (HTF) was affordable housing development, including shared equity programs. HTF serves very low-income which makes it unrealistic for homeownership unless the households already own their home (like fixed income seniors).

Ron added that the Vermont State Housing Authority has tenant based and project base vouchers. However, tenants are unable to find suitable units with their vouchers at an alarming rate. Workshops and other educational opportunities to encourage landlords to accept vouchers could be helpful.

Dan Handy, a landlord liaison with Groundworks that serves Windsor County, works with landlords to help them become more familiar with the voucher process/paperwork and added that vouchers are a stable source of income for landlords.

Matt Bachler noted that there is a concentration of housing in areas with services and infrastructure. The reforms being made to Act 250 provide exemptions and incentives for housing in these areas.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00pm.