

2025-2029 Consolidated Plan Advisory Board

Monday, February 24, 2025, from 2:00-3:15 pm

Meeting Notes

Board Members in attendance:

Cindy Reid, Cathedral Square Corporation
Jessica Hyman, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)
Jo Ann Troiano, Montpelier Housing Authority
Megan Roush, Vermont Housing & Finance Agency (VHFA)
Molly Shimko, Housing & Homeless Alliance of Vermont
Rachel Batterson, Vermont Legal Aid

Staff in attendance:

Gabbie Rae, DHCD	Shaun Gilpin, DHCD
Brett Chornyak, DHCD	Commissioner Farrell, DHCD
Cindy Blondin, DHCD	Ann Karlene Kroll, DHCD
Jayne Bauer, DHCD	Julia Connell, DHCD
Patrick Scheld, DHCD	

Presenters: Nathan Cleveland, DHCD; Lily Sojourner, OEO; Ari Kisler, OEO; Ron Ruff, VHCD

A Power Point Presentation was provided.

Discussion:

Commissioner Farrell asked if the 35% set aside of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for scattered site projects could be increased. He also asked if there would be a bigger impact with a larger cap per award.

Nathan Cleveland said that he looked forward to feedback from the Advisory Board and gave an outline of the funds covered in the Statewide Consolidated Plan:

- \$700,000 – Emergency Solutions Grant
- \$7,000,000 – Community Development Block Grant
- \$3,000,000 – National Housing Trust Fund

Rachel Batterson asked about the Scattered Site Program. Nathan Cleveland replied that Scattered Site Program funding goes directly through the 5 homeownership Centers that serve the state. The homeownership centers provide low interest loans and grants for home repairs, as well as credit counseling. He provided the following details about the program:

- \$19K was the average cost of projects per household.
- The home must meet all codes when the project is completed.
- There's a one-year grant period and three-year performance period.
- 110-115 projects are completed every year for all 5 of the homeownership centers.

Rachel asked how low income was defined. Nathan replied that households had to have incomes at or below 80% of Area Median Income.

Cindy Reid asked about the rental program. Patrick Scheld responded that there is a small rental component and that the homeownerships also administered the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) which provides up to \$50,000 to bring affordable rental units online.

Shaun Gilpin, Director of the Housing Division which administers VHIP, said that the Consolidated Plan refers to HUD funding, which leverages and impacts funding from other sources including state general funds. He stated that the 5-year Housing Needs Assessment, recently completed by the Vermont Housing & Finance Agency (VHFA) and the 5-year Fair Housing Analysis, recently completed by the Housing Division, help inform the Consolidated Plan. He added that the plan won't be finalized for another two months so there is plenty of time for community feedback.

Nathan Cleveland outlined the 4 priorities for the plan:

1. Increase Supply and Quality of Affordable Housing
2. Create and Retain Jobs
3. Decrease the Number Experiencing Homelessness
4. Strengthen Communities and Improve Quality of Life

Ann Kroll noted a few programmatic changes that were being considered by Vermont Community Development Program (VCDP) staff:

- Potentially increasing the set aside for scattered site projects from 35% to 50% of CDBG funds.
- Increasing the cap for individual awards (fewer, larger awards).
- Potentially increasing the set aside for accessibility improvements.

Ann Kroll added that the \$3 Million the state receives from the National Housing Trust serves very low-income families, usually for multi-family structures.

Rachel Batterson said that CDBG funds were historically used with HOME funds for Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) projects. She wondered about the Scattered Site program serving households with incomes at or below 80% AMI versus 30-50%. Ann Kroll said the Scattered Site program preserves housing units and creates opportunities for first time buyers and seniors who want to downsize. She added that there are other funds for multi-family projects and that the states CDBG funds were "a drop in the bucket" compared to LIHTC and other funding sources. 80% of AMI is the ceiling for program eligibility and the average income of households being served is 60% of AMI.

Megan Roush said that the set aside for the Scattered Site program was increased in either 2023 or 2024 and asked how much that increase was. Ann Kroll replied that it went from 25% to 35%. Megan added that it would be helpful to understand how many households were being served at 35%. Ann said that staff would provide these figures with the board.

Cindy Reid preferred keeping the set aside at 35% and wants to continue to serve households at or below 80% AMI. She did approve of increasing the cap for individual awards and added that Build America, Buy America (BABA) requirements significantly increased construction costs.

Rachel Batterson would like to see the data on incomes of households being served by the Scattered Site program and asked if participants had access to conventional loans. Ann Kroll replied that they were required to try to get conventional loans, and most are seniors disabled persons with fixed incomes who could not qualify for a loan. Rachel asked if participants could sell the homes. Ann answered that the homes being fixed were in poor condition and even with being brought up to code wouldn't sell at a high enough price for participants to purchase another home.

Jo Ann Troianno asked if the Advisory Board would be meeting after the public hearings. Patrick Scheld said that the second board meeting was scheduled after the second public hearing.

Nathan Cleveland asked if VCDP should share its Consolidated Annual Performance & Evaluation Report (CAPER) with the Advisory Board.

Ann Kroll said that the state was looking to put more funding into the Scattered Site program to preserve more housing units. Rachel Batterson said that non-profit owned multi-family housing is less subject to being purchased by investors than single-family homes. Ann said that deed restrictions could be used to help prevent that.

Shaun Gilpin noted the public engagement efforts that the Housing Division did for the Statewide Fair Housing Analysis and asked Jayme Bauer to elaborate. Jayme highlighted the "Fair Housing Library Tour" where she paired up with local service providers to visit libraries in 12/14 counties to increase survey responses and help answer questions and concerns. There were over 200 responses for the Statewide Housing Discrimination survey from residents in every county in Vermont. One of the main findings was that discrimination is widespread, which suggests the need for more enforcement of the Fair Housing Act and the Federal Public Housing Authority.

Jayme asked Jess Hymen to talk about the focus groups conducted for residents with Limited English Proficiency for the Fair Housing Analysis. Jess Hyman said that DHCD contracted with CVOEO to conduct five focus groups in 12 languages. Main findings were that more education is needed about fair housing and renter rights and a general distrust of the system.

Shaun Gilpin proposed adjourning the meeting to respect everyone's time. He added that the team would be happy to entertain additional thoughts and questions by phone or email and that the draft would be published in the next few weeks.

The second hearing needs to be scheduled for early April 2025.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.