

Consolidated Plan Advisory Board Meeting – 2/7/2024

Virtual Attendees: Debbie Ingram, Angus Chaney, Bill Colvin, Ari Kisler, Megan Roush, Rachel Batterson, Sandrine Kibuey, Lily Sojourner, Frank Knaack, Adam Grinold, David Riegel

In person: Arthur Hamlin, Nate Formalarie, Jo Ann Troiano, Ron Rupp, Patrick Scheld, Kelly Poupore, Jayme Bauer

Introductions

- Kelly Poupore, Vermont Human Rights Commission, and Frank Knaack, Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont are new members of the Advisory Board.
- We are in the final year of the 2020-2024 5-year Consolidated Plan, this will be the last Annual Action Plan (AAP) for this 5-year cycle.
- This coming year we will start working on the next 5-year Consolidated Plan for 2025-2029 which is a more extensive process.
- Arthur is interested in how to make the Advisory Board more involved and useful in the process.
- Jayme Bauer from DHCD has been working on the Housing Needs Assessment portion of the Plan.
- Rachel asked about the Fair Housing Assessment. Jayme is working on that as well and will provide an update.

Plan overview

- Arthur provided an overview of the HUD Consolidated Plan. The Advisory Board is a creation of DHCD to consult with State agencies and community organizations to get input on the Plan. The second piece of outreach is the public hearing immediately following this advisory meeting to gather input from the public.
- Vermont gets about \$11 million in federal funding to address housing, homelessness, and community development and the Advisory Board helps to advise DHCD on developing the themes of the Plan.
- The broad goals of the plan as established by HUD are to provide decent housing, assure a suitable living environment, and expand economic opportunity. Vermont's goals are: 1) increase the supply and quality of affordable housing, 2) decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness, 3) create and retain jobs, and 4) strengthen communities and improve the quality of life of Vermonters.
- DHCD administers Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, VHCB administers HOME funds and the National Housing Trust Fund – which needs to be included in the Consolidated Plan, and the Office of Economic Opportunity in AHS administers Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funds.
- The Annual Action Plan lays out what we want to use these funds for and describes the State's process for distributing the funds.

- Debbie asked about Burlington's separate pot of funds – Burlington is considered an Entitlement Community and gets their own CDBG and HOME funds and are not included in this Consolidated Plan.
- Adam commented that different states like NH administer funds differently and asked if there is flexibility to look at how here in Vermont we administer. Is there a best practice in rural states? If there is a certain area that has been a challenge to address here in the state, then maybe we should think about shifting the method of distributions to address key challenges.
- Arthur responded that Vermont has not historically done any geographic targeting with these funds but it's something we could look into doing. Julia mentioned in response to Adam that VCDP does attend annual conferences and meets on a regular basis with other New England states.

Program updates

- Arthur gave a quick rundown of the different funding types of CDBG – public facility types, accessibility grants, public services, economic development, and planning grants. The Vermont Community Development Program at DHCD (VCDP) has a board that makes funding recommendations to the Agency secretary. VCDP staff review applications and manage the grants.
- Patrick said that VCDP has been discussing increasing the maximum award amount for Public Facilities Grants from \$500k to \$1M. The priorities would not change but this would allow these projects to ask for more funding due to new regulations like Build America Buy America (BABA) that could cause higher project costs.
- Ron – HOME & HTFs are used for affordable housing. VHCB is not proposing to do anything different this year. Demand continues to be strong and have no issues getting these funds spent. HOME and HTF have given more awards to private developers recently, so that's new. Megan Roush chimed in that in VT we see about 90% of funding recipients are non-profit developers but have seen a small rise in private developers accessing funds.
- Ari – ESG is typically used for shelter operations and has been used for Rapid Re-housing, but State funds are more significant and flexible for Rapid Re-housing (\$30M in State funds and \$700k for rapid rehousing). HUD doesn't allow 100% of ESG funds to be used for shelters. This requirement typically goes into the administration of data entry (like CoC) to better support State needs and partners.

Housing needs assessment

- Jayme provided an overview of Fair Housing Assessment. A draft plan is due in late March and will be brought to the public in May for public comment.
- She has been doing a lot of outreach (Fair Housing library tour, working with CVOEO to reach groups with language barriers, thriving communities group in March).

- The State contracted with Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) to complete the Housing Needs Assessment. The draft submission date is February 28 with public input in May and finalized in June.
- Nate asked about the timing of the HNA report and whether there is data available that can be utilized during the legislative session. Megan responded that she could connect him with the person at VHFA if there are specific data points he's interested in.
- Rachel requested that the Housing Needs Assessment and Fair Housing Assessment be separated further in time that they are completed so that data can be used from the Fair Housing Assessment in the Housing Needs Assessment.
- Arthur said that HUD's schedule for the Consolidated Plan is always the same; our Plan is due 45 days before July 1, with other deadlines working backwards from that date. January is when this process typically starts for us.
- We are still under the interim Plan for Fair Housing Assessment. Jayme thinks we will have new timelines from HUD next year.

Advisory Board input

- Debbie asked if VHIP gets Federal funds. She is aware of some issues that she would like to express – like with ADUs, if funds are taxable, etc. Jayme said VHIP is state funded and recommended that Debbie reach out to the Housing Team.
- Rachel asked a follow up question about the Fair Housing Assessment. Is there guidance from HUD on what is needed? Jayme responded that we're doing a hybrid of the Analysis of Impediments and Fair Housing Assessment which is a bit more robust than what HUD is currently requiring.
- Angus asked - Because these federal funds trigger requirements, is the Consolidated Plan (1 or 5 year) a tool that could be used to reduce per-unit cost that we as a state are currently working with – similar to the QAP for Tax Credits. Maybe we should say something in the Consolidated Plan like “Vermont will prioritize projects that will reduce per unit costs to build more” to show that we really are working to build more.
- Julia mentioned that the Consolidated Plan is our method of distribution, and we are constantly thinking of ways we can stretch our dollars further.
- Adam is thinking about the infrastructure needed to assist with projects and bring units online whether it's a large developer or smaller developer. He would love to see how smaller developers can better utilize CDBG funds and not leave rural areas behind.
- Rachel's thought on the cost per unit comments – regulation is an issue and maybe we can reduce barriers to affordable housing. Arthur said there is a section in the plan about reducing barriers through policies and programs.
- Rachel would like us to note that it's always going to be cheaper to build in more industrial areas, but only prioritizing per unit cost or overly prioritizing this factor among many factors could be an issue for Fair Housing.
- Megan noted that cost per unit is a really complex issue including infrastructure, regulations, and there's a lack of labor force. We'd have to think really hard as a group if we were to put something like that in place.

Schedule

- Megan asked if there's been a meeting set in the schedule for this year after the draft is sent out to review any public comments. Arthur says that's not scheduled but he can do that. It's something we talked about doing last year.
- The draft plan is scheduled to be published for comment on March 19 with an Advisory Board meeting and Public Hearing on April 3.
- Our deadline to submit the plan to HUD is May 17.
- David observed that a lot of comments seemed to come from organized groups and to think about how to ensure that general public comments are heard.