

Consolidated Plan 2020-2024 & COVID-19 Response

Virtual Public Hearing, hosted by Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) April 13, 2020: Meeting Notes

NOTE: Due to technical difficulties the virtual meeting room needed to be changed from one platform to another shortly before the meeting was scheduled to begin. The names of participants commenting were included to the extent that commenters identified themselves or provided identifying information in the web meeting registration.

Shaun Gilpin (DHCD). gave a brief overview of the Consolidated Plan process and eligible uses of funds as well as the changes in timeline and expected allocations in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Josh Hanford (DHCD). piggy-backed on Shaun's overview and talked a bit more about anticipated 5-year goals and introduced some HUD guidance regarding COVID-19

Josh H. opened the floor for comments

Kevin Geiger – Volunteer groups trying to figure out ways to deliver meals more so than in the past.

Mary Ellen Griffin – provided written comments, synopsis – ConPlan to connect goals 1 and 2 more directly and measuring rates of eviction to better assess access to affordable housing. More of a plan to gather data on rental housing – where is it and cost, to help drive the rental market to perform better

Jill (Legal Aid) – VT Poverty Law fellow, researching housing challenges with mental health concerns, to discuss housing accessibility to include those with mental illness. People facing housing availability issues/concerns for individuals with mental illness. Often modifications need to be made to housing units to make housing more accessible to individuals with mental illness (sound proofing for example)

Shaun G. – Offered to continue the fair housing question offline

Shannon B. – Rental assistance programs in the wake of COVID-19

Josh Hanford responded that there have been additional inquiries regarding rental assistance

Ramsey P – Capstone Housing Counselor – abundance of empty housing in Central VT, affordable housing is often separated. Can low-income rental housing be combined with market rate housing?

Josh H – responded with the practice of mixed income housing resulting in best outcomes. The ConPlan does speak to a desire to build mixed-income housing. And, explained a need to restore VT existing housing stock to address housing needs.

Ann Karlene-Kroll (DHCD) – suggested to provide a synopsis of the ConPlan and previous public comments received

Josh H – spoke about 3 specific areas that came up in the 4 outreach meetings across the state. The top 3 are infrastructure needs, farm worker housing, and childcare advocacy.

Joel Colony – Brattleboro, world learning school and international education – concerned about rising unemployment claims, foresees challenges with workforce development and sees an opportunity to work locally in workforce development. Has a track record of workforce development on an international level but is asking about to focus on local workforce development.

Jess Hyman – CVOEO Fair Housing – goals to increase affordable housing as well as Fair Housing and the increase of housing choice. 2. There has been fast action for the homeless population amidst COVID-19, and those short-term solutions should be considered in the transformation to long-term solutions to address the homelessness in VT

Chip Sawyer – A role for the City to play in the local economy to assist business in the funding gap supply agreeable financing to local businesses. Municipalities may have additional leverage in borrowing, and also businesses that close permanently. Communities to provide some RLF or grants to help jump start the local economy to help business to survive in the re-opening. Can be a strategy at any point to revitalize a community but will certainly be needed amidst COVID-19.

Josh H. – Folks are looking at all the State local RLF's to see if there is a way to deploy some of that funding quickly.

Josh started talking about the need for more housing and what kind of housing support is needed. How can we stretch public finances to build new units? Public Facilities section of the conplan is intentionally broad (because of HUD). VCDP has increased the proposed allocation to public facilities project based on ongoing needs.

Mary Ellen Griffin – Asked about an opportunity to respond to CARES Act funding.

Ann – responded that we will be posting the only HUD Guidance of eligible uses of CARES Act funds.

Josh – reiterated that we will accept any eligible activity applications. Went on to say that this is only the first round of funding, and it was intentionally included as part of the ConPlan in order to get the money out to States quickly.

Ann – First round of funding is dedicated for response funding to be used quickly (stem the tide) and there is an anticipated larger amount of funding for recovery efforts

Kevin Geiger - Is there is State Gov't rubric on how the \$2 billion is being decided?

Ann – answered by saying that we are here discussing CDBG eligible uses only

Josh – answered the \$1.25 billion for VT, the Governor and legislative leadership is discussing how and where to use larger CARES Act funds.

Erhard M – Maine CDBG CARES Rental Assistance, that Maine is using ESG funds for homelessness and CDBG could be used for rental assistance. Even though its clunky for up to 3 months. Has VCDP thought through how the Rental Assistance Program. Could it be CVOEO or State Housing Authority? Has it been operationally discussed?

Josh H. – VCDP will need a partner in a Rental Assistance Program (Has not yet spoken to Ann). This is not a normal use of funds for VCDP, so we do not have a precedent in VT for CDBG funds to be used this way. But, yes, this is a specific need that will need to be looked at Statewide for help with COVID-19 response and recovery.

Sandrine (CVOEO) – wanted to say thank you for putting forth the effort to figure out how utilize the CDBG funds. Appreciates the opportunity to be heard. Will send written comments about mobile home needs.

Shaun G – reiterating that any additional comments can be sent to Shaun and/or VCDP.

O. Makuku – Essex Community Development Director – looking to increase the affordable housing in town of Essex and will be creating a Housing Committee.

Josh and Ann close out the meeting telling everyone to stay safe and stay well.