

Virtual Public Hearing
Vermont Draft HUD 2021 Annual Action Plan
April 5, 2021

Organizers/Presenters: Julia Connell, Arthur Hamlin, Ann Kroll, Lily Sojourner, Ron Rupp, Nate Cleveland, Max Krieger.

Participants: Rachel Batterson, Kara Casey, Molly Conarro, Tina Cook, Marcella Gange, Maryellen Griffin, Debbie Ingram, Chris Jacobson, Tom Kennedy, Michelle Lombard, Ramsey Papp, Marissa Reed, Emily Cynthia Wood, Jess Graff

Welcome

Arthur Hamlin, Housing Program Coordinator, opened the hearing explaining that participants can unmute themselves when they give testimony. Organizers can share their webcam.

Background

This hearing to get comments on the draft 2021 Action Plan. Written comments accepted through May 5, 2021. Can be emailed to Arthur.Hamlin@vermont.gov. Can be mailed but staff are working remotely and may not get right away.

Plan describes how State plans to use HUD funds of approximately \$11 million made up of CDBG about \$7 million, \$3 million HOME, \$700,000 to AHS for the Emergency Solutions Grant, and \$3 million for the Housing Trust Fund (HTF). Comments on HTF welcome. It has separate Action Plan but also included. Plan also includes new funds for Recovery Housing.

Ann Kroll, Director of Grants Management. No major changes or new initiatives.

As result of outreach last year for 5-year plan were comments about farm worker housing. Will add an additional housing goal: "Work with stakeholder groups and the Agency of Agriculture to identify methods of investing in the rehabilitation or replacement of housing for agricultural workers to improve worker health and farm sustainability." Has come to the forefront as poor housing conditions exacerbate Covid risk.

DHCD is developing separate plan for Recovery Housing Funds but wants to include in Consolidated Plan. Adding to the strengthening communities' goal: "Promote facilities and services that stabilize living environments and enhance quality of life for families and individuals recovering from addiction." May use regular CDBG as matching source with Recovery Housing Funds to help projects reach fruition.

Comments

Kara Casey, Ann answered her first question which was about where recovery housing fits into plan. Commented on page 71 about negative effects of public policy as barriers and promoting

fair housing. Neither of these calls out racial discrepancy in affordable land and home ownership. Hopes that can be added in more explicitly to highlight work being done and hold ourselves accountable. Kara also commented about statement about the Dept. of Corrections not routinely discharging ex-offenders into homelessness. Would like more exploration, what obligation do we have to support that transition? Does not see anything in Plan to ensure that is happening.

Maryellen Griffin - supports the goal of safe affordable housing for all Vermonters. Had an exchange with Ron and DHCD about goal of five units of housing for homeless. Ann - we will be taking that into consideration. Arthur - five units come out of capital money. Talking about constructing new units. DHCD will keep thinking about it.

Maryellen - how does Con Plan fit with American Rescue Plan and other funding streams? Ann - we are looking strategically to see how fit into what we are doing, but ARP does not have its own action plan (and not in Con Plan).

Maryellen commented about use of data. Plan says will link homeless assistance with permanent housing through practices informed by data. Is there opportunity to use data more than in past to prioritize funding. 15% goal made big difference. For example, could we use eviction rate or admission rates. Considering how Covid housing policy served the state, is there any health data that would be considered? Ann – CDBG writes 15% goal into agreements and is requirement they must meet. Ron Rupp – VHCB tries to coordinate all projects regardless of funding. He has not seen any health related data tied to housing opportunities but recognizes the connection of how housing relates to health.

Lily Sojourner – looks at their data including ESG / HOP and Emergency Housing through GA. Not sure how Maryellen thinks health data would be used and hopes Maryellen can follow up in writing with additional details to her question. Happy to keep discussing. OEO is on a working group on ARPA funds which does look at funds to best use in coordinated way.

Tina Cook - identified as a “proud BIPOC Vermont resident.” This issue is important to discuss. Would like to see more wording in the Plan and requirements tied into this. One example of a health disparity – BIPOC housing is often located where there is more pollution. Would like to see more focus on transportation so housing can be in more places. Lives in Bennington, which rarely gets attention. Will send more in written comments.

Michelle Lombard, Franklin Grand Isle restorative justice. Desires to see more single (person) housing. Works with people on furlough. Landlords don't want to rent to people who are on furlough or have a criminal background and there are usually no vouchers for single person HH. Coming out of prison they have not established a work history and don't have savings started to be able to afford housing. Ann – DOC recently put out RFP for a new mission around establishing units for people coming out of incarceration. More of a scattered site model than congregate housing.

Rachel Batterson – wants to emphasize what others said about including fair housing and issues regarding racial equity in the Plan. Understands HUD’s format has challenges. Ann – HUD officials are putting new emphasis on racial equity. Lily – ESG selection criteria in Plan are same as in past but when release NOFA will include criteria about reaching underserved populations including BIPOC.

Tina Cook – commented about zoning preventing multi-family housing.

Rachel – is there a public process to comment on ARP funds? Max Krieger, DHCD General Counsel – ARP funds most likely the Legislature will work on that. Maryellen – Rep. Welch is holding a panel on ARP on Wednesday.

Hearing adjourned at 6:10 PM.