

Facility Planning for Justice-Involved Youth: Stakeholder Working Group Notes

June 17th, 2024, 4:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Virtually or in person

Pine Conference Room at the Waterbury State Office Complex, 280 State Drive,
Waterbury, VT 05671

Present

1. Tyler Allen, Adolescent Services Director at FSD/DCF
2. Elizabeth Morris, Juvenile Justice Coordinator at FSD/DCF
3. Cheryle Wilcox, Department of Mental Health
4. Penny Sampson, Council for Juvenile Justice Administrators (a national organization focused on administrators for justice involved youth)
5. Rachel Edens, Director of Race, Gender, Equity and Accessibility at DCF
6. Lauren Higbee, Deputy Advocate at the Office of the Child Youth and Family Advocate
7. Kara Casey, Vermont Network
8. Tabrena Karish, Project Manager, BGS
9. Marshall Pahl, Deputy Defender General and Chief Juvenile Defender
10. Karen Vastine, Chair, Council for Equitable Youth Justice
11. Aryka Radke, Deputy Commissioner of FSD
12. Haley McGowan, Pediatric Psychiatrist, UVMHC & Department of Mental Health

No public comments made at the meeting.

Approval of the minutes from last meeting, most of it is the ppt presentation with the builders for how the campus could look.

Cheryle Wilcox: It's very helpful to do the notes by slide. Motioned. Seconded. Notes approved. Karen, Kara, Penny, Marshall abstain (didn't review minutes).

Need 10 people in the room for quorum. Abstaining doesn't cause there to be a lack of quorum.

Updates

On June 5th DCF had a public forum at the Vergennes Opera House with lots of questions and answer – see here [Green Mountain Youth Campus | Department for Children and Families \(vermont.gov\)](#) for a short video/orientation. There were approximately 50 people present and 20 online as well. Some of the salient discussion at that forum included:

- The Weeks school and the painful history
- Some conversation around DCFs capacity to hold youth in general.

- Larger discussion about the practice of putting youth in prisons. To some degree, we spoke in charge about how it's antithetical to DCF's approach to working with youth.
- Some concerns about the property value and impressions of how the town will be regarded. I.e. stigma about how the city might have some reputation that was associated with the weeks school.
- Public utilities, emergency services and impact on local police force.
- How taxation was going to work given that it's state land, but there's a builder so there's a bit of a complicated leasing situation.
- How much would it impact trucking roads
- Some feeling like Vergennes already has a large amount of programming with job corps and a substance abuse program.
- This Facilities planning group was mentioned at the Vergennes public forum, there was some relief that there was a group discussing the facility as well
- Some people were very excited, with hopes around what could be done with an educational program and what that should look like and how education should be added to be therapeutic. Overall, the selectboard was supportive and wanted to make sure there wasn't going to be undue hardship.

Next Steps

Tyler: Wanted to spend some time thinking about how we are going to organize the work of this group. Obviously, there are builders who are thinking through the structure. This group's mandate is to provide thoughtful feedback, we're getting very close to engaging an operator who would be operating at the state level. How do we organize the building? We need to have discussion about what therapeutic modalities are – both crisis stabilization and treatment. Most youth in a crisis stabilization are predisposition youth and there might be some barriers.

Marshall: My concern over the last few weeks is that this group was brought together with the idea that we'd be looking at how best to design and implement the plan, but it seems like a lot of that was done before the group came together. I.e.: number of beds we need, do we really need two programs in one building? It seems like it's not up for discussion, because we're making presentations to the town of Vergennes. It looks like a woodside with a smaller gym, which is what a lot of us have been trying to avoid. I have a lot of concerns about the two programs at one facility, it's an easy way to have both youth bounce between both programs. That led to many super long stays at Woodside. Frankly, I've got concern about it being only one option with one program modality and one system for crisis stabilization. It doesn't feel like this group is making its way to the community or the legislature. What is our group's role? A lot that has been determined looks like what has been there already. Is there anyone defending the woodside model? But that seems to be what we're getting.

Tyler: I think a lot of those things you've mentioned are some of the many pieces we've (the group) have identified, but we need concrete working groups that can have those frank conversations. I think we can't all necessarily be there because of capacity.

We worked with BGS in the design in building & proposed schematic, but we are at the place now where there is no ground broke, and we can decide if we want to move forward with it.

Marshall: When it came to starting out with the state's idea of what the building needs to look like, who was there?

Tyler: Not sure exactly, but I believe my team, Jennifer Herbert, Geoffrey Pippenger, all sat down to talk about what we heard and what we needed. We submitted a legislative report 2 years ago where we identified two distinct levels of care that needed stabilization. When we talked about a campus it was first discussed with Commissioner Harry Chen a few years ago. I don't think we're looking for a Woodside model. We heard feedback about having a number of small programs around the state, but the challenge is that it is very hard to staff and build such things. It's an untenable model to staff such a small environment.

Marshall: I thought that we were starting with was a blank slate, but we're starting with an idea, and the burden is on us to challenge the idea. It's a surprise the extent to which progress was made without this group being involved with this. Who was making the decisions to go forward with this, and if those meetings were public, I am assuming that those meetings were not public.

Tabrena: A little bit of information about how this process works, we (BGS/the state) has to get some more info about the design to see if we can afford it at the beginning. It may look like we're much farther than we are. BGS vets first if we have existing space or if we need to lease space. Then there's a cost estimate and we needed a conceptual design. Then BGS comes up with all the spaces, then we find an architect, we meet with them, we dump our wants and needs and they organize all the spaces in an order that makes sense. Because we are doing a development design build, they came back to us with a proposal. They want to know what we are going to build for a price. At this point we have not approved the schematic design, and this is the time we can make major changes in the format. We think it has quite a different look and feel then woodside.

Marshall: It is two residential wings separated by a central space, with one detention. Just from it's very basics it's Woodside, except the gym is half the space.

Tyler: I think it's okay to have different opinions on whether it's the same as Woodside. The proposal is that there is a design about what that should or should not be, so that we can give that to a builder.

Lauren: I haven't heard one youth perspective. When I was at DCF, leadership was not listening to youth, RLSI had to be the inbetweener. I heard from youth constantly about how that program wasn't working, and that's where we have to start.

Karen: I think I heard that Taberna said that there are still changes to this model without slowing down, we all know that is a long timeframe. I appreciate that you did this as an internal conversation and would like this group to give feedback. If this is the right size, what is the data to ensure that it's the right size? I don't have the expertise myself, it sounds like a lot of beds. I know that we wanted this to be something that the consultant helps with, but we wanted to be able to participate in a meaningful way.

I think that smaller groups on specific issues would be most effective, they can come back to this group and say "we've wrestled with this thing." I think program size, educational program, how are kids being served in this program are all topics to discuss.

Penny: How to properly engage youth in the design/programming is a big question. We don't want to lose sight of that.

Tyler: We need to create the capacity to engage youth voice, folks t may not want to be in a room like this. Perhaps in smaller youth centered focus groups, or development of youth surveys, etc., etc.

Proposed Working groups:

1. Building design
2. Treatment/program design
3. Oversight
4. Admissions/Due Process
5. Youth Feedback

Lauren: do we know yet if the program or those providing the program is a straight contract or per diem? That could impact oversight.

It's a straight contract.

Tyler: Who would like to be part of a working group?

Lauren: I'd like to be on all of them.

Penny: Treatment program/ admissions, but wherever you need help.

Cherly: I'll check with DMH, but we will be happy to be a part of programming and possibly others.

Karen: Assuming admission gets at youth's due process rights, then I'd like to bring it back to the CEYJ. But I think it would be great to be part of programming or admission from the council.

Marshall: all the groups from our office, if I can't be there it will be someone else from my office.

Rachel: I want to assist most substantially in Youth and Family Engagement, but as far as integrating an equity lens I will participate wherever make sense

Tyler: Another strategy is with our YDP program which has lots of access to youth voice. Although we're pretty far away from Woodside being open, we can do some strategizing there.

Penny: For youth and family engagement, I found my time at woodside, that they knew what they wanted and what they did not like. I think if we could engage some previous residents it would be helpful.

Marshall: We can reach out to some people. We still have some woodside files and still have some connections, so I can see who we can find.

Tyler: I'll start putting these committees together, please reach out if you're interested.

Next Meeting

7.15.24 from 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Enabling Statutory Language

Sec. E.316 STAKEHOLDER WORKING GROUP; FACILITY PLANNING FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

(a) The Department for Children and Families, in consultation with the Department of Buildings and General Services, shall assemble a stakeholder working group to provide regular input on the planning, design, development, and implementation of the temporary stabilization facility for youth and on the development of a long-term plan for the high-end system of care.

(b) The stakeholder working group, constituted as a subcommittee of, or 13 drawn from, existing groups or created as a separate group, may include 14 representatives from:

- (1) the families of children in the Department's custody for delinquency offenses;
- (2) youth who have been in custody for juvenile offenses;
- (3) the Juvenile Defender's Office;
- (4) the Office of State's Attorneys;
- (5) the Family Court;
- (6) the Office of Racial Equity;
- (7) the Vermont Family Network;
- (8) the Vermont Federation of Families;

- (9) the Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs;
- (10) the Vermont Protection and Advocacy;
- (11) the Department of Mental Health;
- (12) the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living;
- (13) the State Program Standing Committees for Developmental Services, Children's Mental Health, and Adult Mental Health; and
- (14) any other groups the Department may select.

(c) The Department shall regularly present relevant information to the stakeholder working group established pursuant to this section and review recommendations from the working group regarding:

- (1) facility design layout, programming, and policy development for the temporary stabilization facility, including data on the number of cases and types of case mix, as well as likely length of stay; and
- (2) the Department's data and assumptions for size, type of treatment, and security levels for future permanent facilities included in the planning process proposed in the fiscal year 2024 capital bill; optimal locations, including whether a campus plan is appropriate; and any plans regarding the use of outside contractors for facility operations, including State oversight of appropriate quality of care.

(d) The stakeholder working group established in this section shall be subject to the requirements of the Vermont Open Meeting Law.

(e) On or before January 15, 2024, the Commissioner of Children and Families shall develop and submit a strategic plan to the House Committees on Corrections and Institutions and on Human Services and to the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and Institutions, as part of the overall planning process for development of the high-end system of care, for preventing the disproportionality of youth who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color in staff- or building-secure facilities. The strategic plan shall include mechanisms for collecting necessary data, and the process of development shall include input from relevant public stakeholders.

(f) The stakeholder working group shall cease to exist on June 30, 2025.