

# RIVER VALLEY THERAPEUTIC RESIDENCE



## OVERVIEW

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) identified the need for a secure residence for Vermonters experiencing mental illness. They envisioned a homelike environment supportive of resident safety, well-being, and recovery.

In addition to living areas, the new building would need to include flexible, uplifting spaces to host group activities such as cooking classes, gardening, and community meetings; quiet areas for therapy and to support sensory needs; and office and respite spaces for the staff.

The Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) worked with architects Freeman French Freeman and Lavallee Brensinger Architects to envision a campus that embodied current evidence-based and trauma-responsive design principles for vulnerable populations, including an emphasis on connection to nature.

The site that formerly housed Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center - secluded in a beautiful wooded area, yet benefitting from access to the Chittenden County workforce and public transportation - was identified as the ideal location for this facility.

## EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Safety and security
- Trauma-responsive architecture
- Connection with the environment through light and color
- Access to outdoor spaces
- Autonomy and privacy
- Art
- Home-like furnishings

## STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

DMH initiated a robust stakeholder engagement process, including Vermonters with lived experience in mental health facilities, to inform design development.

The State of Vermont sites State facilities close to businesses when possible to nurture economic development in those areas. BGS worked closely with the town of Essex to ensure the facility would not negatively impact community priorities, such as public safety and traffic.



