

Minutes of the Vermont Council on Homelessness
Friday, December 16, 2016 2:00 – 4:00
Waterbury State Office Complex – Ash Conference Room
280 State Street, Waterbury

Present:

Jan Demers (CVOEO), Liz Whitmore (DOC), Margaret Bozik (Champlain Housing Trust), Sarah Phillips (DCF-OEO), Angus Chaney (AHS), Sarah Carpenter (VHFA), Connie Snow (WWHT), Daniel Blankenship (VSHA), Shaun Gilpin (DHCD), Emily Higgins (DCF-OEO), Mike Ohler (BHA), Monica White (DAIL), Rachel Batterson (VT Legal Aid), Amos Meacham (Pathways), Stephen Marshall (homeless community), George Seiffert (DCF-OEO), Rita Markley (COTS), Erin Oalican (DCF-ESD), Geoffrey Pippenger (DCF-ESD), Josh Hanford (ACCD), Jen Hollar (VHCB), Renee Weeks (Upper Valley Haven), Laurie Hurlburt (AHS)

Angus called the meeting to order at 2:21. A quorum was present.

Introductions and Announcements

Welcome to new council member, Renee Weeks.

Sarah Phillips - The Family Supportive Housing program is expanding to Bennington County in January with a new partnership between Sunrise Family Resource Center and Shires Housing.

Public comment: No one present offered public comment.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the August minutes was moved by Margaret Bozik and seconded by Shaun Gilpin. All voted in favor, with appropriate abstentions from those not in attendance at October's meeting. The October minutes were approved.

Vermont's Council on Homelessness: "Reflections 2011-2016" (Slides)

Vermont's Council on Homelessness: 2017 Discussion

Following the slide show and a re-cap of Vermont's existing plan to end homelessness, members offered ideas on additional items for the council to prioritize in 2017.

Stephen emphasized how many Vermonters experiencing homelessness are able and eager to work. There is much un-tapped talent out there and employers do a great disservice to these Vermonters, as well as their community and businesses, when they don't hire or consider homeless applicants. Stephen emphasized how demoralizing and humiliating it is for a homeless job applicant when they do not even receive the courtesy of a call to let them know they were not accepted. For future priorities, Stephen would like to see emphasis on approaches that confront the class structure which is a vestige from colonial times; emphasized reciprocal relationships between the individual and the community. People need to know there are resources that will be there for them in times of need.

Connie would like to see more coordinated funding strategies, such as a pilot to bundle funding for development, subsidy and supportive services. Would like to see continuation of the investments made in housing and social service provider relationships; and related training.

Amos agreed that the larger framing issues around homelessness are very important; encourage people to look more holistically at individuals, families and communities.

Margaret noted that Stephen has brought a valuable voice to the Chittenden Continuum of Care and encouraged a strategy to actively involve the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness.

Daniel encouraged focus on new Rapid Re-Housing resources available in Vermont; how can we promote success in this new area?

Angus noted that workforce housing and housing for people coming from homelessness need not be an either/or discussion. Many people in shelters work, though often for low wages. Sarah Carpenter noted that in 77% of non-elderly, tax-credit units, people have wages and that incomes across this same cohort are very low.

Members suggested a discussion on health care and housing intersections and inviting the new AHS Secretary and Health Commissioner to that. Angus agreed that many conversations are happening around Vermont, but that most are very local (Chittenden, Rutland, St. Johnsbury, Brattleboro), and confined to one population (children, women, chronically homeless). Angus will schedule this item for early in the calendar year and reach out to health care partners and state leaders. Members suggested a health care seat on the council as well as a substance abuse seat. Mike Ohler cited great connections with the medical social workers at UVMHC.

Cold Weather Shelter Updates:

Angus distributed a handout explaining the cold weather emergency shelter partnership.

The AHS Secretary's Office has convened staff from multiple AHS departments, the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security and partners such as the American Red Cross and Community Action Agencies to develop a strategy for rapidly activating additional Emergency Cold Weather Shelter capacity in Vermont's larger communities. The current focus has been Chittenden and Rutland Counties. This planning represents a contingency that would only be activated for short periods during the coldest weather and only when other systems were overwhelmed. It will not replace current DCF-funded shelters, the use of motels, or the existing cold weather exception in the General Assistance program.

On Thursday, December 8th, lead partners CVOEO and BROCC ran simultaneous drills in Burlington and Rutland. The drill exercise also tested the VtAlert notification system that would be used to mobilize volunteers. 28 Trained volunteers from the Department of Health's Medical Reserve Corps and SerVermont's AmeriCorps program responded to both sites for the drill exercise, and received specialized training on facilities and procedures. The State and community partners were satisfied with the drill exercise and view this planning as an important contingency option to have available for a future winter weather emergency.

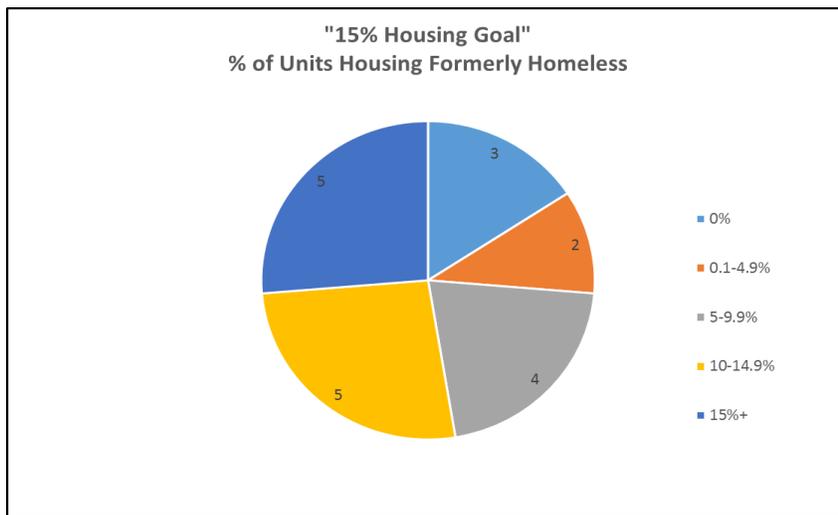
Jan added that the shelter will be ready to go when it's needed. Stephen asked about a possible test run during the January point in time count. Angus noted that the drill went well and that because the shelter is staffed by volunteers, AHS is not planning to pull them off their primary duties for another drill at this time.

Progress toward the Governor's 15% Goal - Shaun Gilpin

Shaun presented a summary of the 15% goal and data from the first round of annual HART reporting.

In April of 2016, Governor Shumlin signed Executive Order 03-16 "Publicly Funded Housing for the Homeless". The Order established a goal to ensure that at least 15% of the permanent housing units that received state-controlled public funds were available to Vermonters experiencing homelessness. To enhance the partnerships between housing providers and organizations serving those experiencing homelessness, and to track progress towards this goal, the Housing Access Reporting Tool (HART) was created. Housing organizations that receive funds from Community Development Block Grants, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, or the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, were asked to complete the HART to the best of their ability for State FY16 to establish a "baseline" from which we can measure future progress.

The following chart breaks out the 19 responses to the question 'How many of the permanent housing units in your portfolio are occupied by households who were experiencing homelessness at the time of application for the unit?'



This first year of reporting was primarily about establishing a baseline and testing the reporting tool, itself. In this case, those responding with 'unknown' were included in the "0%" category. DHCD and AHS are encouraged to see that five of 19 organizations have already met or exceeded the 15% goal. Rachel asked whether the 15% goal included at-risk of homelessness or homeless. Sarah Carpenter clarified that it was for families and individuals meeting the current HUD definition of homelessness.

Meeting adjourned at 4:00

Next Meeting - February 14th 2017 (1-3) • Waterbury State Office Complex – Cherry Conference Rm.