

Minutes of the Vermont Council on Homelessness
October 19th, 2016 2:00 – 4:00
Waterbury State Office Complex – Oak Conference Room
280 State Drive, Waterbury, Vermont

Present:

Jan Demers (CVOEO), Deborah Hall (HPC), Liz Whitmore (DOC), Margaret Bozik (CHT), Sarah Phillips (DCF-OEO), Angus Chaney (AHS), Maura Collins (VHFA), David DeAngelis (BHA), Connie Snow (WWHT), Paul Dragon (AHS), Donna Sherlaw (at-large), Daniel Blankenship (VSHA), Sarah Russell (BHA), James Bastien (VAMC-WRJ), Bethany Pombar (VCRHYP), Kara Casey (VT Network), Shaun Gilpin (DHCD), Rey Garofano (DCF-OEO), Emily Higgins (DCF-OEO), Mike Ohler (BHA), Kristin Prior (AHS Field Services), Monica White (DAIL), Rachel Batterson (VT Legal Aid), Richard Williams (VSHA), Amos Meacham (Pathways), Ari Kisler (VCRHYP)

Angus called the meeting to order at 2:04. A quorum was present.

Introductions: Angus announced the two newest members to the Council on Homelessness: Amos Meacham from Pathways Vermont, and Renee Weeks from the Upper Valley Haven. Amos introduced himself, explaining how his work with Soteria House and Pathways - and his personal experiences prior - make the mission of this group important to him. Renee, who had car trouble on the way to the meeting, sent her regrets and looks forward to joining us next time. Angus welcomed Rey Garofano, the new housing officer with Vermont's Office of Economic Opportunity.

Public comment: No one present offered public comment.

Approval of Minutes:

Approval of the August minutes was moved by Sarah Phillips and seconded by David DeAngelis. All voted in favor, with appropriate abstentions from those not in attendance at the August meeting. The August minutes were approved.

Subsidized Housing and Fair Housing Choice

-Rachel Batterson, Esq., Director of Housing Discrimination Law Project, Vermont Legal Aid, Inc.

Rachel expressed that Legal Aid is a huge supporter of affordable housing, and added that where we build it is as important as that we build it. Housing policy and housing development is social policy. Where you live determines everything else. Poor children who grow up in high opportunity neighborhoods have better long-term health, educational attainment, income, and other positive outcomes than poor children who grow up in poor, segregated, low opportunity neighborhoods. Growing up in a diverse neighborhood also leads to less implicit bias and less discrimination. Kids miss out on these benefits when its only age-restricted housing that's developed in communities of opportunity. Indeed, the rate of family homelessness in Vermont is not surprising considering how much of our subsidized housing is age-restricted to seniors only. [*While 73% of the housing need for*

elderly renters is met, only 18% of the housing need for non-elderly renters is met.] Rachel cited an AARP study which indicates that many seniors would prefer to live in age-integrated settings.

Rachel shared GIS maps of Chittenden County and South Burlington, illustrating where subsidized housing has been developed. Also distributed were summary results from VLA's 2012 and 2014 housing discrimination reports and information on the disparate impact on families with children when subsidized housing is disproportionately restricted to elders.

Rachel referenced a Boston Globe article which discussed Boston-area data similar to data from around the country. Poor people are trapped in low opportunity neighborhoods. Even families who try to get out, can't. The article cited three primary causes:

- 1) It's cheaper and easier to build subsidized housing in poor neighborhoods. No NIMBY. So most subsidized housing is built in areas that already have a lot of it - poor neighborhoods, not the suburbs.
- 2) When subsidized housing *is* built in suburbs, it's overwhelmingly restricted to elders or elders and people with disabilities.
- 3) Vouchers alone aren't the answer because of many factors including: rental discrimination; lack of knowledge or comfort of poor people about suburbs (and lack of transportation); housing costs; subsidized and affordable housing that is restricted to elders and people with disabilities; steering to landlords who are "willing" to accept Section 8; and lease-up deadline pressure.

As hard as the NIMBY fight is, our trained and funded organizations are more equipped to have it than a voucher-holder looking for housing for her family.

Solutions:

- 1) Data and Analysis
 - a. Map housing data, including: Deep subsidy and tax credit; Restricted to elders only or elders and people with disabilities; and Section 8 Voucher data.
- 2) Investigation and testing
 - a. Fund Section 8 Voucher Discrimination testing
 - b. Support, use testing data
- 3) Stop building restricted housing
 - a. All housing built after 1991 must be accessible.
Elders and people with disabilities *and* families can live there
 - b. Give incentives to build unrestricted housing
 - c. Give incentives to build subsidized housing in high opportunity areas
- 4) Section 8 Vouchers
 - a. Be careful about where you project base vouchers—and how many
 - b. Give more lease up time, especially if a person experiences discrimination
 - c. Mobility counseling. Legal Aid does it and is happy to do more
 - d. Don't steer voucher holders to landlords "willing" to accept section 8. This encourages discrimination and the perception that it's ok to say no, keeping people in low opportunity neighborhoods.
 - e. Negotiate Section 8 total rents with landlords
 - f. Conduct housing code inspections on *all* rental housing, not just for Section 8 vouchers

- 5) Enforce state and federal fair housing laws
 - a. Use CDBG money to pay for private or public enforcement of Vermont's Fair Housing laws.
- 6) Support subsidized housing where you live.

Discussion:

Richard – The main problems are that the Fair Market Rents as determined by HUD are too low, and there is not much turnover of rental units.

Kara – Emphasized challenges of transportation and distance to services.

Discussion of how code enforcement of all rental housing – not just Section 8 – could resolve issue of landlords who say they don't want to participate because of the inspection criteria/process.

Maura – Have you identified VT communities which are high or low opportunity? Rachel – No.

Discussion about whether the presence of affordable housing would make a community high or low opportunity. Also, the number of kids receiving free or reduced lunch through school. Rachel noted that Underhill has the least rental housing in Vermont.

Connie - Issue of infrastructure limitations (water and sewer) on where developments are built.

Bethany – Impact on youth in rural communities.

Sarah R. – Do we have national data on RAD communities?

Maura – VHFA actively soliciting comments on the state's qualified allocation plan. This discussion around development and priorities is relevant and timely. Angus will forward the information from Rachel and a link to the public comment process for VHFA. Discussions on geographic targeting.

Angus – Interesting discussion for how we might impact what's termed "generational poverty." Safford Commons in Woodstock is a success story. We should also avoid the well-meaning fallacy that people with low-incomes should only live in close proximity to social services. Not every Vermonter with a low income needs or wants social services, but all need housing.

**Housing Retention - Attaining and sustaining affordable, appropriate housing for all who are in need
-Michael Ohler, Ed.D., Housing Retention Team Lead, Burlington Housing Authority**

Michael provided an overview of Burlington's Housing Review Team and team members.

Describing the program, he began with the importance of mercy - defined as getting what you don't deserve, or a chance to wipe the slate clean - in the program's philosophy. Michael explained how sometimes rules do and should supersede. Michael read an extensive list of the types of support they provide during a given week and the many partners they work with to achieve success.

Discussion around the relationship between the housing retention team and property management; balance between transparency, confidentiality and communication. Client case note data is compartmentalized so it can't be viewed by property management. No information on domestic violence, mental health or substance abuse is shared.

Housing Opportunity Grant Program – Highlights from fiscal year 2016

-Emily Higgins, Community Services Program Administrator, Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity

Emily distributed the recent Housing and Opportunity Program (HOP) annual report for 2016, walked through the current utilization and outcome data, as well as trends, and answered questions from members.

Angus – The recent consolidation of ESG, GA and CHG grants into the state Housing and Opportunity Program is consistent with one of the three strategies in the Council’s Plan to End Homelessness: alignment and consistent measurement of prevention, re-housing and shelter activities.

Margaret – Questions and concerns around increased length of stay.

Sarah – Preempted question about stability being measured as 90 days. The ability to measure longer-term stability through other means is probably two years away.

Veteran’s Homelessness – Recent Progress in Vermont

-James S. Bastien, LICSW MHD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, WRJ VA Medical Center

Jim provided background around the national goal of ending Veteran’s homelessness; the system developed in Vermont to support use of a by-name list; the concept of “functional zero;” and the process for a state or city being approved by USICH as having ended Veterans homelessness.

The goal of ending Veterans homelessness is achievable in 2017. 100 Veterans are currently on Vermont’s by-name list. 78 are “active.” 22 are “chronically homeless.” Some are housed, some are not engaged. The team will attempt to engage every two weeks for 90 days. There is an inactive list. It is mostly people who are incarcerated. 192 VASH vouchers have been allocated. 100% are in use.

Jim cited the challenges of the two Vermonts: Randolph and Burlington. This is still a barrier to a statewide system. We need to make sure that all agencies that work with Vets are engaged. The V.A. is now set up to use HMIS software and is completing policies and procedures for the by-name list. They have also invested in a housing specialist. There are Veterans with vouchers that can’t find a place to live. People can stay in GPD (Grant and Per Diem-funded programs) for two years and there can be a bottle neck there.

Paul – Inquired about trauma-informed care. Understanding the incidence of trauma among Veterans, how should we be delivering appropriate services in their homes?

Meeting adjourned at 4:05

2016 Upcoming VCH Meetings - All Times 2-4 PM
December - 16th (Friday) • Waterbury State Office Complex (Ash Conference Room)