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Consolidated Plan Citizen Advisory Group

March 27, 2015

Members present: in person: Willa Davidian, Richard Williams, Debbie Ingram, Sarah Launderville, Sarah Phillips, Sarah Carpenter, Kathy Metras, Ed Willenbaker, Cindy Reid, Marsha Curtis, Angus Chaney: by phone: Martin Hahn

Staff: Jen Hollar, Shaun Gilpin, Claire Forbes, Josh Hanford, Arthur Hamlin

Welcome and Introductions, Agenda Review

Jen Hollar opened the meeting. Members of the group and staff introduced themselves.

Jen stated that the purpose of the meeting is to look at the draft Consolidated Plan. She considers it a rough outline as the Department is transferring the old plan into the new format that Arthur described during the public hearing, and it will be developed based on public input and past performance. She noted that there is still opportunity to make changes and comment. Jen also thanked Willa and Sarah for their work on the HOME and ESG sections of the Plan.

February 2, 2015 meeting notes

There were no further comments or edits for the February 2, 2015 meeting notes. Arthur will post them on the Department website.

Department Overview of Draft Plan

Jen described the HUD template and how the Plan is structured. For this part of the meeting the Plan was projected onto the screen.

Shaun walked through the parts of the Plan which include: Setup, Executive Summary, Process, Needs Assessment, Market Analysis, Strategic Plan, and Annual Action Plan. Next year, the Department will only have to submit the Annual Action Plan ("AP" forms).

Jen added that the needs assessment and market analysis tables have prepopulated data provided by HUD which the Department supplemented with the analysis done by Bowen National Research. However, because Bowen's assessment was not as strong in homelessness and special needs, the Agency of Human Services (AHS) provided a lot of the information that went into those sections. As a point of information, Sarah added that the AHS data came from the two Continuums of Care.

The Strategic Plan overview (screen SP-05) was discussed next. Jen stated that based on input, resources, and past performance, the Department, OEO and VHCB decided that the top four "Priority Needs" would be Safe, Decent, and Affordable housing, Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness, Economic Opportunity, and Strong Communities and briefly described what these include. Within the Plan, the Department has to establish goals and outcome indicators for each of the Priority Needs.

Jen also said that for many years the Plan has included two overarching priorities which are now being called guiding principles. These are perpetual affordability and a preference for development and growth in designated downtowns and village centers versus sprawl. This year, the AHS recommended adding a third which is tying homeless assistance to permanent housing. Debbie Ingram asked whether the words “proven practice” should be changed in the guiding principle related to homelessness.

Angus commented that they’d like to redraft the principal. Sarah Phillips said the new template forces all three programs to be integrated in ways we haven’t before, but the first two principles listed by DHCD don’t really guide ESG and this is why AHS wanted to write something else. Angus thought it should read “approaches.” Sarah and Angus agreed to revising it.

Sarah Carpenter asked what is meant by “homeless assistance”. Sarah Phillips said that this means all the programming and work that is done under the ESG program. The idea is to see the work they do tied to permanent housing, rather than a shelter that is not inherently tied to a pathway to permanent housing. Angus said he thinks of homeless assistance as everything under McKinney-Vento. Jen recommended that Sarah and Angus make it a broad statement consistent with the first two.

Josh Hanford said it makes more sense when it’s looked at with the goals and allocation of funding. For example, ESG funding is tied to a certain goal and HOME and CDBG are tied to another goal. Even though some CDBG funds can also assist with reducing homelessness, the Plan is not assigning CDBG funds to the homelessness goal, whereas all of the ESG funds are tied to it.

Priority Needs (screen SP-25) were discussed next. Arthur explained that the formatting, as difficult to work with tables, comes from HUD’s template. Josh added that the target populations are also provided by HUD and we just select the ones we want.

Angus said it looks like there are duplicates and suggested changing it to make it more understandable. Sarah Phillips indicated that there aren’t really duplicates but the way the HUD template prints in Word makes it look that way. Richard Williams asked about which target populations the Department chose. Josh said for the affordable housing need all of the populations are checked, but fewer for the economic development need. The Department also did not assign any geographic areas and each need is also associated with a goal.

For each goal there are outcome indicators and dollar amounts assigned to them. Josh clarified that dollar amounts are allocated among the priorities. Jen said the Department only created four priorities because we wanted to make the goals as flexible as possible.

Josh pointed out that more detail about creating and retaining jobs, and associated strategies are in the goal description. Martin Hahn commented that the Department worked on the CEDS and some of the needs and strategies in the CEDS apply to the Plan. Currently the Plan is thin on economic development. In one place the Plan talks about EB-5 but no economic

development organizations are listed in the Institutional Delivery Structure section (SP-40). The goal indicates \$1.3 million is expected to be spent on economic development, but only creates 35 jobs. Josh offered to work with Martin to include more economic development information; however, the template is heavier on housing.

Jen said we'll need to be focused on where this fits in the plan. Martin said he'd like DHCD to be more explicit about what the Department wants to do to assist low and moderate Vermonters with our economic development activities.

Sarah Launderville said that barriers (for employment) for people with disabilities are work-sites that are not accessible and would like some connection to make more businesses accessible.

Goals (screen SP-45) were discussed next. Arthur will change the numbering so they are in the same order as the needs. Willa Davidian made a general comment that the Plan needs a table of contents. The Department will add one. Arthur explained that the available categories are also part of the template and we have to choose from these categories.

Arthur also explained that the funding amounts shown are for the five years covered by the Plan and that one year amounts appear in the annual plan screen later. Sarah Phillips reviewed the ESG funding amounts. She also explained that the outcome measures are also a drop down list in the template and are limited. They do much more than what is shown.

Cindy Reid asked if the order the goals are listed in is their priority. Arthur explained that it's just numerical. All of the needs except Strong Communities are all listed as "High Priority" in SP-25.

Arthur explained that the dollar allocations for CDBG funds were estimated based on the past five years of grants awarded. The breakdown is 68% housing, 20% economic development, 12% public facilities and services. Josh said that since HOME funds are all under the housing priority, the Department looked at what was funded together, and gave examples, to estimate the number of units that will be created. Jen said the outcome indicators were also based on the public outreach meetings and the needs assessment.

Sarah Carpenter asked what is meant by homeowner housing added. Josh said these are new units.

Sarah asked what is meant by housing units for the homeless added. Does this relate to "purpose built" or units targeted for the homeless, for example units targeted per the QAP. Jen said not necessarily just a purpose built project like Canal Street. Josh said we'll need to think about what is included and when to count them. Angus stated this would not include shelter beds. Cindy stated that she thinks it would include set-aside units if built with CDBG or HOME funds. Angus suggested that if there's a lease it would count.

Willa commented that the 25 housing units for the homeless could also be counted in the goal outcome for new housing units. It was agreed that there is overlap. Willa also pointed out that HOME funds can't be used for public housing, but that public housing is listed in the category. (This is in IDIS and can't be edited.) Sarah Carpenter asked if the Rental Assistance Demonstration project can be funded by HOME. Willa said it can but then it would no longer be considered public housing.

Angus commented that 25 new homeless units is low. Sarah Carpenter also said 10 percent of ceiling credits (9%) are targeted for the homeless, based on 300 units per year, so the goal of 25 homeless units added is modestly low.

Angus said we should challenge ourselves to do more than 205 new units and suggested increasing the goal to be on par with rehab. He said we should base the goal on need rather than past performance. Ed Willenbaker commented that if we don't do rehab projects we'll lose units. He thinks Bowen was neutral on whether new units or rehab are more important. We can't afford to lose units given how low we know the vacancy rates are from Bowen's report. Josh commented that there are projects coming back that can get 4% credits for rehab. We don't have the resources with CDBG alone to increase the number of new units. Jen said based on past performance 205 new units is already a stretch.

Richard commented that "preservation" seems to be missing in the Plan. A lot of the rehab projects we do will be re-do's of projects we already funded such as projects at the end of their 15 year subsidy and asked where the Plan talks about preservation. Willa agreed that preservation should be included. Jen and Josh both noted that "preservation" is not in HUD's template, but it is in the narrative. Jen said the outcome goal under rehab includes re-do's and preservation projects. She stated that when a preservation project comes in, the Department will prioritize the ones that have rehab.

Josh stated that he estimates that approximately two-thirds of rehab projects the VCDP has done have been preservation projects. Cindy agreed with the above comments, and suggested increasing the outcome goal for the number of new units. Jen asked if the group wanted to make the outcome indicator goals for new and rehab the same. The group agreed to make them both 225 units.

Arthur described the Economic Development goal and outcome indicators.

Josh described the Strong Communities goal. This includes public facilities, public services, and access modification grants for municipal buildings. Housing projects can also fall under this goal for infrastructure projects that are supporting housing projects. He said VCDP usually does 10% public facilities and 2% public services but it made sense to group them. The Department also included \$500,000 in CDBG-DR funds in this goal because most of the unmet disaster need is for municipal projects that FEMA did not fund. He explained that HUD's regulations now require CDBG-DR to be included in the next Con Plan if there are remaining funds and unmet needs.

Arthur noted the bulleted lists in the Description for each goal and that these came from the lengthy “objectives and outcomes” section of the current plan, and the Department did not want to leave them out. Josh mentioned that, for example, mobile home parks can be funded by CDBG but are not included in the template. He asked the group to consider whether these are all still relevant? Are there any changes needed?

Ed asked for an explanation of the bullet about identifying and removing barriers to affordable housing. Jen answered that there is a whole section about removing barriers to affordable housing. This mostly has to do with public policies. Angus asked how the bulleted lists in the descriptions fit into the overall Plan. Josh explained that these are activities or strategies that the State feels are important, but they are not exclusive. Jen added that they could be thought of as a menu, and also can help people reading the Plan, and describe different ways to go about meeting the goal.

Angus asked if the group was interested in exploring the idea of small, compact homes (E.g. Vermods, Irene Cottages, Tiny Homes). Sarah Carpenter commented that the HUD funds are mostly used for rental housing and that there is a Tiny Home movement but we are not primarily building single family homes. Angus clarified that he wasn’t just thinking of home owners, but if the goal is to build more units, do we need to think about building smaller units? Sarah responded that this is a good policy question but might be outside the Con Plan.

Josh noted that there is no bulleted list in the Description for the ESG goal. Jen asked if AHS wanted to add something from the “Plan to End Homelessness.” Angus stated that he feels the “Plan to End Homelessness” is pretty well reflected already.

Willa asked if we can add a fair housing strategy/bullet into the Description for the ESG goal. Jen agreed, and explained that the Department has been focused on filling in the template, but there are things we still need to add.

Debbie noted that the bullets should be consistent, e.g. most start with a verb.

Sarah Launderville asked about the statement that 13% of Vermonters have a disability, which seems low. Shaun agreed to flag this and look into it. Jen mentioned that one part of the Plan lists other plans. Sarah said she had sent the “State Independent Living Plan” to Arthur before the meeting.

Arthur asked the group to review the Plan and data and make sure it all looked accurate and thanked Ed for helping with the Public Housing sections. He highlighted the Homeless Needs data was not provided by HUD and acknowledged Sarah Phillips’ work on this section.

Jen said the existing Con Plan prioritizes serving households below 30% of median income is included and asked if this was adequately addressed in this plan. Ed responded that the Plan has backed away from this but for good reason. It has been in the Plan every year, but we haven’t been able to follow through due to the lack of the resources to do it.

Sarah Carpenter asked if the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) is covered by the Con Plan. Willa answered that the NHTF will be part of the Plan in 2016 and the first year calls for 100% of housing to be targeted to households at <30% of median income. Jen said the Department will add a placeholder or reference for the NHTF.

Arthur quickly reviewed the NA-15 to NA-30 Disproportionate Needs sections that relate to the housing needs of minority households and cost burdened households. Sarah Phillips commented that the NA-10 tables and narrative also talk about the extremely low income households being most cost burdened. Josh briefly explained that AP-30 Method of Distribution and AP-90 describe the details of the funding programs that are in the current Plan.

Angus said that we have to correct the list of uses for ESG funds in AP-15 to make them the same as the Strategic Plan. After discussion it was agreed that the Department would rewrite this and SP-35. (This is an error in IDIS but we can edit the Word document.)

Willa requested that other members of the group review the HOME section.

Jen said we should carefully track all changes and need to account for all comments and suggested that the Department take over making any further edits. The Department will also put the Plan higher on our webpage and email a link to interested parties and requested that members of the group share the information as well.

Sarah Carpenter requested that if AHS is going to rewrite the homeless assistance goal language, that they include permanent housing and services because it could be interpreted that housing providers should provide the services. This was agreed upon.

Before adjourning, Jen reviewed the changes that we agreed to make. Arthur briefly explained the process of submitting the Plan to HUD. Several people commented and thanked the Department for its work on the Plan. Arthur made special mention of Cindy Blondin's help.

Schedule

March 12, 2015: Draft Con Plan published v
March 26, 2015: Second draft of Plan posted online v
March 27, 2015: Public Hearing on Draft Con Plan v
March 12 – April 27, 2015: Written comment period
May 15, 2015: Submit to HUD
July 1, 2015: Program year begins

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.