

Summary of Consolidated Plan Community Outreach Meetings

Every five years, the state is tasked with developing a Consolidated Plan to help guide the investment of approximately \$10 million dollars annually in federal U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding for three grant programs:

- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- HOME Investment Partnership Grants (HOME)
- Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)

In December 2014 and January 2015, seven regional meetings were held around the state of Vermont to gather input and comment from the general public about community development needs. Meetings were held in West Rutland, St. Albans, Bristol, St. Johnsbury, Bennington, Bellows Falls, and Randolph. There were over 125 participants including members of regional planning commissions, staff from housing organizations, representatives from regional CAP agencies, citizens from surrounding communities, and municipal employees.

The following is a summary of the comments most frequently heard at the meetings:

- **Prioritize very low-income housing**
Many of the communities commented on the need for more Section 8 vouchers or subsidized housing, especially for the very low-income population. Numerous individuals remarked on the need to continue and expand the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program. Attendees also talked about the importance of integrating low-income housing into all areas of the community, including mixed-income housing developments. Inclusionary zoning practices could be more widely implemented throughout the state to do this.
- **Continue to address homelessness and provide more transitional housing options**
Several people said there should be a focus on permanent housing options for the homeless. There is a need for more flexibility in design and creation of affordable housing, particularly housing with supportive services to address chronically homeless individuals, at-risk of homelessness, and those dealing with substance abuse. Funding for initial capital and ongoing services for efficiencies such as single-room occupancy (SRO) units are needed to serve single, disabled, and elderly populations. The Housing First model is a very successful way of addressing homelessness, and funding should be increased for this. Many attendees had concerns about HUD phasing out funding for transitional housing.
- **Support enhanced building rehabilitation programs**
At every meeting, there was an emphasis on the importance of rehabilitating the existing housing stock. There are several areas across the state that have enough housing, but people cannot afford to purchase the homes because they require rehab. Also, there is a need for increased code enforcement and/or incentives in many communities to maintain existing housing in a safe condition.
- **Focus on connecting housing, employment, and services with public transportation**
A few people commented on the lack of public transportation connecting housing and jobs, particularly in the off-hours, as a major barrier to low-income people gaining and maintaining employment.

- **Increase flexibility for economic development and job creation**
Job creation was a common theme in each meeting. Some people said there are limited resources for workforce development, including education and job training opportunities, especially for the existing pool of low-income, underemployed people. Additionally, available commercial space is scarcer, new construction is often difficult to finance, and it can be challenging to encourage new business startups. The Revolving Loan Funds are essential to continue economic development.
- **Assist municipalities in addressing aging or non-existent community infrastructure**
At most of the meetings, municipal employees stated the need to fund more loans and grants for infrastructure improvements (water, wastewater, culverts, roads, bridges) in order to create more opportunities for economic development projects. Also, funding is needed to provide municipal water and sewer connections to property owners since there is an overcapacity of septic systems.
- **Focus on centralization and coordination of social services**
Attendees stated the need to coordinate services and increase collaboration among agencies, in order to help people navigate the services efficiently. This could also include the integration of housing and services.
- **Increase and improve senior housing facilities, programs, and services**
Many of the communities emphasized a need for more senior housing, in addition to resources and services for the senior population to age in place. Suggestions for improving this need included ADA improvements to housing structures and fuel assistance. Also, programs such as Support and Services at Home (SASH) should be expanded.
- **Incorporate accessibility into new construction and improve accessibility in private homes and affordable housing units**
Several people felt that newly constructed housing units need more thought in advance about accessibility issues.
- **Increase homeownership assistance**
Many attendees said support for homeownership, including first-time home buying, is important. This type of support could include down payment assistance, counseling programs to ensure homebuyers are successful, and assistance to allow people to age in place in their homes.
- **Increase flexibility in the replacement/rehabilitation for mobile home parks**
Several people commented on the many deteriorating mobile home parks with aging infrastructure and the replacement or rehabilitation needs associated with these. Suggestions were made to invest more in these or possibly move people out of these parks and into homeownership. Also, energy efficiency can be a problem in many mobile home units, and more efforts can improve this through examples like the VerMod homes.