

Vermont Department of Housing and Community Development
Public Hearing
January 31, 2020

The purpose of the hearing was to:

- 1) Hear views on what citizens feel are the state's most pressing housing, homelessness, public services, community development, and economic development needs;
- 2) Listen to ideas for programs or priorities for the 5-year HUD Consolidated Plan for 2020-24 and for program year 2020 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) to address those needs; and
- 3) Get feedback on the programs or projects funded by HUD under the 2019 Action Plan including how they have performed in meeting the state's goals

Bob Haynes from Green Mountain Economic Development Corp. testified that RDC's (Regional Development Corporations) are a sounding board and exchange information, support the economy, and help businesses find workers. He testified that businesses in their area can't find workers or qualified workers. When someone is recruiting an employee, who lives somewhere else, the first question is where will they live, what's it like, and what does it cost? The second question is what is the situation with childcare? They are inter-related.

He works with housing agencies, education, career tech, and Let's Grow Kids. There is a manufacturing housing policy group that is trying to make it easier to find and train people to fill some of the 10,000 jobs available in Vermont. Competing with other states to recruit people from out of state is tough so they are focusing on people who already live here in particular, young people. One project he's working on is trying to enable a child care facility in their area. They have surveyed businesses about how many people they expect to bring in and what is the childcare need. In summary he testified that supporting childcare in an affordable way is important.

Patrick Scheld from the VCDP asked what geographic area they cover. Mr. Haynes said GMEDC includes 30 towns and described their service area. They're looking at Randolph for the childcare facility because of the number of employers (LED, ARA, Vermont Tech College) and near Exit 4, but it's not just people in Randolph who could use it. He said they share an SBDC officer with NVDA and the Northeast Kingdom has the same situation.

Dominique Viteretto from Davis Studio Preschool testified that she moved to Vermont in 2011 for college and went directly into early education when she graduated from Champlain College. She is concerned about people leaving her field of early childhood education and parents who can't afford childcare. There is a shortage of spots but also educators can't make a living off it. She graduated with 30 people in her class and all but there have left Vermont. She mentioned a friend who left education to work at a vineyard and earns much more than they did teaching kids. She said we need to draw new people into the field of early childhood education and retain the existing childcare workers. It's important to talk about why early childhood education is important and how we view educators.

She also testified that she and her husband want to start a family but that was not affordable right now, and it was not viable for her to pursue a master's degree partly because she's at the top pay level at her workplace already so a master's degree would not increase her pay.

Lastly, she testified that she has friends having a hard time finding childcare and having to drive long distances for spots.

Nate Cleveland from the VCDP asked Ms. Viteretto if she currently works in childcare. Ms. Viteretto said yes, it's currently a part-day center open from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. They are trying to expand to after (school) care to 5:30 p.m. for parents who work. She also has friends who are trying to open a center, but they are running into barriers with zoning and covenants.

Patrick Scheld asked to learn more about the barriers that are preventing her friends from opening a center. Ms. Viteretto testified that many locations are already set up for office or restaurants. Getting a house and creating a center is an option, but then you run into zoning or covenants banning businesses. She wondered if daycare should have their own zoning that recognizes that daycare centers are not like other businesses.

Kati Gallagher from Mad River Valley Planning District testified about the housing challenges in the valley, in particular employee housing and rentals. They have a lot of seasonal employees and a lot of their rental units are being used for short-term rentals. Sugarbush (ski resort) is actually doing two major employee housing projects, which shows how much this is an issue.

Another issue she's noticed through the housing coalition is that they don't know what their role is, so she's been trying to find resources to bring to them. One question they ask is whether they should become developers. Although she does not advise it because developers are the experts, there is a need to connect the coalition with developers. When they find a couple parcels where they could do a housing project there are no developers interested.

Another issue she heard is that it was difficult to get certain funds for housing projects because of the higher incomes in the valley.

Nate Cleveland responded that 70% of CDBG funds need to benefit people at 80% of median income or less, but that eligibility is determined by a survey when the building leases up not the income level of the community. 51% of the tenants need to be 80% or lower. He also suggested that a planning grant is one way to explore options and access funds. Another way is a turn key project in partnership with a nonprofit and a developer. The developer can be a for-profit.

Shaun Gilpin from DHCD clarified that the income limits are based on the incomes of the tenants, not the surrounding area. Ms. Gallagher asked if there were any experience with seasonal employees. Mr. Cleveland thought that would be difficult. Mr. Haynes commented that ski resorts out west have been doing employee housing and employees assume that housing is provided. Maybe as more ski resorts get sold that may come east. Large institutions like Dartmouth are also doing employee housing.

Hearing adjourned at approx. 4:15.