

State of Vermont

Consolidated Plan Meeting

St. Johnsbury Welcome Center, St. Johnsbury VT

February 19, 2020

State of Vermont Staff: Ann Kroll, Shaun Gilpin, Julianne Sherman, James Brady, Cassie Bell, Sarah Phillips (AHS)

Public present: Chad Whitehead, St. Johnsbury; David Snedecker, NVDA; Maryellen Griffin, VT Legal Aid; Joe Kasprzak, St. Johnsbury; Lauren Cornell, News7/Newsline; Taylor Girard, News7; Martin Hahn VHCB

Shaun opened the meeting and provided an overview of the Consolidated Plan (ConPlan) process that oversees the priorities for Federal funding through HUD and the overall goals set by HUD, and the current priorities for the State of Vermont. DHCD drafts the Conplan with assistance from VHCB and AHS.

The plan is known as the strategic plan and covers 5-year span (2020-2024). Programs covered (CDBG, ESG, HOME, Housing Trust Fund and HOPWA) Home and HTF are administered by VHCB. State of Vermont is ineligible for HOPWA funding

Allocations for 2020 include

CDBG \$7,244,934 with an additional \$753,000 targeted for recovery housing for opioid crisis

HOME \$3,000,000

ESG \$677,036

HTF \$3,000,000

HOPWA not eligible for formula funding we apply directly for these funds

Continuum of care and public housing authorities

5 year Conplan re-write State is holding public outreach meetings, an online survey and is assisted with an appointed ConPlan Advisory board, Housing needs assessment, Draft plan to be published by March 15, final plan to submit to HUD by May 15th, and expected HUD approval within 45 days (by end of June 2020).

Shaun also provided summary of Housing and Demographic information available through housingdata.org This site includes community profiles that include wide ranges of data that will assist with the Housing Needs Assessment that will be included in the ConPlan.

Shaun opened the floor up to comments and feedback from the public who were in attendance.

Vermont Legal Aid provided a statement articulating a desire to use Consolidated Plan funding programs to enhance eviction prevention efforts. The group sees an increased importance in the Qualified Allocation Plan to house those who are experiencing homelessness as an encouraging development and

seeks more movement in this direction. Legal Aid also supports efforts to avoid concentrations of housing targeting low income households and instead ensure economic and demographic integration as a top priority. This is achieved in part by continuing to focus on downtowns and areas of opportunity and requiring Universal Design in buildings to allow for ease of use by a wide array of age groups and people with mobility constraints.

It was noted that Downtown-focused development has a “domino effect” and the redevelopment of the building formerly known as Depot Square would likely be a major ‘domino’ to fall.

Town and regional representatives articulated a need for funds to maintain and upgrade above-ground utilities and municipal buildings. There are existing programs that are more generous with funds for underground utilities but it is difficult to access grant funding to address the needs of above-ground utilities and even more difficult to secure funds to upgrade the infrastructure within municipal buildings.

Ann provided some guidance on addressing those issues while also articulating the existing demand for CDBG funds.

A Town representative described the process that St. Johnsbury went through with the Vermont Council on Rural Development. The number one issue identified by the community was a need for housing opportunities. The community developed a rental registry and code enforcement office and has used proceeds from registration fees to establish a fund to help renovate housing units. The goal is to attract and assist younger folks and especially those with student debt loads or childcare costs that would make it unaffordable to live in St. Johnsbury. This has been an exciting development and an early success story of community engagement and is also incorporating Universal Design to the extent possible to ensure wide marketability and the potential for residents to ‘age in place’.

It was noted that all of these efforts are bolstered by funds from Northern Borders Regional Commission and in conjunction with New Market Tax Credits. Consideration should be made to utilize Opportunity Zones to support ongoing redevelopment efforts.