

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA)
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 2, 2025; 9:00am – 11:00am
Contois Auditorium, 149 Church Street, Burlington

The meeting was called to order at 9:05am

1. Open Forum

10 minutes

CVOEO announced the community resource center will be open 7-days per week for the winter months.

KidsSafe is now accepting nominations for their outstanding service awards.

The Department of Housing and Community Development shared an update:

The Department (DHCD) uses a variety of public input methods in developing the five-year Consolidated Plan Strategic Plan and annual Action Plans (AAP's) to ensure that all Vermonters have an opportunity to participate in planning how the State spends its housing and community development resources. These are guided by the Department's [citizen participation plan](#) which outlines the steps the Department takes when developing or making a substantial amendment to the Consolidated Plan.

This is where you can find information about giving your input and ideas for the state's Consolidated Plan by attending a public hearing or submitting written comments and read the notes from our advisory board.

Meetings start next week!

[Consolidated Plan Citizen Participation | Agency of Commerce and Community Development](#)

2. Approves Minutes and Agenda

10 minutes

a. Approval of the December Meeting Minutes

Taylor Thibeaux motioned to approve. Meghan Masterson seconded. Jason Brill & Will Vilardo abstained. The motion carried.

b. Approval of the January Meeting Agenda

Sarah Russell motioned to approve. Taylor Thibeaux seconded. Bryce Bierman made a correction to the agenda, as Steps to End Domestic Violence will report on their HOP grant at the February Steering Committee meeting instead.

Shelburne and Winooski also joined the meeting to give a legislative report.

The motion was approved unanimously.

3. Data Review

15 minutes

a. Unsheltered Data Review & Discussion

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Kerri Duquette-Hoffman mentioned the Williston Family Shelter is back at capacity (7-8 families). The previous residents have been transitioned to longer-term housing. The shelter operates on a first-come-first-served basis.

Jonathan, from COTS, says they are full. 75-100 people at the day warming center each day. Smith House is also at capacity. The winter warming shelter will have a capacity of 30 people and will open January 15th. The day station will be the primary place to qualify people for the warming shelter. Violence would be the main reason someone wouldn't be allowed inside.

ANEW Place at capacity now. Their waiting list is about 15 people and may have openings soon.

Champlain Inn is at capacity. They are hoping to start their 30-bed expansion to their shelter February 1st.

4. Shelter Capacity Discussion

20 minutes

Sarah Russell reported on the City of Burlington's emergency warming shelter they set up December 21-22 when temperatures dropped below 0 degrees overnight. The max capacity of the miller center is 100, but the 80 people they had made the space feel full. Capacity needs to grow for low temperature nights in order to prevent deaths from exposure. The City of Burlington hopes to partner with the wider non-profit community to create more capacity.

Taylor Thibeaux reported that Harbor Place is at capacity.

Spectrum Youth Services expanded their nightly capacity from 10 to 12 beds.

Kerri Duquette-Hoffman reported the Economic Services Division is still pursuing partnerships with hotels to create more capacity for transitional housing.

If residents in the motel program do not meet the priority category, then they will be asked to leave once their voucher has expired.

Sarah Russell mentioned it would be great to have a representative from the statewide emergency housing task force to provide updates to the CCHA. She received an increased number of reports of unhoused residents committing minor crimes to stay inside overnight on especially cold evenings. Chelsea Phillips will work to connect the statewide emergency housing taskforce remotely to the CCHA meetings.

5. Legislative Agendas

20 minutes

a. City of Burlington

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The City voted, for the first time, to provide a legislative report to the state legislature. Sarah Russell shared the City of Burlington's Legislative Report:

The City hopes to prioritize long-term supportive housing, rather than using the bulk of state funds on the motel program that is only temporary.

Top Five Legislative Priorities for 2025

1. Address Vermont's Housing Emergency
2. Provide More Resources for Acute Mental Health and Substance Use Needs
3. Properly Fund the Judicial and Pre-Trial Monitoring Systems
4. Appropriate State Funding for Critical Water Infrastructure
5. Gun Reform

You can find the full report here: [City of Burlington Legislative Priorities 2025](#)

Amy Carmola asked how United Way may help to amplify the unified message of the several legislative reports. Amy will connect with Frank Knaack and Matt Lawless to discuss the effort of aligning legislative reports.

Sarah Russell mentioned an effort to create a legislative report for the CCHA. It was mentioned this could be a reason to form a working group with the Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont to align priorities.

Kerri Duquette-Hoffman asked if there are specific priorities for changes to housing in Vermont. A lot of the changes coming will have to do with reacting to the outcomes of last year's Act 250. Will Towne mentioned a lack of public funding for development is a major hurdle.

b. Housing & Homeless Alliance of Vermont (HHAV)

Frank Knaack presented the HHAV Legislative Report:

Top Three Priorities for 2025:

1. Accelerate Production of Affordable Housing
2. Invest in Homelessness Prevention Programs and Services
3. Ensure Emergency Shelter for Vermonters in Need

You can find the full report here: [Housing and Homelessness of Vermont - 2025 Legislative Priorities](#)

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They will seek to retain the same level of resources for Homelessness Prevention.

HHAV will support the GA Task Force efforts as well.

They are seeking to eliminate the cap on residency by April 1st.

They are working to gather information about success stories regarding the programs over the last year to garner support for more funds.

Will Towne from Spectrum Youth Services mentioned the HOP fund recipients could all use more funding to complete their tasks.

c. Other Local Municipalities

Matt Lawless – Town Manager of Shelburne

The Town of Shelburne is targeting sustainable development for the future. They do not feel their priorities have any conflict with the HHAV or Vermont League of Cities and Towns legislative reports. They are focusing on partnering with Green Mountain Transit to bring down transportation costs, which directly impacts housing options.

You can find the full report here: [Shelburne Legislative Priorities](#)

Mayor Christine Lott – City of Winooski

They are prioritizing 3-bedroom or larger units, as they see that as a bottleneck in the current housing stock. Winooski is working on a Charter change to allow for Just Cause evictions. They are advocating for a statewide rental housing registry. She hopes the service providers and legislators can come together in a working group to help bridge the gap between mental health/substance abuse and funding.

Christine Shared Winooski's Legislative Priorities, specific to housing:

1. Ensure access to affordable, appropriate housing through policy that preserves, protects, and produces the housing Vermonters need:
 - a. Continue the prioritization of creating Affordable and Workforce Housing as prescribed in the HOME Act and the historic appropriations made during the pandemic. Paired with newly passed regulatory reforms, and extending the temporary Act 250 exemptions until adoption of new Tier 1A and B areas is achieved, sustained significant funding from the State will be necessary for the next 5 to 10 years to make progress against the housing and affordability gaps, as demonstrated by data collected through the Building Homes Together 2.0 campaign and VHFA's Housing Needs Assessment, to ensure access to Affordable housing, ownership opportunity, and 3-bedroom+ housing for families targeted for resettlement where we need appropriate housing for the larger families we are welcoming into our state.

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b. Protect existing housing by passing municipal charter changes that include Just Cause Eviction protections and create a statewide protection, so all Vermonters are protected from eviction without cause. Fund ongoing Landlord-Tenant mediation support to divert Vermonters from evictions court such as existed under the Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program (VERAP) and included in S.100. Additionally, commence a study to revise the evictions process so tenants creating serious public safety hazards, or otherwise in egregious violation of a lease, can be evicted in a timelier manner.

2. Ensure necessary services and supports are in place to sustain permanent housing and stop the growth in those experiencing homelessness, by supporting the physical and mental health and safety of all Vermonters:

a. Continue to invest in transitional and supportive housing programs that are demonstrating success and increase recovery and sober housing units; establish funding to increase the availability of on-demand drug abuse and mental health treatment services; extend eligibility for Medicaid reimbursement to addiction treatment and increase clinical capacity statewide to address needs in mental health and substance abuse.

b. Develop a long-term, sustainable and scalable strategy, that recognizes many re-housed homeless households do not have the financial resources to pay rent. Align state and federal rental assistance programs and employment training systems to successfully re-housed homeless households exiting emergency housing. c. Fund and implement a statewide rental registry to protect all Vermonters from unsafe housing and create a mechanism to prevent de facto evictions by negligent landlords. A publicly available rental registry also provides a mechanism by which available rental housing can be located for Vermonters facing displacement by eviction, redevelopment, natural disasters, and other causes.

6. General Assistance Task Force Report Review

15 minutes

Sarah Russell presented the General Assistance Task Force Report:

Recommendations:

- the maximum days of eligibility be removed.
- the Age of the "Older Adult" classification should remain at 60 not 65.
- Income certification every 90 days instead of the current practice of every paycheck.

A few options were discussed regarding income requirements. Adam Hall, from CVOEO, said he loves the idea of the escrow account that helps residents save for more permanent housing while staying in the hotel program.

Jason Brill asked that VA retirement benefits be recognized as income for the program, just as Social Security is used now. Jason will follow up with Sarah on this issue.

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Stephanie Bixby, from Burlington Housing Authority, mentioned there are people who do not want to leave the motel program since it is 100% subsidized. More work needs to be done to incentivize residents to pursue permanent housing.

The task force is advocating aligning the winter emergency housing period with Vermont State Parks (October 15-April 15).

The Task Force had 8 meetings and did not have enough time to discuss all the issues in depth.

All public comments on the report should go to Sarah Russell.

The full report can be found here: [General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force Report](#)

7. HOP Reports

10 minutes

a. CEDO

Sarah Russell presented on the 2023-2024 seasonal warming shelter. Here is the data:

- A \$600k operating budget
- The shelter was open 12/15/2023 – 03/18/2024, located at former VFW site
- There are up to 40 beds full each night; there is a very low barrier for entry
- The shelter served 85 unique guests, resulting in 3200 bednights over the course of operation
- The shelter provided warm-ups to visitors who were not guests of the shelter
- Secure storage is provided onsite for shelter guests
- Onsite medical services were provided 5 nights/week, in partnership with VDH and the Community Health Center/Safe Harbor
- Meals are provided by Feeding Champlain Valley/CVOEO
- Harm reduction supplies are donated by Turning Point Center of Chittenden County

Taylor Thibeaux gave a report on the Elmwood Shelter:

Fiscal Year 24' (July 23' - June 24')

- Number of exits from the shelter: 33
- Exits to Permanent Housing: 5
- Average length of stay: 220 days
- Average length of stay to permanent housing: 318 days (one outlier found housing in two weeks; skewed data)
- Reasons for exits outside of housing: not utilizing space efficiently, active unsafe substance use

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- Successes: Guests engaged with case management & document ready for housing, average length of stay (when we serve folks who primarily have unsuccessful shelter stays elsewhere and poor rapport with service providers), guests appreciate the low barrier model that meets guests' where they're at, guests voluntarily choosing to help with daily chores and clean up, staff and guest building positive rapport
- Challenges: Staff morale (enabling vs. meeting people where they're at), length of stay (a sense of home and comfortability making it hard to encourage folks to leave to other housing)

July 24'-Sept 24'

- Number of exits from the shelter: 14
- Exits to Permanent Housing: 4
- Average length of stay: 252
- The shelter was at capacity most of the year
- They are encouraged by the average length of stay considering the averages in other forms of shelter.
- The residents appreciate the low-barrier model and enjoy the community aspect offered at Elmwood.
- Residents are volunteering to help with staff clean-up tasks.
- Elmwood initially applied for a 3-year permit originally. They expect the City will renew the permit.

b. Steps to End Domestic Violence – Removed from the Agenda.

8. Standing Sub-Committee Updates

20 minutes

- a. Strategic Planning – No Update*
- b. Coordinated Entry – No Update*
- c. Housing Retention – No Update*
- d. Outreach and Membership – No Update*
- e. NOFO and Ranking – No Update*
- f. Veterans – No Update*
- g. Data, PIT, & HMIS*

The 2024 PIT Report was released last week. A link to the report will be sent to the group with the minutes to this meeting. There was an 18% increase in homelessness nationwide.

The 2025 PIT count will be conducted the night of January 22-23.

The CCHA website will be updated next week to reflect the 2025 PIT count information.

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There is a live training from ICA on the 13th of January from 1:00-3:00pm.

The PIT Committee will be meeting before the PIT count to make sure everyone is on the same page.

CVOEO has resource bags planned to give away while surveying the community.

Jason Brill mentioned Vermont has the 4th highest rate of homelessness in the country.

Frank Knaack mentioned Vermont ranked well regarding our ability to provide shelter for those who are unhoused, but that performance will likely suffer this year due to lack of funding for the motel program.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45am.

We encourage questions and participation in discussion and place great emphasis on hearing from people with lived experience of homelessness and/or housing insecurity. If you are a person who has lived experience, you will be provided with a stipend for attending; please let us know after the meeting concludes. Please reach out to us prior to the meeting if possible or let us know when you arrive at the meeting should you need any accommodation(s).

Thank you so much for joining us.