

Hartford Committee on Housing and Homelessness – Draft Minutes
July 20, 2023 6:00 PM
Hartford, VT Town Hall, Room 2

Attendance

In-Person: John Haffner (Chair), Patrick Danaher (Vice Chair), Jennifer Kravitz

Remotely: Ally Tufenkjian (Selectboard Liaison)

Members of the Public: Laura Simon, Michael Redmond (Director of Upper Valley Haven)

Staff: Lori Hirshfield

1. Call Meeting to Order

John Haffner called the meeting to order and relayed information about the in-person and remote hybrid format for the meeting.

2. Review Order of Agenda

John Haffner asked if any changes to the meeting agenda. Lori Hirshfield requested item # 6 (Meeting Minutes) be addressed first. The members agree.

3. HCHH Member to do Meeting Minutes

Given Alex Belenz's resignation who took meeting minutes, HCHH Members were asked if a volunteer would take Minutes. Jennifer Kravitz volunteered for this meeting.

4. Approve June 15, 2023 Committee Meeting Minutes

Jennifer Kravitz made a motion to approve the Minutes with Lori Hirshfield's addition of Committee members' terms. Patrick Danaher seconded the motion. The Minutes were approved unanimously.

5. Public Comment

Laura Simon of Wilder introduced herself and expressed interest in the committee's work as she is a retired social worker and member of the Climate Action Committee. Michael Redmond, Director of the Upper Valley Haven also introduced himself.

6. Committee Member Opening – Discussion on Process

Lori Hirshfield explained the process for applications and the Selectboard approval of a new member. The opening has been posted on the Town website and on the List-serve.

7. Update on Town Plan Housing Chapter Planning Commission/Ad Hoc Steering Committee

Lori Hirshfield reported that the Planning Commission/Housing Steering Committee have drafted goals, strategies and actions and a revised draft is being put together for the next PC/Steering

Committee in August. The next community meeting will be in September. A formal adoption process will follow. Michael Redmond requested a copy of the current draft. John noted that Alex was the HCHH representative at the PC/Steering Committee Housing Chapter meeting and inquired if anyone else was interested to take his place. No one volunteered. There was discussion about the HCHH as a whole reviewing the draft goals, strategies and actions. The HCHH thought a joint meeting with the PC/Steering Committee for the Housing Chapter update should be explored and Lori would look into it.

8. Update on State Homes for All Pilot Project – Hartford Submittal to be a Case Study

There was discussion on whether the state has chosen the communities that will participate in the project. John Haffner reported that he received information that five communities have been chosen. Hartford was not one of them. He recommended following what these communities are doing in each of their respective projects.

9. Hartford Letter of Interest to State on Resources and Support for 2023 Homeless Response Efforts

Ally Tufenkjian reported that she presented this committee's ideas to the Selectboard regarding how a grant would be administered.

- Support an existing organization's project proposal, such as the Haven's, perhaps via letter of support from the Town.
- Augment/support existing housing-related efforts the Town is working on.
- Other creative possibilities, such as bi-state work with Lebanon's in progress low-barrier shelter; and supporting Community Safety Review process.

The Selectboard recommended continued study by this committee.

There was discussion about what the next steps in the process might be and how things were proceeding. Ally noted she had contacted Ken Hammond, Agency for Human Services Field Director for Hartford and it remains unclear. She did note that grant funds could not be used for programs outside of Vermont, and not to offset costs to individuals participating in Hartford's community safety study.

Michael Redmond informed the Committee that the contact for this State grant project is Sarah Phillips, Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity who can clarify the activities which would qualify for the grant. He also reported that 59 letters of interest were submitted with many varied ideas and proposals. The Haven has already received some funds related to homelessness prevention by expanding its existing contracts with state agencies. Michael further explained that the Haven proposed a Medical Respite Shelter but the state would require they partner with a medical agency; the Haven is exploring this option.

Lori Hirshfield will check with the acting Town Manager to see if any other communication has been received from the state regarding the Town's Letter of Interest. Michael Redmond said he will send the summary of the 59 proposals to Ally Tufenkjian, John Haffner and Selectboard members Dan Fraser and Michael Hoyt. Ally Tufenkjian said she will contact Sarah Phillips.

John Haffner noted that since funds cannot be used to support a NH project like the seasonal shelter planned in Lebanon, and the Town does not have any ready to go projects, it might be best to look at existing organizations already proposing projects or interested in doing so. Committee members then reported on area organizations identified at the June 15, 2023 HCHH meeting that are unhoused or at risk of becoming unhoused.

Jennifer Kravitz reported on her interview with Elizabeth Austin, Director of the Good Neighbor Health Clinic. She learned that they are serving the housing insecure and unhoused population over the age of 18 with free medical and dental care. The HCHH members agreed that this is an agency which could be a partner with the Haven on a Medical Respite shelter. Jennifer also will contact Visiting Nurses and Hospice (VNH) to investigate their work relating to this as well. Ally Tufenkjian reported she learned that Dismas House would not be an appropriate partner. Other partnership opportunities will continue to be considered. Other organizations not reported on were Restorative Justice and SEVCA. There was further discussion on the need for clarity regarding the grant process which Ally will pursue.

10. Follow-up on HCHH Workplan for 2023

Housing Group Interview Reports

John Haffner reported that he met with Monique Priestly of the Bradford housing group which is not affiliated with the town government. They are housing advocates, developers and homeowners who are looking for property to develop affordable housing including adaptive reuse. They are working with UVM students to convert an old convent into housing units and finding that it is a long-term project. John added that he thought the model is a good one for the HCHH to explore more. Lori Hirshfield noted that although the Town may not be the developer as Bradford is doing, the Committee could look at how it can facilitate similar projects in Hartford.

Ally Tufenkjian reported on her meeting with Lynne Goodwin, Human Services Director of Lebanon. They discussed the Housing First working group and the differences in funding between VT and NH. NH municipalities each have a welfare office that receives tax dollars. VT administers from the state level. Housing First is an information and education-oriented group with many community partners forming a large network. It was noted that Parker Advisors is in the process of the Upper Valley Homelessness Assessment. John Haffner recommended that this Committee connect with Parker Advisors as able.

Lori Hirshfield requested that any interviews be summarized and sent to her to keep a spreadsheet of information gathered.

Other Follow-up from June Meeting

Ally Tufenkjian reported that the Wilder Community Center is being sold and the owner has approached the Selectboard to see if there is interest in acquiring the property to be used as office space or possibly affordable housing units. There was discussion about this and the Committee's possible involvement including looking at regulations that might make development easier such as

lower impact fees. Lori clarified that Town discontinued impact fees a few years ago and there has been discussion at the Planning Commission/Steering Committee meeting on HO Committee for the Town Plan Housing Chapter

11. News from Committee Members

There was discussion of how the Town fared during the recent state-wide flooding. Hartford had some locations that were affected. The Town is working to get the word out to individuals that were affected to register for FEMA and State assistance by calling 2-1-1. FEMA is in Town and starting to set up to get information out to business and residents. Upper Valley Strong has been re-activated. There is information on the Town website.

14. Adjourn Meeting

Jennifer Kravitz made a motion to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Patrick Danaher. The motion was unanimously approved and the meeting ended at 7:50 PM.

Committee Membership as of 7-20-2023

John Haffner, Chair (through 12/12/2024)

Patrick Danaher, Vice Chair (through 11/28/2024)

Dan Nott (through 11/28/2024)

Sandra Mariotti (through 4/03/2025)

Jennifer Kravitz (through 4/03/2025)

Ally Tufenkjian, Selectboard Liaison

Vacant Position

Lori Hirshfield, Staff Liaison