

## **THE NEIGHBORHOOD PROJECT**

The Neighborhood Project is one of 22 proposals contained in Burlington's Housing Action Plan (HAP), adopted by the City Council in October 2015. The overarching goal of The Neighborhood Project is to develop an actionable strategy and toolkit for neighborhood stabilization in near-campus neighborhoods.

### **Background**

For decades the City of Burlington has identified the availability and affordability of housing for individuals across the income spectrum as one of its most significant challenges. More recently, the HAP identified, "the lack of sufficient housing is exacerbating quality of life issues in the City's historic neighborhoods, particularly near the University of Vermont (UVM) and Champlain College."

In parallel with creating new student housing to increase the opportunity for quality of life improvement in the City's historic neighborhoods, residents of those neighborhoods called for a pro-active initiative to help stabilize those neighborhoods heavily impacted by students.

As part of the Eagles Landing settlement agreement, Champlain College agreed to work with the City, UVM and Preservation Burlington to create a neighborhood stabilization project, known as The Neighborhood Project. All four entities have contributed to this program.

The HAP also called for hiring housing, planning, historic preservation and real estate professionals to create the actionable strategy and toolkit of policies and programs based on national best practices, for enhancing quality of life in near-campus neighborhoods.

### **Contract Award Process**

Meetings were held between the partners and community members to receive input and guide the overall direction for the scope of work for The Neighborhood Project. Following review and input from the Community Development and Neighborhood Revitalization (CDNR) Committee, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued on March 20, 2017. By the due date for proposals, April 28, 2017, CEDO received seven (7) proposals from consulting teams to provide services under The Neighborhood Project.

As called for in the RFP, the proposals were thoroughly vetted by a selection committee comprised of the Chair of the CDNR Committee, a representative of City Council from an affected neighborhood, two representatives from CEDO, one representative from Planning & Zoning, one representative from the Planning Commission, and one representative each from UVM, Champlain and Preservation Burlington.

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, the Board of Finance approved the award of a contract to Ninigret Partners to provide services under The Neighborhood Project.

### **Activities to Date under The Neighborhood Project**

- **Project Organizational/Kick Off Meeting**

The Neighborhood Project kicked off with a meeting of the Funding Partners/Steering Committee and the consultants on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017. The meeting re-affirmed the Project's goals, process and deliverables and a preliminary discussion took place on the key issues and concerns. The meeting also

reviewed data requests and a discussion took place on relevant studies, programs, policies and other materials that would be helpful in crafting effective strategies and tools for neighborhood stabilization. The consultants also presented a list of data requirements.

- **Consultants' Visits to Burlington**

During the period September 5-8, 2017, Ninigret Partners visited Burlington to undertake a series of interviews with a variety of partners. Individually and collectively, the consultants met with more than 50 persons.

Along with Interface Studio (2 team members), with whom Ninigret is partnering on The Neighborhood Project, a series of neighborhood tours were undertaken in the focus areas of the study, that is, Wards 1, 2, 6 and 8. The purpose of the neighborhood tours was to provide an opportunity for the consultants to tour affected neighborhoods with those residents and stakeholders most familiar with the housing concerns and quality of life issues. The tours provided an opportunity for the teams to hear about the issues first hand and on the ground. They complement additional field work to help prepare for analysis and neighborhood mapping.

Ninigret Partners, lead consultant, Kevin Hively returned to Burlington on September 29, 2017, to complete the Ward 1 neighborhood tour, which was foreshortened on September 7, owing to awful weather.

### **Project Status**

Currently, the consulting team is analyzing neighborhood trends, based on demographics, housing conditions, real estate/market trends, quality of life and other statistics that will be useful in developing strategies and tools for neighborhood stabilization.

The consultants are also reviewing and evaluating existing programs, policies and other tools with the view to understanding what elements are working well to support neighborhood stabilization and where the gaps are. The consultants will seek to understand the penetration level of programs which in turn will help inform on the right questions to ask.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

- **Neighborhood Findings Meeting**

In mid- November 2017, the consultants will present their findings from the stakeholder interviews, neighborhood tours and analysis to the Funding Partners/Steering Committee.

- **Interactive Community Open House – December 12, 2017**

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, an Interactive Community Open House<sup>th</sup> working session for the neighborhood will be held in Contois Auditorium from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. The purpose of this Open House is to provide an opportunity for findings to be shared through story boards and infographics and participants will walk through a series of self-guided exercises that solicits their input and feedback on potential solutions. This design allows people to come and go based on their own schedule.

## **Timeline**

A Strategies and Tools meeting with Funding Partners/Steering Committee members is proposed following the Interactive Community Open House. The purpose of this meeting is to distill outcomes of the Interactive Community Open House and focus on the most effective and achievable strategies and tools for implementation. This process will focus on setting priorities and establishing a timeline given the mix of programs that have support.

The outcomes of the Strategies and Tools meeting will determine the timeline for preparation of a draft actionable plan and final plan for neighborhood stabilization in near-campus neighborhoods. It is anticipated that a draft plan could be prepared by end January 2018.