

Cathedral

Square Corporation

*Healthy Homes
Caring Communities
Positive Aging*

October 31, 2014

Brian Pine
Community & Economic Development Office
149 Church Street
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Brian:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Burlington's Draft Housing Plan.

We appreciate that the report addresses the needs unique to seniors and persons with disabilities. With the significant growth of the 65+ cohort, we need to make sure our existing housing stock, and plans for new housing, are poised to meet the needs for affordability, accessibility, social connection and services to support aging in place.

To this end, I would underscore some of the excellent points and suggestions contained in the report.

Restore Full Support for the Housing Trust Fund

Housing resources have declined, specifically two important financial tools Cathedral Square and other non-profit housing developers have utilized for housing production: the HUD 202 program which provided both capital and rental assistance for senior housing. This has not been funded in the last several years and has an uncertain future. Second, the USDA RD 515 program which provided 1%, 50 year financing and rental assistance for affordable housing in rural areas is no longer available. This means there is more competition for fewer financial resources to address the many affordable housing needs of our communities. Opportunities for new federal, state and municipal financial resources are few and far between. Increasing the amount of the Housing Trust Fund to support affordable housing would be very helpful.

Reform the Building Code

In terms of the current Building Code, ensuring that the code reflects what is needed and not surpassing it will help to maintain affordability while ensuring safety. As a nonprofit housing developer that utilizes federal, state, municipal and private funds, we must build to a high bar and address accessibility, energy efficiency, green building standards, and life cycle costs. As the bar has been raised by these requirements, so have construction costs. Rising costs mean less overall units produced, so we would like to have a code which requires what is necessary but does not become cost prohibitive. The Report proposes to hire a consultant to review the current code – we think this is a good idea. Would you consider having an advisory team to provide feedback on what has worked and what has been challenging in the past regarding changes to



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code, and areas in which what was required by code may have exceeded what was truly needed to address a problem or condition?

Explore the Adoption of a Rehabilitation Code

We support this recommendation. This would be helpful for acquisition/rehabilitations of existing housing, as well as preservation of existing affordable housing. We, and other non-profit affordable housing organizations like Champlain Housing Trust, have committed to permanent affordability. This protects public investment as well as our low income residents. As our portfolios age, we strive to strike the balance between maintenance and management of project reserves, and planned recapitalizations when building systems wear out and reserves are depleted. In addition, because Cathedral Square's residents are aging in place, we often need to increase accessibility as well as energy efficiency when we recapitalize older properties. A code for rehabs that would not rise to the level of new construction could play a major role in maintaining affordability and incenting preservation.

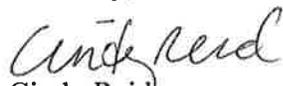
Municipal Role/Incentives

Recommendations from AARP's "Housing America's Older Adults" publication include incenting universal design in all new housing, and incenting supportive services in senior housing. These are important issues and increased funding for the Housing Trust Fund, as well as tax incentives, will help make the goal of increased accessibility and universal design more attainable for nonprofit developers committing to permanent affordability. Cathedral Square's SASH initiative has proven a successful health/housing partnership, in which services are paid for with health care/service dollars, and the housing is paid with housing dollars. We would like to be a resource for the City as you contemplate requirements or incentives for services.

Advancing housing development by researching and providing information on privately and publically owned sites, could provide opportunities to both increase housing stock, and improve neighborhoods and achieve community development benefits. The Thayer development in the new north end on former state owned land is a perfect example of transforming an underperforming resource into a vibrant, mixed-income new neighborhood. We concur that parking requirements should be reduced and we have useful data on the utilization of parking by our residents and staff.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. We welcome the opportunity to further address the housing and service needs of seniors and persons with disabilities and for opportunities to work with the City to do so.

Sincerely,



Cindy Reid

Cindy Reid
Director of Development