

## **Building Opportunities: Action Plan for Expanding and Improving Burlington's Housing Stock**

Thank you completing this most recent housing plan. Efforts to make it more efficient and economical to build and rehabilitate housing stock is critical; the **Vermont Housing Finance Agency** (VHFA) supports those initiatives and is interested in helping in any way we can. We did submit comments related to the Downtown Housing Development Strategy, and I would like to reiterate a few of those.

- The housing plan keeps referring to a “steady loss of young professionals”. That seems a little dramatic when you consider the changing demographics and your own data that refers to the increased aging of Vermonters.

Who are these “young professionals”? What age are they, what income range, where do they work? What kind of environment are they and “young families” seeking? In our understanding of the market, young professionals and family households are likely looking for two very different housing types. Grouping them together is not helpful since households with young children are more often looking at homes with at least 3 bedrooms. Young professionals are more willing to have roommates, live in a downtown, and predominantly rent.

The shift of having some more 18-25 year olds in the downtown and modestly fewer young professionals is most likely a function of students, so additional downtown student housing may not improve that demographic. Some of those “professionals” may have been driven to quieter neighborhoods. VHFA’s research in 2011 found that almost 63% of the downtown and waterfront area residents are under age 35. The percentage of the state’s population under age 35 dropped from 46% in 2000 to 42% in 2010; but remarkably Burlington saw increases in the percentage of the population under age 35. As we discuss strategies of the downtown we need to think about what kind of diversity might be best? Is having 75% of those living in downtown and the waterfront under 35 really our target goal?

- I appreciate the efforts to eliminate parking minimums, but be careful what you wish for. If neighborhoods become too parking challenged it may be a real negative to retaining the young professionals, families and older persons you may want to attract to Burlington. Our current public transportation system just does not fit some of the urban models you mention. That should be a bigger priority before reducing parking.
- I see no discussion about working Burlington largest employers; workplaces that employees might walk to. In 2011 Fletcher Allen Healthcare had about 7,100 on the payroll with about 5,500 full-time employees. UVM had about 3,420 fulltime employees and 490 part-time. I understand that the City of Burlington has about 500 employees. Shouldn’t you be having much more serious discussions about employer assisted housing programs? I realize not all of these institutions’ employees work in Burlington, but these employers have land available both in Burlington and the surrounding towns. Shouldn’t those sites be on the table for possible housing development? We realize new housing will be needed across a range of price points to serve all segments of the labor force, but what are the needs of those Burlington-based employees?

- You mention the average Burlington household spends 44% of their income on housing. As you look at Inclusionary Zoning you must keep the affordability crisis in mind; that is the point of it. Building more housing itself, without targeting it, is unlikely to change the affordability issues. You reference that only 18 only market rate rentals units developed since 2000 (compared to 220 assisted units). However there are a fair number of market units now under construction, and the context is missing – namely that 78% of Burlington’s rental housing stock is market rate and without the 220 new units, the ratio of market to affordable rentals would be even higher.
- We all are very aware that purpose built student housing is critical to Burlington, but providing strategic, well located, walkable sites first to students and not to our average citizens doesn’t make sense. UVM has land, and as well controls purpose built housing in Winooski that Champlain has been leasing. Walking away from that would be a step backward. Again, the “inconvenience” of some housing locations, including those on the UVM campus, might be mitigated by better, more flexible transportation.
- We very happy to see the acknowledgement of Burlington’s (and the State’s) homeless problem in the housing plan. Housing First is a model that works, but the City must be willing to support and advocate for the services and staffing needed to support those models.

Again thank you for proposed action plan to deal with these complex issues.

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