

V. ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

91.215 (h)

Describe the jurisdiction's goals, programs, and policies for reducing the number of poverty level families (as defined by the Office of Management and Budget and revised annually). In consultation with other appropriate public and private agencies, (i.e. TANF agency) state how the jurisdiction's goals, programs, and policies for producing and preserving affordable housing set forth in the housing component of the consolidated plan will be coordinated with other programs and services for which the jurisdiction is responsible. Identify the extent to which this strategy will reduce (or assist in reducing) the number of poverty level families, taking into consideration factors over which the jurisdiction has control.

Recognizing that poverty is a regional and national issue, and that many factors contributing to poverty lie outside of local control, the city nonetheless hopes to see the downward trend in the number of city families living in poverty which began in 1990's continue into the next decade. Key components of the city's anti-poverty strategy include:

- Meeting basic needs and stabilizing living situations, including increasing access to affordable housing and to income supports
- Increasing earned income to livable wage levels
- Increasing and protecting asset accumulation and resident net worth
- Decreasing social isolation and increasing social capital

City policies directed towards this strategy include:

- The Burlington Housing Trust Fund (tax revenues dedicated for affordable housing);
- The city's Livable Wage Ordinance;
- The city's Women in Construction Trades Ordinance (aimed at increasing opportunities for women in the construction trades); and
- The city's Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance (which makes affordable housing an integral part of every newly constructed residential project in the city).

Programs that the city runs which are aimed at reducing poverty include:

- The CDBG Program: The city's overarching goal for its CDBG program is to reduce the number of people living in poverty in Burlington, most especially among those groups disproportionately affected by poverty. As the CDBG Advisory Board develops its funding recommendations, it rates applications on resource allocation principles designed to promote that goal. The Board includes low-income residents who help to making spending decisions, and the Board's orientation includes a discussion about why Burlington residents are living in poverty and the barriers they face in changing their circumstances.
- The AmeriCorps*VISTA program: Since the 1990's, 40 to 50 AmeriCorps*VISTAs have worked each year in community development to expand voice and opportunity of underserved populations, create job and skills-training opportunities, alleviate homelessness, increase literacy, and expand access to healthcare, housing, and education. Members assess organizational capacity, access new resources, implement new programming, increase outreach, and recruit, train and support volunteers. They help residents organize street associations (which have increased

from three in 1994 to over 50 today) in low-income neighborhoods and raise money for neighborhood improvements, with documented resulting quality of life improvements. Members also do multi-benefit outreach through annual door-to-door flyering on Martin Luther King Day.

- Free tax assistance and EITC outreach: The city operates one of three local Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites, providing free tax preparation assistance to low-income taxpayers. This includes helping residents tap into the federal and state Earned Income Tax Credits, income-based property tax relief and the state renter's rebate, with residents receiving tax refunds often amounting to thousands of dollars. The city also partners with the local CASH Coalition in biannual Free Credit Report Days, where low-income residents can get their credit scores and reports together with one-on-one credit counseling.
- The Business Financing and Technical Assistance Program: City economic development staff provide loans and technical assistance to low-income entrepreneurs who want to move into business ownership. Clients include refugees as well as other residents, and the program offers ongoing support to help them sustain their businesses.
- The Housing Initiatives Program: The city offers down payment assistance to low- and moderate-income homebuyers, especially those purchasing a duplex or triplex for owner occupancy.

Consistent with its guiding principle of nurturing a strong local nonprofit infrastructure which can sustain itself across changing political landscapes, the city has supported the start-up of a number of programs aimed at increasing the economic and social capital of low-income families. These include:

- The Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), which offers affordable homeownership through the community land trust model. The city supported the start-up of this organization – which is now the largest land trust in the country – with \$200,000 from the city general fund and a \$1 million line of credit from the municipal employee retirement fund.
- The Good News Garage, which trains low-income residents to repair donated vehicles for low-cost purchase by low-income working residents. The city provided the Good News Garage with start-up funding and with money to renovate part of an old “bus barn” into a new facility for the organization.
- Step Up, a program offering women training in non-traditional occupations. Step Up began in the basement of City Hall. Under the auspices of Vermont Works for Women, it has grown statewide and offers a variety of programs, including programs for women in the corrections system.
- ReCycle North, which offers a variety of training and apprenticeship programs for low-income and disadvantaged residents. The city supported the start-up and expansion of this organization with both operational funding and with money for new and improved facilities.
- Circles of Support, which matches low-income families with three middle/upper-class Allies to help the families work on financial, education/training and social goals

and to help the Allies work on understanding the barriers the families are confronting. The city was able to bring a local visionary who had this idea together with organizations in the mid-West who had put a similar idea into action, and to provide funding to support the local birth of NeighborKeepers and its Circles of Support program.

- Opportunities Credit Union, a Community Development Credit Union which makes mainstream financial services available to low-income residents. The city provided \$100,000 in start-up loan capital and continues to work with Opportunities to support innovative new programs such as a matched savings program to pay off debts in collection.

Examples of ways in which housing activities are coordinated with other programs for which the city is responsible begin with the inclusion of a resident living in assisted housing on the CDBG Advisory Board, helping to make decisions on how to best spend CDBG resources. Other examples include the city's Lead Hazard Reduction Program which – through a partnership with the Central Vermont Community Action Council – will provide training and technical assistance to low-income individuals who want to start businesses in lead abatement or related fields. The Lead Program will also recruit workers among ex-offenders through the city's Re-entry Employment Specialist.

Going beyond programs for which the city is responsible, examples include the city-supported Northern Lights project, a transitional housing program for women exiting corrections which includes employment support and mentoring. The Burlington Housing Authority integrates housing with economic opportunity through its Family Self-Sufficiency Program – which, as previously discussed, moves families toward economic self-sufficiency through access to career counseling, job training, child care and other services, and through escrow accounts with funds available for homeownership and other asset-building opportunities – and through its Section 8 Homeownership Program.

The local TANF program is run by the Economic Services Division of the state Agency of Human Services. The local District Director of the Agency of Human Services sits on the Advisory Board which makes recommendations about the city's annual CDBG allocations. The city had proposed to reserve a seat on that Board for a TANF participant (as part of the participant's community placement), but was not able to make that fit with TANF program requirements.