



WINOOSKI HOUSING AUTHORITY

Proposed Plan 2025

The following is a presentation of the five-year plan for the Winooski Housing Authority. This is a requirement from Housing and Urban Development and was delayed, first by a new Executive Director needing time to assess the status of the organization and local housing needs. This was further complicated by the onset of the pandemic which made public meetings impossible for a population with limited access to the internet.

Executive Summary

After careful review of the City, County, and State plans and of the operations of the Winooski Housing Authority, we present this five-year and annual plan, supported by plans for 2021 (in review), 2022 (current), and 2023-5. The plan is based on the following conclusions:

- The Winooski Housing Authority must adopt from a primary provider of public housing to a partner in the region to increase the availability of affordable housing focusing on families to address a shortfall.
- The agency must look at all of its historical patterns of operation and adopt new technology, human resource processes, and financial management strategies to modernize its approach to improve its customer service functions in a manner expected for the twenty first century.
- Planned retirements will mean a changeover in most key positions within the agency will require careful succession planning and a significant investment in training.

Introduction

Winooski Housing Authority entered a period of significant change in 2019 – 2020. A long-time Executive Director retired and was followed by an Interim appointment who managed the process of converting our public housing to non-profit entities using the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. This was followed by a new Executive Director from outside of the housing industry.

This plan is designed to reposition the agency to be able to manage under the new RAD rules, to repair our buildings and infrastructure, to update our systems, policies, and processes including implementing technology to better serve our population, and to diversify housing options in our community. This effort will require the agency transform itself from its mission focused on public housing operations. The new focus will be on converting to the RAD model, contribute as a developer or partner in adding

to the affordable housing available in the City, and embracing technology as a means of becoming more efficient and effective in reaching our diverse client base.

In addition, the agency is likely to experience turnover due to retirements of long-time employees in the next five years after a long period of stability.

Our goals reflect a strategy to manage this change at a pace that is sustainable and accounts for a learning curve for current staff and an orientation plan for new employees. Adoption of new technologies takes time to fully integrate into the work processes based solely on paper for many decades and may involve maintaining paper files to comply with federal requirements. We will also need to develop relationships that will allow us to partner with agencies toward the goal of providing more affordable housing for families in Winooski. The latter is identified in the City Municipal Plan, The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission's ECOS Plan, and the State's Consolidated Plan.

This document starts with a discussion on the 2015 – 2020 Goals. Admittedly, the Executive Director who implemented those goals is no longer with WHA, so the evaluation is not complete. Looking forward, we present goals for five years, discuss the way our 2020 work contributed to meeting those goals, looks at 2021 work, and takes a high-level view to the last three years. These will be evaluated annually.

The result is at least two years (one is complete) and possibly three will be focused on repositioning and to adding to the affordable housing inventory in Winooski. This focus prepares us to move into the twenty-first century with the tools and skills that will allow us to continue to thrive for decades to come.

In addition, the City of Winooski recently completed an analysis of housing in the City and is focusing on the need for affordable family housing, with three- and four-bedroom homes for purchase and rental in significant short supply. A new master plan has led to an increase of one bedroom and studio apartments that often involve removing family units.

Winooski Housing Authority is working on partnerships to address this shortfall.

Summary of City, County, and State Housing Needs Goals

The City of Winooski is the most diverse city in the State. This diversity covers race, ethnicity, gender, and income. The City prides itself on its history of affordability and its working-class character. Median income in Winooski is 83% of the Vermont average. (VHFA, Community Profiles) Housing stock is beginning to increase, but most new inventory is rental units mostly with 0 and 1 bedroom.

The rental market in the greater Burlington area is very tight, with a vacancy rate of 1.9%. Fifty nine percent (59%) of housing units are rental, compared to 30% in Vermont and 37% in the county. (VHFA, Community Profile) Winooski also outperforms our neighbors in providing affordable rental units.

Winooski's municipal plan (adopted March 2019) states that there is a "strong desire to maintain the income diversity that currently exists among residents as it grows and revitalizes." The City won a Smart Growth award for a newly developed downtown in 2006. At 1.4 square miles, the City is a densely populated, diverse area in Chittenden County and is at the core of the Smart Growth movement in Chittenden County. Relevant goals from the City's municipal plan include:

- (1) Encourage the development of affordable housing options for a broad range of income levels.

- (2) Foster a mix of housing types to serve the needs of different family composition, household types, and multigenerational needs.
- (5) Protect current residents from displacement.

A look at the regional transportation plan includes a focus on job growth and a concentration of 80% of the future growth in 15% of the land area. This is designed to reduce vehicle miles travelled to and from work. (CCRPC¹ 2018 Chittenden County ECOS Plan) Winooski is in the center of that targeted land mass. Through the initiative Building Homes Together, CCRPC, together with Champlain Housing Trust, and Evernorth plan to build 3,500 new homes in Chittenden County by 2021. The focus of this initiative, which is likely to be extended, is to assure a percentage of those homes are affordable and serve the community.

Another key issue is that limited public transportation options also mean bus service is concentrated in Chittenden county to the core area defined above. New homes serving low- and moderate-income residents will benefit from efficient bus service that cannot be found outside of the that land area identified by CCRPC above. (GMTA Route Maps)

From the perspective of the State of Vermont, there is a focus on the fact that 50% of the rental households are cost burdened. The State also focuses on housing that does not meet basic health or energy efficiency standards. (Vermont Consolidated Plan 2020 – 2024 p.30) Cost burden is a critical issue in Chittenden County and in Winooski. (VHFA) This results in the following goals (VT Consolidated Plan p. 90):

- (1) Increase supply and quality of affordable housing.
- (2) Decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness.
- (4) Strengthen communities and improve the quality of life of Vermonters.

The State's guiding principles focus on "achieving perpetual affordability", "Smart Growth", a focus on "opportunity zones", and aligning homelessness to permanent housing.

The outline of the challenges and five year and annual goals reflect these challenges as well as the internal operating needs of the Winooski Housing Authority to become an agency capable of contributing to these goals moving forward.

¹ Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

Evaluation of Plan from 2015 – 2020

2015 – 2020 Goals:

1. WHA will continue to utilize prudent and sound business practices in all facets of the operation with the result being a sustainable business model.

WHA converted to RAD during the period in order to create a more predictable revenue stream.

2. WHA senior staff will emphasize urgency, pride, and professionalism and undertake training to underscore the importance of these watchwords to the agency's mission

Cannot be measured. Senior staff lives the mission of the organization.

3. Options as regards to potential new office space for WHA employees will be explored.

Options were explored and were deemed not a practical investment at this time.

4. Job descriptions will be updated, and operational policies will be reviewed and revised as needed.

In progress and will carry over as a goal.

5. WHA will promote its mission of providing decent, safe and sanitary housing by continuing its program of modernizing its housing stock

WHA made investments as allowed under the previous funding model. The RAD conversion provided financial support necessary to make a major investment. The next step is to develop a sustainable funding plan for a regular, predictable, and consistent approach to managing our assets.

6. WHA staff will ensure the portfolio remains code-compliant, as new housing codes are promulgated by local, state, and federal authorities.

Same as #5

7. WHA will utilize the Resident Services Coordinator to link the needs of New Americans to resources in the region

This remains an issue after the Resident Services Coordinator position morphed into a senior leadership position and was not replaced.

8. The Resident Services Coordinator will be integrated into the administration of the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program

See # 7

9. As regards housing related issues, WHA will continue to provide help and guidance and act as a general resource to the City of Winooski

This effort will be adapted in 2020 - 2025

10. WHA will promote ageing in place of elders within the portfolio, the primary mechanism will be the SASH program.

The SASH program is working well to assist seniors to age in place while safe to do so.

Plan 2020 - 2025

Key Challenges

1. Affordable housing in the area is in short supply making it difficult for eligible voucher holders to find suitable housing and creating long waitlists for WHA properties. This is particularly, but not exclusively true of workforce housing.
2. The Rental Assistance Development program is new and requirements and best practices are unclear at times.
3. Key skills in accounting and human resources are not available among the staff and training on policies is behind schedule, some due to the inability to train in person during the pandemic.
4. Systems to improve customer service and to engage and empower clients – especially those with limited English proficiency and those who speak, but do not read English remain an area of consistent needed improvement.
5. Relationships with local private developers and city staff have been disrupted due to turnover and must be reestablished.
6. Budgets under the RAD program are new and do not have an established history and need a predictable budgeting model based on the new revenue stream.
7. Policies are out of date and in need of revision and implementation.
8. Financial data is managed by a fee accountant and current information is not easily available.
9. Issues with tenant who are experiencing mobility and cognition struggles present challenges to the “aging in place” philosophy, potentially leaving tenants in dangerous living situations.
10. Critical staff are approaching retirement age and have no established successors.

Agency Goals:

1. Create a budget model that can look out five years and allow for a robust capital and development plan to address maintenance, accessibility, and investment in new assets.
2. Examine the organizational structure to assure expertise exists in critical functions of finance, HR, and policy development, and accounting.
3. Review and improve systems for communicating with clients with limited English proficiency and those who do not read in English.
4. Reestablish relationships with private developers, housing providers, and city staff to understand current needs and opportunities and be in a position to help solve the affordable housing shortfall problem.
5. Use project-based vouchers to partner with developers to increase affordable housing availability.
6. Identify a succession plan for critical positions and begin training and mentoring current staff to fill those positions where possible.
7. Review and, where necessary, rewrite policies and procedures while implementing needed training and systems to assure compliance.

8. Work with SASH and property management staff to identify and assist individuals who may be a danger to themselves in their current living situation to support moving to a safer environment when necessary.
9. Update systems that allow remote work and move to a paperless system.
10. Update building systems to provide Wi-Fi access, allow staff mobility between buildings, and upgrade alarm and security systems.

Annual Plans

FY 20 - 21

NOTE: The pandemic rendered 2020 a time to focus on managing the health crisis and often resulted in staff either working from home or unable to work at all for periods of time.

- (#9) Evaluate and, if needed, replace the PHA management software to simplify the system, enable access to data online to assist with a continuity of operations plan, and enable the management of budget and finances to provide feedback whenever desired.

System was evaluated and replaced with PHA Web in March 2020 and implemented the system remotely. Using the system required a learning curve, particularly in Finance. This may not be a long-term solution.

- (#6) Create a training plan for Maintenance and Property Management staff to enter and progress to fully functional with raises as critical milestones are met.

Proposal was created for the FY 2022 budget pending Board approval

- (#2, 6, 7) Reestablish Business Manager position (with the closure of BINGO) to fill in a leadership position.

Position is being redesigned to clearly define a role that fills in a gap in HR and policy administration and contract management.

- (#1) Implement the RAD Capital Needs Assessment Plan to complete work as scheduled through the Bond agreement.

Tracking and reporting tool in place that can be used moving forward in regular capital maintenance.

Work is progressing and will require an additional year to complete.

- (#3) Work with the City of Winooski on a Working Communities Grant from the Boston Fed to improve a city-wide strategy on engagement of all members of our diverse community, a large number of who live on our properties or use our housing vouchers.

Grant was awarded and the City is in the process of implementing a new position of Director of Equity. This position will be available to us to determine how to best engage our population.

- (#9, 1) Update computer system to assure system security and flexibility of use.

System is mostly updated with a server replacement in FY 22. A regular replacement schedule will be available to become part of the capital plan to assure system does not age out of date.

- (#7) Update and implement policies on procurement, building security, professional boundaries, and cell phones.

All are complete, with some work left on procurement for firms that do major work (over \$100K) with single projects at a time that cumulate to a major effort over a year. Finalize key issuing and implement electronic door access systems in senior facilities and create a regular review of policies when staff meetings return.

- (#10) Install WiFi in central locations in all senior buildings.

Project is underway with CARES funding to allow seniors to access video communications with family during isolation. We have added iPads to the inventory for people who are not online to be able to access family, friends, and telemedicine.

Annual Plan FY 22 (unranked)

- (#9, 1) Master PHA Web and provide regular financial updates against the budget to staff.
- (#6) Implement a Skill Development Plan for Maintenance.
- (# 1, 2) Upgrade training for Finance staff in Financial Management to assist in mastering HUD requirements.
- (#4) Create and evaluate a plan to add affordable family housing to our inventory using a partnership with the City and a private sector developer to be prepared to move forward is necessary. This would include tax credits as a source of funding.
- (#5) Target a portion of our HCV program resources to provide place-based vouchers to developers intending to create affordable units.
- (# 1) Complete RAD repairs required for closing out the process with HUD and the bank. This includes a plan to assure compliance with accessibility requirements.
- (#3) Review plans for working with people with limited English proficiency and those who do not read English regardless of language spoken, to be sure critical notices are received and understood.
- (#3) Increase time staff spends at each property to develop better relationships with families using an “office hours” model.
- (#3) Reach out to the City’s new Director of Equity to establish best practices for engaging New American communities.
- (#2) Identify key missing skills on the staff and create a plan for the following year’s budget to address issues.
- (#7) Create a list of policies with a date record of when they are adopted. Use list to schedule revision and adoption work.
- (#10) Install electronic access systems in senior buildings to increase control over issuing keys and keep accurate records of who has keys to the buildings.

- (#8) Create a project to work with Property Management and SASH to proactively identify individuals who do not participate in SASH and who are approaching a point where living alone may be a challenge to be sure supports are in place.

Fiscal Years 23 – 25

- (#1) Finalize a long-term replacement schedule for each property that lists all of the needs and is funded for two years, has a steady need for funding, and has regular contributions from the operating budget to meet basic needs.
- (#1) Develop a follow up plan to monitor accessibility of the property and systems to assure we remain compliant with requirements.
- (#1) Create a three year look ahead budget model for each property and evaluate the sustainability of management fees for WHA operations.
- (#2) Create a sustainable staffing plan with critical skill positions to be filled and a succession plan in place.
- (#2) Develop a strategy to assure that recruitment efforts include a strategy to attract, hire, promote, and retain a diverse staff.
- (#4) Add affordable family housing units to the Winooski inventory.