

# VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2028

## **Overview**

In 2020, the Vermont State Housing Authority (VSHA) Board commissioned Melanie Goodman to facilitate a short-range planning process with then long-tenured and outgoing executive director, Richard Williams. The primary goal at that time was to address immediate needs and set near-term goals and strategies. By 2023, under new leadership and with most of these goals accomplished, we launched a new and more robust strategic planning process. What follows is the result of several planning meetings, both remote and in-person, where Board and staff worked through various phases that led to this final strategic plan.

#### **Assessing our Current Reality**

The Board conducted a trends analysis, interviewed key stakeholders for their perspective on external trends and challenges, as well as potential opportunities for VSHA going forward. Additionally, we looked inward, and conducted an internal assessment of the organization's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Invigorating our Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles**

Together with leadership, the Board looked further into the future, enhanced the vision we created during our 2020 planning process, revised our mission statement for clarity and brevity, and established guiding principles to serve as criteria in evaluating our programs, processes, and future decision making.

#### **Setting our Strategic Directions and Goals**

Using a consensus process, the Board and staff contributed input that led to VSHA's four major strategic directions for 2023-2028: Building our Team, Modernizing for Greater Impact, Evolving with Intention, and Raising our Profile. Goals and objectives were identified from all the data and contributions that preceded this phase.

#### **Action Planning**

The VSHA Executive Team engaged in the two phases that comprise action planning.

- 1.) We prioritized our 2023/24 goals under each strategic direction and committed them to a calendar.
- 2.) Task Teams outlined concrete implementation steps for goals in the present quarter.

#### **Benchmarking our Progress**

Six months from the completion of our first Action Plan, the Board and Leadership will convene to evaluate our progress and make any necessary adjustments. Thereafter, we will produce a new Action Plan each year, in view of new information, opportunities, and challenges.

We are enormously grateful for everyone's time and contribution to this planning process, we are extremely pleased with the outcome, and we are well underway!

~Kathleen Berk Executive Director ~Alex Farrell Board Chair

## **Our Growth**

Since our founding in 1968, the VSHA annual budget has grown from \$1.6M to over \$77M. Simultaneously, our workforce has grown from 6 to 71 employees in 2023.

## **Our Work**

The VSHA was established as the first statewide housing authority in the country to improve housing conditions and expand housing for families of very low, low, and moderate income. Our direct housing services reach approximately 9,000 Vermonters annually.

We administer the largest portfolio of Section 8 rental subsidies in the state in partnership with private landlords, non-profits, statewide agencies, and municipalities. We also provide grant administration of homeless funding and manage multi-family housing and mobile home parks.

Additionally, we provide oversight of a Housing Choice Voucher Program which funds 4,425 households; contract administration of 120 properties (3,262 units); state supported Rental Assistance, and Housing Subsidy Plus Care.

Our other programs include, or have included, Homeless Assistance Programs, Bridge to HOPWA, an accessory dwelling unit program; a rental stabilization program; Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program (VERAP); the Landlord Relief Program; and the Mobile Home Improvement & Replacement Program.

In June of 2023, The Housing Foundation, Inc. (HFI) and VSHA entered into a Reorganization Agreement resulting in the restructuring of the HFI Board of Directors and the organization's by-laws. The newly formed HFI Board is constituted as a seven-member board and comprised of four designated directors and three non-designated directors. The designated directors are the VSHA Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Executive Director and an additional VSHA Commissioner. The three non-designated directors are current HFI directors. This consolidation enables our two organizations to achieve greater efficiencies and more impactful outcomes.

# Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles

## **OUR VISION**

## Over the next three to five years VSHA is ...

- Adapting to evolving needs.
- Increasing the supply of affordable housing.
- Offering leadership on housing policy.
- Known as an employer of choice.
- Maintaining a strong financial position.
- Ensuring that our operations meet the demand.

## **OUR MISSION**

To ensure that quality affordable housing opportunities are available to Vermonters statewide.

## **OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

#### We are committed to ...

- ~ Fulfilling our mission with knowledge and compassion.
- ~ Partnering with others to creatively address housing needs.
- ~ Stewarding our finances and programs with confidence.
- ~ Promoting DEI solutions across the organization.
- ~ Tailoring professional development to our workplace.
- ~ Fostering a culture of openness and trust.

# **Strategic Directions, Goals, and Objectives**

	Goal 1: SUPPORT OUR LEADERSHIP	Goal 2: DEVELOP OUR WORKFORCE	Goal 3: BUILD OUR CULTURE	Goal 4: MAINTAIN HIGH STANDARDS
I. BUILDING THE TEAM	Objectives  1A. Conduct an organizational assessment of the Leadership Team and their responsibilities.  1B. Ensure the Leadership Team has the time and support needed to evaluate and implement changes to business processes and necessary modernizations.  1C. Institute a succession plan for leadership staff 3-5 years out.  1D. Assess and develop our	Objectives  2A. Assess our workforce strengths, weaknesses, needs and gaps.  2B. Develop and implement a robust staff recruitment and retention plan.  2C. Involve staff in the design and delivery of new professional development opportunities.	Objectives 3A. Routinely evaluate our operational capacity through surveys, interviews, and internal systems.  3B. Provide open and consistent communications and direction to staff that support performance.  3C. Ensure all staff are modeling VSHA's vision and guiding principles.	Objectives  4A. Engage in ethical and transparent decision making across the organization.  4B. Develop and implement a structure for accountability.  4C. Establish service-level standards and measurements.  4D. Provide regular training on the Authority's Professional Code of Conduct, Ethics and Confidentiality polices.
	internal talent pool.	Cool 2: FNSUDE DROCDAMS		
II. MODERNIZING FOR GREATER IMPACT	Goal 1: RECOGNIZE OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES  Objectives 1A. Evaluate business analytics (website, software, phones, hardware and project tracking mechanisms) and enact necessary solutions.	Goal 2: ENSURE PROGRAMS TARGET CURRENT NEEDS  Dbjectives  2A. Initiate a thorough crossagency programmatic review of processes, procedures, and administrative delivery systems.  2B. Institute system improvements, incl. development and/or redesign of programming and administrative delivery systems in response to crossagency review.		

III. EVOLVING WITH INTENTION	Goal 1: EMPLOY DATA-DRIVEN DECISION-MAKING  Objectives  1A. Evaluate the housing space, determine what gaps to fill and where VSHA wants to take the lead.  1B. Use the Housing Needs Analysis to identify the evolving needs of low-income Vermonter's  1C. Assess quality and timing of new programs and our management capacity ahead of selection and implementation.	Goal 2: ASSERT OUR RELEVANCE AND FINANCIAL STRENGTH  Objectives 2A. Increase and broaden our funding sources.  2B. Dedicate funds in annual operating budgets to meet the goals of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan.	Goal 3: PURSUE PROMISING OPPORTUNITIES  Objectives 3A. Identify HFI assets that allow for expanded land uses.  3B. Develop and maintain stakeholder relationships needed in order to pursue new initiatives.  3C. Seek opportunities to collaborate and partner with like-minded entities.	Goal 4: BECOME A ONE-STOP SHOP  Objectives  4A. Streamline the administration of rental assistance programs with AHS.  4B. Develop universal, easy to use on-line application for rental assistance programs and providers @ affordablehousing.com.  4C. Develop a statewide waiting list for use by all public housing providers @ affordablehousing.com.  4D. Develop voluntary renter registry @ affordablehousing.com.
IV. RAISING OUR PROFILE	Goal 1: INVEST IN COMMUNICATIONS  Objectives  1A. Develop capacity to manage external and internal communications, PR, and act as a legislative liaison.	Objectives  2A. Produce regular press releases, newsletter, social media posts, etc. describing VSHA's work and accomplishments.  2B. Produce and publish an Annual Report every year.  2C. Maintain a regular presence at the Statehouse during the legislative session and monitor federal housing policy impacting Vermont and specifically VSHA.		

# **APPENDICES**

- I. Trends Analysis
- II. Stakeholder Input
- **III.** Internal Assessment
- IV. 2024 Action Plan (April-October)
- V. 90 Day Implementation Plan

# Appendix I

# **Trends Analysis**

#### What is on the horizon?

- Influx of new rental units under construction
- New development opportunities
- Increased needs for rental assistance
- Contracted fed/state budgets
- Expansion of existing properties/HO opportunities for MHP
- Increasing vacancy of commercial & dormitory space
- MHPs for middle income seniors
- Long-term health of mobile home communities
- Employer-based housing

### What is **emerging?**

- Increasing awareness (media/political support)
- Shortage (preserve exiting, increase supply)
- Budget tightening (state and federal)
- Climate/Energy (conversion costs, uncertainty, deferred maintenance)
- Economy (correction, federal\$ removal, what's next?)
- Client needs (staff capability, resources)
- Workforce (ability to ramp up, resources to execute, adapting to labor force needs)
- Reform (zoning, etc.)

#### What is **established?**

- Realignment for task-based model
- Structures in place to handle funding changes
- Collaboration with others
- Continually upgrading technology
- Legislative actions/ED HAS a seat at the table
- Section 8 Mobile Home management
- Climate related costs
- Funding of best practices in place in case of lost funding
- Subject matter experts

## What is disappearing?

- Skilled human services workforce
- COVID relief fund (federal programs are sun setting)
- Bipartisanship (the art of compromise)
- Sustainability (ability to maintain home –increased cost of rent/mortgage, repairs, taxes)
- Housing affordability (incomes not keeping pace with market)
- Generational transfer of wealth
- VT 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest population in the country

# Appendix II

# **Consolidated Stakeholder Input**

	VHFA (Maura)	CHT (Michael)	VHCB (Gus) (Kim)	Cathedral (Kim)
Strengths	-Shared vision and goals -Critical Role	-Critical role -Administration of program	-Administration of programs -Excellent ED	-Excellent ED -Administration of program
	-Excellent ED		-Critical Role	, ,
Opportunities	-Consider merger -Operational excellence -Housing needs assessment data	-Transition parks into co-op model -Operational excellence	-Operational Excellence -Build Federal and State relationships -Hire a consultant on HFI development role -Infill mobile home parks with vacant lots.	- Operations excellence -Reassess property inspection requirements
Weaknesses	-Slow turnaround time  -Properties are vacant due to slow response time from VSHA.  -Succession planning and depth of bench.  -Organizational structure is outlier with peers.  - HFI development	-Slow turnaround time  -Properties are vacant due to slow response time from VSHA.  -HFI development	-Succession planning and depth of benchHFI development	-Slow turnaround time  Property are vacant due to slow response time
Threats	-Long term low vacancy rate  -Market that will create primarily high-end housing.  -Increase in housing costs.  -Supply shortage of housing at all levels.  -Forced dichotomy in funding/politics	-Supply shortage of housing at all levelsIncrease in homelessnessStrain on supportive servicesWorkforce shortage -Ending of federal fundsHigher construction costs.	-Supply shortage of housing at all levelsIncrease in housing costsStrain on supportive servicesWorkforce shortage	-Workforce shortage -Strain on supportive servicesHousing the homeless
Overall Comment	Overall support for Kathleen and open to exploring mergers of two organizations to serve Vermonters more effectively.	Take a breath, pick 1-2 things to do better on.  Probably need to find some cash for better systems to improve service.	He is a VSHA supporter and thankful for everything they do.  "Do whatever you can to have Kathleen fresh and supported. Make sure she has the support so she can move beyond handling the day to day."	We really appreciated the VERAP funding for our properties (not residents) and the creativity used to make that happen.

	Agency Admin (Doug Farnham)	AHS (Sarah Phillips)	Stewart Property (Paul Stewart)	UDSA/Rural Development (Susan Greenware, Stephanie Vergin, Donna O'Brien)
Strengths	-Their professionalism and dedication in the face of highly challenging and emotionally charged circumstances.	-Staff are available, responsive and welcome the opportunity to discuss and coordinate.	-Re: Project-based Admin: Going well. Reviewers are thorough, reasonable, respectful, and promptly respond to questions and concerns.	-Field ops has found the day-to- day mgmt. relationship. -on track with projects they manage
	-Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program was executed on extremely short timelines under highly stressful conditions. I would classify the program execution as a success that VSHA staff should be proud of.	-Strong relationships with multiple staff between VSHA and OEO team. They see solving homelessness as part of their core work, not ancillary. -They are a willing partner and are		-Quick responses to inquires
		able to pivot and grow. They are clear about their role and capacity.		
Opportunities	-Flexibility in how VT meets our housing needs is critical but pilots and innovations always carry additional risk.  -Need to balance continuing to invest in areas that we know have impact with development of housing that doesn't negatively impact Vermont's character or environment.	- It will continue to be hard to lease up, but helping clients lease up a HCV in place will help VSHA with their bottom line.  -For people experiencing homelessness, that means a move on preference to households coming out of homelessness who have temporary rental assistance.	-Don't know whether VSHA is having utilization rates issues in the HCV program given the lack of supply, which, is a hit to admin fees, but one area that could help this possible problem is to do more PBVs, particularly tied to VHFA new construction projects that competed for LIHTC units. PBVs tied to Tax Credit properties makes the latter more viable in the rural areas where LIHTC rents, while "affordable" based on the contemporary definition, aren't particularly affordable to very low income tenants. The tax credit program is for households of moderate income; truly low income households need the rent subsidy that only VSHA can provide.	- Play a role in transferring more properties to non-profit ownership -USDA-RD can help with transfers -More funding for rehab Could work with USDA-RD to better understand funding opps. Could assist with farm labor housing, a newer priority for USDA-RD New funding coming through weatherization and efficiency
Weaknesses	My only negative experience was with ReFrame No procurement process can fully protect any organization but that's something you could evaluate internally.	-Process improvement and better communication with clients.  -Lean into process improvement and build project management capacity. This will create some administrative efficiency.  -Look at internal systems and build some best practices based on behavioral science.	-Re: HCV: Staff turnover of personnel and the inexperience of intake people particularly creates processing delays, and becomes a problem when we don't receive timely tenant rent changes.  Regarding leadership, don't know how many people are assigned to HCV and PBV-we only deal with one person-but the size and complexity of the PBV program especially, may be overwhelming,  With both programs the communication and responsiveness to questions or requests is definitely a big concern and is a chronic issue.  Re: PBV: This hybrid program has structural complications that are HUD's doing and can't be meaningfully improved until HUD implements the HOTMA provision allowing owners to maintain the waitlists.  Operational improvements last year have been helpful but the time to process applicants is lengthy. The biggest problems are around not getting tenant rent changes before anniversary dates and program terminations that we are told about long after the effective date.  One phenomenon is the substantial number of tenant program terminations that we see in Vermont. In NH, we have a comparably sized PBV program and we seldom see terminations.	-Continue ongoing work and good communications -VT housing network is complex, inhibits outside entities from assisting -Too many players (VSHA, VHFA, VHCB. DHCD) -Non-profit network also complicated/hard to follow

			We can cite many cases where we actually help the tenant to complete the recertification paperwork and then send it to VSHA only to find out weeks later that the tenant has been terminated due to failure to recertify. I wouldn't mention this as a problem area if the issue was incidental. One area that does work well is the physical inspection component.  -Some of the problems with VSHA's performance with HCVs, and especially, PBVs relate to the universal problem we are all encountering with this mysterious shrunken work force, but, honestly, the issues in these two areas predate recent history  -There seems to be a good amount of turnover that we don't see with NHHFA. Is compensation an issue?	
Threats	-The degradation of civility and practicality in our society is concerning. Demanding that we solve problems doesn't help - coming up with creative and collaborative solutions does	-Housing programs and resources are complex – staff turnover means major setbacks.  -Doing our best to simplify the administration of programs will help partner organizations that provide services to be better partners/provide better services and focus less on paperwork.	-As to VERAP, I fully understand the imperative to commit the funds quickly and effectively, and I know that some assistance was not especially deserved, not just in Vermont but NH as well. As much as the program did assist many households who needed help-especially fixed rent LIHTC properties- in a way it perhaps created for some a sense of entitlement as receivables have increased while the newspapers are chock full of help wanted ads. (Maybe it's me, as I am aware that my old school mentality is vanishing from the landscape)	-Increasing housing costs -resulting increases in rent -some property owners pulling out/reluctant to participate in subsidized housing -Hard for subsidies to to keep pace with rising costs
Overall Comment	-Kathleen, and others at VSHA, are the quiet heroes of our society. The public will never truly understand or appreciate how much they put into making VT a better place to live and that is partially because, like most truly worthy people, they do not seek recognition or attention for their efforts but instead continue to dedicate their time and energy to helping others.  Kathleen is calm, rational, and extremely competent when it counts the most. You can see a person's character more clearly when they are under pressure and her integrity shines through.		- I hope that this is somewhat helpful.	Please keep the communication strong, and notify them of any funding opportunities that may arise for the USDA-RD portfolio.

	VT Landlord Association	VT Legal Aid		
	(Angela Zaikowski)	(Wendy Morgan & Jean Murray)		
Strengths	-The spirit of collaboration, including with the RHSP, in my capacity as Director	-The team at VSHA is open and cooperative, comes up with creative		
	and an attorney.	solutions, and cooperates with all		
	-the email list developed and info	stakeholders		
	dissemination is fantastic	-When they take action on behalf of		
	-communications of new programs as	individuals, VSHA is very helpful.		
	new things or changes that are coming -most complaints/issues people had	-Easy to underestimate the volume of what VSHA does, they probably help or		
	related to VERAP were not VSHA's fault	play a role in housing about 10% of VT's		
	given the magnitude/scope	rental housing population.		
		-Richard's and now Kathleen's presence		
		is very approachable and open, a huge		
		asset for legislators and collaborators.		
Opportunities	-Develop housing outside of traditional	-Advocate for reduction in investor		
	methods: tiny homes, or other housing development with more density aside	ownership in Vermont.		
	from typical high-rise, which have high	-Advocate for regulations that allow Sec.		
	construction costs.	8 voucher income to be included in income calculation.		
	-Develop with climate resilience in mind!	-Advocate for higher FMRs –to		
	-Play a stronger role in the development of housing?	encourage utilization by more landlords.		
	-Explore transitional campgrounds?	-Shelter Plus Care Vouchers are not		
	Zapiere transmental earripgioaniae	extending long enough – there may be an opportunity for a special unit to focus		
		on cases where recipients need more		
		intensive services.		
		-More resources to help people with		
		hoarding problems –this could be in partnership with elder services agencies		
		but then who helps with those that		
		aren't senior citizens?		
		-Encourage more landlords to accept		
		subsidies,		
		-Investigate how much investor		
		ownership has increased in VT, because the turnover in ownership and		
		gentrification of these properties is		
		reducing options for low-income		
		residents.		
		- A permanent rental assistance program for those above 30% AMI and/or rental		
		assistance in addition to HCV		
		-Rental assistance should not look like		
		ERAP, it should be more like rental		
		arrearage assistance as well as ongoing % of rent payments like RHSP.		
		-Housing Quality inspections to ensure		
		health of housing stock for recipients. For		
		landlords that don't pass these		
		inspections, they should be connected with VHIP. <b>VSHA</b> has a role in assuring		
		quality standards for housing. Perhaps		
		HUD standards aren't stringent enough,		
		and perhaps we aren't requiring		
		inspections in enough communities.		
		-Can the VSHA inspection be leveraged in communities that do not		
		require a certificate of occupancy?		
	l .	roquire a continuate of occupancy:	l .	

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		-Make sure we have resources necessary to cover the cost of record maintenance for ERAP records.	
Weaknesses	PHAs in general seem to struggle with getting proper docs and forms (ex. HAP - housing assistance payment contract - confusion when asking case managers for that) -Landlords are on a wide spectrum of ability and organization - More prompt notification re: when tenant subsidy is getting terminated and voucher has been reinstated -More clear documentation to allow people to track and understand what's happening -Lack of social supports for tenants with challenges - causes issues with tenant management and neighbors of challenging tenants	-10%-15% of evictions are being filed by subsidized housing providers, evicting people for nonpayment of rent at fairly low amounts – there should be solutions for resolving modest delinquencies in these cases.  -Is eviction the only device VSHA have to get people to regularly pay rent, or is there some other behavior modification device that could be put in place? Is there research that suggests that the threat of eviction will actually encourage low-income people to pay their rent? -It's difficult to get by with the nonhousing portion of income that there should be more flexible to help people make ends meet when they fall behind -Often people are evicted for failing to file recertification papers – these are cumbersome 12-page applications. Failure to successfully complete this will result in a massive increase in rent because they will suddenly be facing market-rate rent rather than just paying their portion after HUD subsidyCan VSHA put more resources into helping avoid evictions?	
Threats	-VT has had under-developed housing units for DECADES, yet landlords & providers are blamed for rising prices -ABNBs NOT causing housing shortage -MHPs no longer being developed due to restrictive rules -Housing providers' costs increase around removing troublesome tenants -Totally open eviction laws are NOT the solution, but the landlord/tenant statute results in increased housing costs due to lost rent, damaged property, & property owners reluctance to become landlords	Evictions have been increasing in the absence of VERAP -Too many Landlords will not accept subsidiesThe Landlord Risk Mitigation program unfortunately plays into the stereotype of these residents as riffraff who will damage the units they inhabitTrend - climate migrants will continue to come to Vermont	
Overall Comment		"Find another means of behavior modification other than threat of eviction to enforce the rules – there should be a variety of options (like eviction diversion programs. Likewise with recertification.""	

# Appendix III

# **Internal Assessment**

OUR STRENGTHS	OUR WEAKNESSES
Mission-driven & dedicated	Demanding workplace environment
Flexible, responsive & innovative	Scarce supply of qualified staff
Operational excellence	Insufficient professional development opportunities
Highly collaborative	Inconsistent program administration in some areas and aging technology
Internal subject matter expertise	Few alternatives to eviction
Willingness to take on new opportunities	Limited by designated funding requirements

# Appendix IV

# **VSHA 2024 Action Calendar**

[Six Months]

Strategic Direction →	Pre-April	April – May 2024	June – July 2024	August – Sept. 2024	October 2024 Achievements
Building the Team	Proposals for Management Audit				
Modernizing for Greater Impact	Architectural Proposal				
	Phone System				
Evolving with Intention					
Raising Our Profile					

# Appendix V

# 90 Day Implementation Plan [EXAMPLE]

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: Building our Team	KEY STRATEGY: Develop our Workforce			
GOAL: Assess our staffing gaps and needs	ACHIEVEME	NT: Increase the	number of c	qualified applicants by 50%
ACTION: Design and trial-run a creative recruitment plan	DATE:	TEAM MEN	1BERS:	
IMPLEMENTATION STEPS		WHO	DONE BY	RESOURCES
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
7.				
5.				
6.				