



House General and Military Affairs

February 14, 2023

Testimony Submitted by: Lucy Leriche, Interim Executive Director, Lamoille Housing Partnership

Good afternoon Chair Stevens, Vice Chair Chestnut-Tangerman and committee members, My name is Lucy Leriche. I'm Lamoille Housing Partnership's interim Executive Director, and back in the housing saddle after serving LHP from 1997-2003. Thank you so much for your time today and your engagement on housing and homelessness throughout Vermont.

Established in 1991, Lamoille Housing Partnership (LHP) collaborates with communities to create and preserve quality affordable housing opportunities for households throughout Hardwick and Lamoille County. We envision equitable, inclusive communities where all households, regardless of income, can thrive in safe, quality, accessible, and affordable homes. Over three decades, LHP has developed and maintained 350 income-eligible, subsidized and affordable rental apartments in our communities. We create stable places for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to sleep and rest, do homework and play, cook meals, recover from injury and illness, feel safe, live close to employment, age in place, be part of a community and build financial stability. Just last year LHP completed 50 new, affordable rental apartments in Morrisville with nearly a dozen providing a pathway into permanent housing for Vermonters who have experienced homelessness. All 50 units are leased up.

Yet we know there continues to be an urgent need for affordable housing options in our communities. In early February 2024, LHP had 11 vacancies within our 350 apartments and 520 waitlisted applicant households. In the same week, Capstone Community Action reported 94 households known to be at risk of becoming homeless and 77 households known to be literally homeless in Lamoille County. "In total, there are 229 adults and 119 children who are at risk of, or are currently experiencing literal homelessness in Lamoille County." Continued, compounding pressures on Hardwick and Lamoille County's housing landscape include extremely low housing vacancy rates, homeownership and rental costs that significantly outpace incomes, sluggish housing production rates, population growth, rapid annual conversion of long term rental apartments to short term vacation rentals, plus hundreds of homes destroyed by 2023 flooding. In fact, we are still working to get 5 apartments in Cambridge back in habitable condition after the July, 2023 flooding.

The following story was shared with me by Kerrie, a staff member at LHP. The tenant's name is changed to protect her privacy. Kerrie writes:

I recently met *Jane at the mural unveiling ceremony at our most recently completed affordable housing development. After posing in the group photo, she approached me to ask if I could mail her the photo. Soft spoken, sweet, and with a gentle grandmotherly demeanor, Jane introduces herself and shares that she recently moved into the new building. "Before this, I was living in my car." she

said. Jane has lived in the area for many years and raised her children to adulthood here, and had become homeless after fleeing her abusive marriage earlier in the year. She said: "I'll never forget it. I was shopping for clothes when my phone rang. My rental application had been approved. I was holding a shirt with roses printed on it. It's my lucky shirt, now." With emotion and gratitude in her voice, Jane tells me how deeply she appreciates the building's safety and security mechanisms. She shares snippets of how her life has changed since moving in. "I feel safe from him (referring to her ex-husband.) He can't get in. I've been sleeping in a lot, I never used to. It feels good. I wanted to give back, so I started volunteering at the local church. My friends tell me that I hold my head a little higher than before." By now, she is beaming. She's proud of herself and her story, and at the same time says she doesn't want her experiences to define her. I tell her how honored I am to hear her story. We hug. She connects with our mural collaborators, women from the local art center. She's planning to attend an art class there soon.

Most recently, LHP partnered with Lamoille Community House on a project that will create an acutely needed resource, a 21-bed year round homeless shelter in Hyde Park. When complete, the Lamoille Community House will provide guests with bedrooms, shared bathrooms, laundry, a community kitchen, office space for service providers to meet with guests, and a computer lab for telehealth access. We're eager to open the doors to our community members in need and are deeply thankful to you for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board funds that made this possible.

Right now, we are in discussions with owners of two different properties that could provide 18-20 apartments each in Johnson and Hyde Park. Additionally, we are working with community partner, the Stowe Land Trust, to try to identify a location that would be appropriate for a dual goal housing and conservation project.

Please support full statutory funding for VHCB. Fully funding VHCB will help leverage even greater investment from other federal, philanthropic and private funds to address our housing affordability crisis.

Having stepped back into LHP after 20 years, I have had the joy of seeing developments I did as LHP's third executive director continue to provide needed and loved homes for Vermonters. Your investments in VHCB will continue to be your enduring legacy for many, many generations to come. On behalf of every Vermonter, like Jane, who has ever needed a home, thank you.