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Champlain Housing Trust Buys Burlington Motel to House Homeless

Investment from UVM Medical Center will lead to housing for 12 at the former Bel Aire Motel

Burlington, VT – The Champlain Housing Trust (CHT) and University of Vermont Medical Center announced a new effort today to address homelessness through an innovative partnership that deepens the connection between housing and health care.

Using funds invested by the medical center, CHT plans to purchase and convert the Bel Aire Motel on Shelburne Street in Burlington into eight rental apartments to house people who are either frequent users of health care services or who are patients but no longer need hospital care. The apartments will house twelve residents who lack a safe place to call home in order to recover.

The tenants will be supported by a caseworker from the Community Health Centers of Burlington. In addition to a capital commitment, the UVM Medical Center is pledging its support for operating costs. The same three organizations have collaborated on other successful efforts to reduce homelessness at properties in Shelburne, South Burlington and Burlington.

One such collaboration resulted in a 60% drop over one year in the cost of providing medical care to a small group of people experiencing homelessness, saving more than \$1 million. The rate of homelessness has dropped by 31% in Vermont according to the most recent annual Point-in-Time count, much of this success due to these types of partnerships and new initiatives. The reduction came on the heels of seven years of growing numbers of people without a home.

“The purchase of the Bel Aire and conversion to apartments is part of a larger successful, coordinated strategy to house people experiencing homelessness,” said Michael Monte, COO/CFO of the Housing Trust. “The UVM Medical Center’s involvement has been critical and we look forward to transforming the property in the coming months.”

“These patients deserve to be in the supportive community setting they need to improve their health, and the Bel Aire apartments will provide that,” said Dr. Stephen Leffler, chief medical officer at the UVM Medical Center. “Our mission is to work with others to improve people’s lives, and there is no better example than this collaborative approach to addressing a critical housing need. This is exactly the kind of investment we need to make if we’re going to achieve of the goal of improving the health of our communities while controlling costs.”

The property will be purchased by mid-December and renovations will be made over the winter with expected occupancy in April. The building will be converted into six studio or one-bedroom apartments, one 2-bedroom apartment and one 4-bedroom apartment. The apartments will house tenants with a range of supportive needs, ranging from case management to live independently to those who will benefit from medical respite – or patients who don’t need hospital care but who are unable to recover on the street or in tent encampments.

CHT will be submitting a permit for the changes to the property soon. The adaptation will bring the motel, currently a non-conforming use in the City’s zoning regulations, into zoning compliance. No additional buildings or construction to expand the foot print of the property is planned.