

Woolson Block Project

39 Main Street

Springfield, VT

The Woolson Block is a historic three story structure in the center of downtown Springfield. In the past few years, the property has gradually fallen into disrepair. All of the store fronts on the ground floor are now empty due to the landlord's lack of interest and a number of difficult tenants on the second and third floors.

Springfield Housing Unlimited (SHU) and the Springfield Housing Authority (SHA) were asked by Springfield on the Move (SOM), the designated downtown organization, to consider buying and renovating this property for the good of the Town of Springfield.

SHU has partnered with Housing Vermont (HV) to renovate this building. The overall vision is to have commercial space for lease on the first floor, workforce housing on the second and third floors, and a Youth in Transition (YIT) program on the garden level.

The YIT program would take "at risk" young people from 16 – 22 years of age and provide them with wrap around social services, so that they are able get their lives in order and can become productive members of the community. Furthermore, one of the agencies that partners in this program would master lease these units, so that it would be easier to remove any person who did not follow the rules of the program. Additionally, the SHA/VSHA would provide 8 project based section 8 vouchers that could be used with youth who successfully transition to a regular apartment in this building.

The SHA has a MOU with HCRS and they will be the agency responsible to provide the wrap around social services that will be needed by this population. Furthermore, Windsor County Youth Services, Easter Seals, and several other social services agencies are part of this MOU and they will be assisting us in setting up and administering this program.

The balance of the housing units would be regular tax credit apartments that we could lease to the other people in the community.

SOM and Springfield Regional Development Corporation (SRDC) will master lease the commercial space. Both organizations have experience in finding commercial tenants. They currently have inquiries from people who may wish to establish a bookstore, a coffee shop, and office space in this building.

Since this project is a key piece of the Town's vision to revitalize the Main Street area, many organizations have stepped up to become active partners in this venture and we too are excited to be part of this transformation.

Woolson Block Project

Construction and Ownership Partners:

Housing Vermont and Springfield Housing Unlimited

Youth in Transition Program Partners:

HCRS, Vermont Agency of Human Services, Windsor County Youth Services, Easter Seals, Springfield School System, Springfield Supportive Housing, and Springfield Housing Authority

Partners for the Leasing of the Commercial Space:

Springfield Regional Development Corporation and Springfield on the Move

Other Key Partners:

The Town of Springfield

Construction to begin in the late Spring of 2019. Project should be completed by the early Summer of 2020.

Youth in Transition Program

(Garden level)

Youth in Transition Program

While homelessness is a much more hidden phenomenon in rural communities, it is nevertheless a serious and very real social problem in many areas of Vermont. Many youth in our communities are couch surfing, living in places unfit for human habitation, or are in unstable and/or unhealthy situations. Being in such situations makes it much more difficult for youth to achieve their education, career and other personal goals and often leads to greater mental and emotional instability. These same youth have the potential to be the future leaders, productive citizens and active members of our local and statewide communities.

The Youth in Transition program (YIT) will be a safe and supportive transitional program that serves as a bridge toward independent living for youth between the ages of 16 and 22. The goal of the YIT program is to provide a “housing first” model in a structured environment that will help participants develop their strengths, assets, and independent living skills. In order to understand the complexity of the demands of independent living, the program will work on developing skills in several core areas: housing, employment and career development, health and well being (which includes physical and mental health), education, independent living skills, and positive forms of recreation/free time. Each participant will work with a support team, including a case manager from one of the YIT collaboration agencies and the Program’s Housing Coordinator, to develop an individualized plan of care. The program will provide opportunities for participants to examine the skills they have already mastered and to work on the skills they need to acquire and strengthen. The program will also work to inspire a sense of hope, empowerment and self-worth to the participants.

Ideally, the program will serve male and female youth between the ages of 16 and 22 who are homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or who lack safe living alternatives. To fully meet the needs of the local community, the program would preferably serve individuals, couples and pregnant and parenting youth in this age range for a period of up to 6 months, which can be extending if the participant(s) is in good standing with the program but needs more time to move on to more permanent housing.

Youth will have completed an intake and screening process of at least one month with the identified lead agency and/or partner agencies. Applicants will be screened for mental health and substance abuse issues and may be asked to undergo assessments in these areas before admission to the housing program. Youth with serious mental health & substance abuse issues who need more intensive supports and/or supervision may not be considered appropriate referrals for the program. Examples of this may include applicants with active psychosis, recent histories of violent behaviors, lethality directed at self or others, histories of fire setting and histories of sex offenses.

The housing program will consist of 4 rooms and serve as a housing “training ground” for its participants, where participants will learn how to be responsible and respectful residents for moving on to more permanent housing. A room may consist of an individual or a family unit of up to 3 people (i.e, a couple with a baby or a young adult parent with 1-2 children). The participants are expected to pay \$300 to \$400 per month in program fees. However, there will be no cost to them if they do not have any income. The program will also have a Residential Advisor living on site in either an additional room with private bath or connected apartment to provide general supervision of the premises. The Resident

Advisor will live rent-free in exchange for their role. The lead agency will have a staff person dedicated to oversight of the program, with an estimate of less than 10 hours of staff time per week needed to fulfill this duty.

The housing program will be drug, alcohol, and weapon free and will be a community that is open and supportive to all youth from diverse backgrounds. Participants will be expected to take part in weekly house meetings to support and problem solve a variety of issues that may arise in the program and to keep communication open and on-going between all residents. They will also be expected to meet at least weekly with their lead Case Manager. They will also sign and comply with house agreements and policies upon move-in and throughout their participation in the program which are designed to create a safe environment for all participants and meant to help lead to successful outcomes for moving into a more independent setting. They will understand that violations of the house agreements and policies may lead to immediate removal from the program.