



Downstreet Housing and Community Development
February 20, 2025

I am so grateful for the House Committee on Human Services' commitment to ensuring stable and supportive shelter and housing options for some of our most vulnerable Vermonters.

As you know already, there are not enough homes in Central Vermont to meet the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness here. While we work to create these homes, we have to offer shelter options where state dollars and other resources are invested in safe physical environments and the services people need to move towards more stable housing. Downstreet is committed to providing this interim step and is standing up a homeless services hotel in Barre City with space for 42 families.

We also need to create the spectrum of housing options that meet the diverse needs of all our neighbors. Over 25% of Downstreet's apartments provide homes to people who exited homelessness into our housing. While this model has worked for a lot of people, we do not have enough housing or services to support everyone. We have seen too many people lose their housing because the housing design, unavailable rent subsidies, and support services did not meet their needs either because of capacity challenges or the services are time-limited.

This is why Downstreet worked with Vermont for Recovery to develop a recovery house where moms can receive recovery supports without being separated from their kiddos. It is the reason Downstreet, in partnership with Upper Valley Services, has two fully funded projects to provide housing with the supports that allow adults with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities to live independently and to integrate into their communities. It is the reason Downstreet and Central Vermont Refugee Network have united to create housing for refugee families and asylum seekers – one site is complete and another is under construction. It is why Downstreet is working towards creating single-site permanent supportive housing in Central Vermont. It is why we partner so closely with community service providers and are working diligently to expand our Resident Services program.

Downstreet and affordable housing providers across the state need legislative support to provide the housing-based services that our residents, especially those who have experienced homelessness, need to maintain their housing stability.

More specifically, like Downstreet, the State's nonprofit housing network has committed to housing as many people experiencing homelessness as possible and needs your help to make sure people succeed when we do. Last year in Act 181 (the large housing bill), a housing-based Resident Services Program was created but not funded. VHC has secured some philanthropic dollars (\$1 million a year for three years) to support the resident service functions by helping their grantees hire 10 service coordinators. It's not enough. Many housing organizations, including Downstreet, are raising other money to supplement this activity, but charitable dollars are not a reliable long-term source.



Resident services coordination takes various forms depending on the needs of the resident. It's about resident success, and housing stabilization -- upstream prevention. We need more housing-based service dollars generally, like the ones mentioned above.

Funding this Resident Services program at \$5 million will support our network to help 2-3,000 low-income affordable housing residents across the state and connect them to the resources they need to be successful and thrive in their permanent homes – and prevent new people from becoming unhoused.

Below is the language adopted in Act 181 last year that we request the House Committee on Human Services include with a \$5 million funding recommendation to your colleagues on the House Committee on Appropriations:

Sec. XX. RESIDENT SERVICES PROGRAM

(a) The Agency of Human Services shall work in coordination with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to develop the Resident Services Program for the purpose of distributing funds to eligible affordable housing organizations to respond to timely and urgent resident needs and aid with housing retention.

(b) For purposes of this section, an "eligible affordable housing organization" is a Vermont-based nonprofit or public housing organization that makes available at least 15 percent of its affordable housing portfolio to, or a Vermont-based nonprofit that provides substantial services to, families and individuals experiencing homelessness, including those who require service support or rental assistance to secure and maintain their housing, consistent with the goal of Executive Order No. 03-16 (Publicly Funded Housing for the Homeless).

I hope that we will have the support of the Committee for this critical resource.

I would be remiss if I did not note that all the projects mentioned in this testimony were only possible because of funding from the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. Funds for affordable housing through VHCB is a critical component of ending homelessness in Vermont.

Thank you again for the important work that you do.

Sincerely,

Angie Harbin

Executive Director, Downstreet Housing and Community Development

aharbin@downstreet.org, 503-929-9591



Downstreet Housing and Community Development

<https://downstreet.org/>

Downstreet Housing and Community Development is a mission-driven, not for profit organization dedicated to equitable access to opportunities for the people of Central Vermont. For the past 38 years, we've used the power of permanently affordable housing as a platform to connect people to the resources they need to thrive and to strengthen the health and future of our local communities.

We Create Permanently Affordable Homes

Downstreet develops, owns, and operates permanently affordable multifamily rental housing – or apartments – and manufactured housing communities in Washington and Orange counties. We also are working towards a merger with Lamoille Housing Partnership, an affordable housing developer in Lamoille County and Hardwick. In anticipation of that merger, we are overseeing the operations of the organization and providing property management and support services for its Lamoille County properties. In this three-county area, Downstreet is currently operating almost 700 apartments and 85 manufactured housing lots. We also have 69 homes currently under construction in 4 different projects in Waterbury, Berlin, Montpelier, and Barre.

We Make Homeownership Possible

Our Homeownership Center serves Washington, Orange, and Lamoille Counties and stewards and grows a shared equity homeownership portfolio of 165 permanently affordable homes. Serving over 200 households each year, we provide homeownership education and support; offer foreclosure counseling; deliver a range of grants and loans for homeownership deposits, home repairs for low- and moderate-income homeowners, and rental housing repairs for private landlords; and coordinate other initiatives related to affordable housing livability.

Because of the lack of affordable homes for sale in our region, we are piloting single family home development to create more shared equity housing. We have full funding to create 4 net zero, single family homes in Montpelier, and 9 others in various stages of funding.

We Support Healthy People and Vibrant Communities

When paired with targeted support services, the ability of affordable housing to provide residents increased access to opportunity and foster healthier and more equitable communities is greatly enhanced. These services can mean the difference between a family staying stably housed or slipping into homelessness. In 25% of our multi-family rental homes, we partner with community service providers to offer **Permanent Supportive Housing**, combining rental assistance and housing subsidies to help people with disabilities who are exiting homelessness maintain stable housing. We administer the **Support & Services at Home (SASH)** model for Central Vermont, a Medicare-funded program that, each year, helps over 600 older adults and people with disabilities age in place. We are building a robust **Resident Services** program that promotes thriving housing communities and helps residents maintain housing stability, access community resources, and improve health and well-being.