

Supportive Housing for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities – A New Model



The Act 186 Pilot Planning Grants were established by the Vermont Legislature to explore innovative housing solutions for Vermonters with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD). The Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living granted Champlain Housing Trust, one of three grantees, developed a new model of supportive co-housing. In collaboration with the Developmental Disability Housing Initiative, the Howard Center and Champlain Community Services.

The location of the project is in an accessible neighborhood in downtown Burlington close to parks, medical care, educational institutions, entertainment, shopping, and public transportation. The property to be developed, "Supportive Housing at St. Paul Street", offers support to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism.

This unique model combines permanent affordable housing, individualized support services, and community inclusion. Each tenant will have their own apartment with a lease and receive support from on-site staff. The model was designed with the input of adults with I/DD, is affordable, sustainable, aligned with best practice, and adheres to state and federal regulations.

Supportive Housing at St Paul Street is a proposal to create service-supported housing for adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities in Vermont. Currently, no available housing options like this exist for adults with I/DD. These vulnerable Vermonters need safe, stable and affordable homes integrated into the community.

Project Design and Administration

The project is designed as a 10-unit housing model that balances shared resources with a homey atmosphere. It includes three key features: extensive communal space for socializing and hosting, a dedicated office and flexible staff space, and circulation designed for large wheelchairs.

The low-rise, high-density design which includes renovation of an existing building and a substantial addition, avoids a bulky appearance through thoughtful massing, and incorporating color and roofline variations to create the appearance of townhouses. While apartments for individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) share common elements with typical apartments, they also include specialized features to address mobility, sensory, and environmental needs. The project offers three types of units tailored to different levels of mobility and care requirements, ensuring appropriate accommodations for each tenant's requirements.

Property Management

Property management outlines the roles and responsibilities related to the ongoing maintenance and support for tenants, ensuring that housing remains safe, clean, and accessible. In this model, property management functions will be highly coordinated with on-site staff to ensure tenants build skills and have opportunities to learn about maintaining their apartments and common areas. A developmental service provider will refer tenants to Champlain Housing Trust and ensure all tenants secure rental subsidies to maintain long-term affordability.

Supportive Services

Supportive services are at the core of the housing model, ensuring tenants receive tailored assistance to meet their specific needs. The proposed services cover a wide range of supports, from helping tenants with activities like dressing and eating to providing guidance on managing finances and navigating public transportation. The services were designed to be person-centered, drawing on the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) provided through Vermont's Medicaid waiver. A non-profit Developmental Services provider will manage the funding and coordination of these services to align with each individual's service plan.

Community

This emphasizes the importance of both internal and external community connections. Internally, tenants and staff would develop a close-knit community where tenants actively participate in decision-making processes regarding the space and community. Externally, the housing model focuses on integrating tenants into the broader community, fostering relationships, and encouraging active participation in community life. The project aims to break down barriers between individuals with I/DD and the broader population, promoting equity and inclusivity.

Remote Support and Assistive Technology

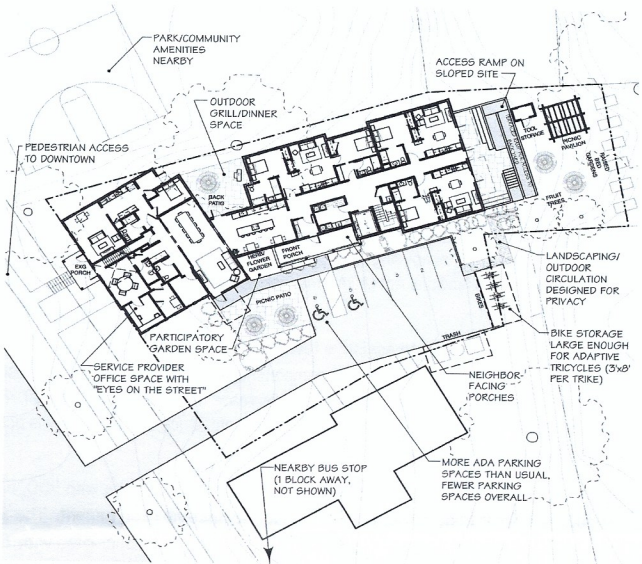
The project plans to leverage cutting-edge technology and "smart home" design to enhance the independence and quality of life for tenants. Remote support, including monitoring and off-site staff assistance, will be used to ensure the safety and independence of tenants and potentially decrease the number of on-site staff. The use of smart devices and electronic systems are proposed to enable tenants to manage daily tasks and improve their autonomy.

Financing and Affordability

If fundraising efforts are successful, the renovation of the planned site will be supported through a combination of federal, state, and local funding sources, including the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP), the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the Burlington Housing Trust Fund. These funding sources will ensure that all units will be sustainable and affordable for decades to come. However, adults with I/DD require more space than is typically possible to develop in affordable housing. This "one-size-fits-all" approach will make it difficult to assemble the funding required. People with disabilities are guaranteed equal opportunity to housing under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As new and improved housing models are developed, this inequity will continue to be a barrier. The planning team has developed ideas for overcoming these and other obstacles, which are highlighted in the recommendation section.

Community Engagement and Inclusion

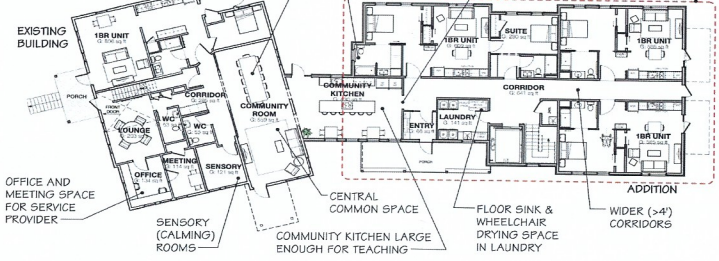
A key part of the planning process involved ensuring that the voices of individuals with I/DD were heard. Focus groups and surveys were used to engage potential tenants, their families, and caregivers in the planning process for the building and supportive services design. This engagement ensured that the housing model was reflective of the desires and needs of future residents, addressing a history of exclusion from decision-making processes that affect this population.



2ND FLOOR



1ST FLOOR



Recommendations to Promote Development and Replication

1. Provide capital funding to offset the costs of additional common space required for housing models for adults with I/DD

The St. Paul Street model is possible because it is in many ways, a traditional affordable housing development funded by conventional Federal and State housing resources. These resources are essential for construction capital. The ongoing operation costs not paid for by Medicaid are supported by rent. Though small in scale, the design prioritizes accessibility with larger interior spaces and common areas for community building - attributes consistent with the needs of adults with I/DD. However, this makes funding difficult, as it's too small for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) and its larger spaces don't fit conventional housing funding guidelines. Despite the guarantee for equal opportunity to housing under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the lack of capital funding for innovative models like St. Paul Street has been a substantial barrier.

2. Provide funding for upfront costs related to assistive technology and remote support

Assistive Technology and remote support are significant components of the St. Paul project because they facilitate greater independence among people with I/DD and potentially decrease the need for on-site staff. Funding is needed to pay for the upfront investment to purchase software, training staff, etc. Once the technology is operating, the cost can be incorporated into the tenant/resident waiver budget.

3. Vermont Aid to the Aged Blind and Disabled (AABD) provides a benefit to adults with I/DD, based on living arrangement, to supplement their Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefit. The State should create a new category of living arrangements that is aligned with the costs associated with The St. Paul Street Supportive Housing model.

The current categories for living arrangements include shared living, group homes, therapeutic care residences, etc. St. Paul Street is a unique model and to ensure that adults can live there affordably, we suggest the rate be higher than a shared living provider but lower than a Therapeutic Care Residence. The higher rate would help cover the costs of maintaining common areas, recreational activities, etc.

4. Add supports included in other jurisdictions Long Term Support Services to facilitate independence such as:

- Residential Habilitation Services, such as "Homemaker" services to help St. Paul Street tenants maintain the cleanliness and safety of their apartments.
- Individual Directed Goods and Services to help individuals purchase essential items that increase their independence or substitute for caregiver assistance
- Transportation Services to help pay for tenants' travel to work, school and community activities

5. Provide funding through the waiver for housing-related costs as in other jurisdictions (such as MA):

- An annual rate or occupancy rate could be assigned per housing site (not on the number of units) to offset the expense of some ongoing fixed costs of housing like insurance, and maintenance.
- Funding could also be used to pay for "start-up" costs associated with moving into a new home like buying furniture and other essential home goods.

6. Collect best practices and develop a continuous quality improvement process for all of the State's residential options for adults with I/DD

Adults with I/DD and their families deserve more information about what to expect from the various residential models available. The State should begin to collect best practices and outcome data from all available residential models and use the information to support providers with continuous quality improvement and on-going technical assistance.