

Letter of Interest
Agency of Human Services
06-01-2023

Organization Name: City of Burlington
Point of Contact: Sarah Russell, 802-829-6326, srussell@burlingtonvt.gov
Geographical Area: Chittenden County, Burlington District
Project Name: Congregate Emergency Shelter Expansion with Co-located Day Shelter; Critical needs related to preventing and addressing unsheltered homelessness during 2023.
Areas of Interest: #1 and #2

Background:

Chittenden County experiences a lack of emergency shelter options for people experiencing homelessness. Due to the impending sunset of the VT Economic Services Division (ESD) Motel Program, we anticipate a large number of households to exit motels and, without adequate shelter options, will be forced to live unsheltered in camps, parking garages, vehicles, and places not intended for habitation. As Vermont's most populous city and a community with a robust concentration of resources including state agencies, community health centers, public transportation, MOUD providers, and non-governmental organizations that support basic needs, Burlington expects to shoulder the bulk of this challenge within Chittenden County. Since 2020 The City has supported the creation of 90 new low-barrier shelter beds and the Community Resource Center, a day shelter located at Feeding Chittenden, which regularly serves over 100 people per day. Despite this historic level of investment for services to meet the basic needs of people experiencing homelessness, these systems cannot accommodate the expected numbers to exit the ESD Motel program. According to the most recent data available, Chittenden County expects the following impacts:

June 1, 2023

- 170 households, including 194 people

July 28, 2023

- 184 households, including 318 people consisting of the following vulnerable sub-populations:
 - 56 families, including 115 children
 - 15 people aged 65 years+
 - 20 people receiving homehealth and/or hospice services
 - 92 people with disabilities
 - 4 households fleeing domestic violence
 - 2 pregnant people

Enclosed, please find the City's proposal to respond to the urgent need for emergency overnight shelter, daytime shelter, and recommendations to respond to the critical needs of people experiencing homelessness within Chittenden County.

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Program Description:

Area of Interest #1 and #2: Congregate Emergency Shelter Expansion with Co-located Day Shelter

Recognizing the impact of the above data relating to adults exiting the ESD motel program during the next six weeks, the City proposes creation of a new temporary congregate emergency overnight shelter and daytime shelter:

Location: 108 Cherry Street, Burlington

Capacity: 50 individuals (overnight); up to 75 individuals (daytime); age 18 years and older

Justification: This location, owned by the State of Vermont provides ideal access to services, transportation and resources within downtown Burlington. The building, while currently housing some existing office uses has a significant amount of vacancy and is set-up to allow for semi- congregate emergency shelter utilizing one floor of office space (within existing offices and conference rooms). Additionally, we propose using additional space in the building for daytime shelter capacity.

Overnight shelter: The City has experience operating a low-/no-barrier congregate shelter for 48 individuals and, while the proposed shelter will operate as low-barrier, serving 50 individuals is ideal for this location. Existing office spaces within the building will accommodate from 1 to 6 individuals, (dependent on existing room sizes). Office space will also be allocated for support staff during the hours of 5pm-9am seven days per week. Every effort will be made to partner with the Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf to offer prepared meals nightly for shelter guests. We propose that staff will be provided by a contracted temporary staffing agency.

The City has engaged in discussion with Maxim Staffing to employ the staff and we have been assured they will meet staffing demands. The City will seek proposals for staffing in accordance with its Procurement Policy. In addition, the City will expand its contract with Chocolate Thunder to provide onsite security presence (one guard during hours of operation) to augment the shelter staff.

While a low-barrier model will be utilized to enable shelter access to people with mental health/behavioral challenges and those with substance use disorder, guests will be strongly encouraged to engage with case management/housing navigation services and enroll in Coordinated Entry. This site is intended to be a temporary bridge emergency shelter until other housing or non-congregate shelter options become available.

Daytime Shelter: Daytime shelter will be offered to both guests of the overnight shelter and others who require access to indoor services and resources during the hours of 9am – 5pm, seven days per week. The current Community Resource Center (CRC) operates Monday – Friday, therefore weekend operation of the 108 Cherry Daytime Shelter is necessary to provide indoor space for members of our community without housing. The CRC experiences a daily guest visit count of 80-160 per day which is not sustainable for the current size or staffing. Dependent on existing facilities, the Daytime Shelter will also serve as a cooling center within the City during stretches of heat during the summer months and could potentially allow for showers. If the 108 Cherry St. location does not currently include adequate shower facilities, further capital funding may be required.

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The City intends to utilize Maxim Staffing (or similar, in accordance with its Procurement Policy) to provide oversight and supervision for the Daytime Shelter. Our intention is to provide connection to resources, basic needs, meals/snacks (partner and funding dependent) to guests of the Daytime Shelter. Ideally, the clinical mental health and substance use (Howard Center), recovery (Turning Point of Chittenden County), and medical (CHCB, Safe Harbor Clinic and/or VT Department of Health) support services for guests visiting the Daytime Shelter and would be secured through MOUs with local providers. The City has experience administering a similar model to provide robust access to services through the creation of the Elmwood Emergency Shelter Community.

Budget: The combined estimated annualized budget for 24-hour support with the emergency daytime and overnight shelters is \$2,067,241.00. Please see attached for detailed draft budget.

Timeline: As soon as reasonably possible; staffing and location dependent.

Vulnerable Populations

Separately, the most recent data (above) indicates a large number of families (including minor children), adults with disabilities receiving homehealth and/or hospice services, seniors (60 years+), and pregnant households residing within the ESD Motel Program. Estimates, provided by AHS Field Services, indicate as many as 165 households fall within these vulnerable categories. It is the position of the City of Burlington Administration and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (local Continuum of Care) that placement of these vulnerable sub-populations in congregate shelter is damaging and unsuitable. This position is supported by several studies identifying the trauma sustained by congregate shelter stay, specifically in minor children:

- *The Impact of Homelessness on Children:*
https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/67217899/Rafferty1991AmPsychol-libre.pdf?1620274667=&response-content-disposition=attachment%3B+filename%3DThe_impact_of_homelessness_on_children.pdf&Expires=1685071009&Signature=WrfkOhn83JSu-zWot4UNITzH5T3NzUII9cao5qjChpo~k3pjl0AJHoHBU5JgBfNanDSXQ02AiYr3F58DkrcSY94gG7A-PK6OBod0CVVvzW5ZGEmnEQnPbmkZ9~cXAFwoo~E201l1sGVVwQ9dqd7z2VRjMIJW6IIT25CDAQaunFmKtEai22v8DCdtXcMWS61kg73N-jasa8UiKtSvEnpH~0K2gRST9tB-WE73iAONGVZOUVRADvtFLA4AlvQXV3Ch6--meElZsMnz-a7FomAhZamDvCGZXkY69jxrwne09ZGltfDHQbc3Crbw6IDWuCQlh4hWzVptz0WaX77SDVqcmMA__&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA
- *Child Homelessness: A Growing Crisis* <https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources/hpr-resources/child-homelessness-growing-crisis>
- *Children's Rights: A Youth Account of Congregate Placements in New York:*
https://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/CR-2023-AreYouListening_report_web.pdf

Recent local data indicates that 20 of the households currently access home-health, palliative, or hospice services within the ESD Motel Program. Congregate shelter is unable to accommodate these services. Additionally, 20 households have mobility issues or require assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) that would pose challenges to accessing congregate or daytime shelter options. The City

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perceives that exiting these vulnerable populations with complex needs from the ESD Motel program is both unacceptable and unnecessary, as Chittenden County currently has the resources to transition these families directly into appropriate permanent housing within 5-8 months.

Chittenden Coordinated Entry, managed by Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA), is a system to streamline access to housing supports and resources in our region by better identifying the housing needs facing our community. Each eligible household is enrolled by outreach workers and housing navigators from area non-governmental organizations that support homeless community members. Once enrolled, the household is referred to a housing case manager in the Coordinated Entry system and is added to a master list of homeless households, which is reviewed on a weekly basis by coordinated entry partners to be connected to appropriate housing opportunities. The City of Burlington has made concerted efforts over many years to strengthen the system, including by investing ARPA funds in FY22 to expand capacity and improve real-time data capabilities.

In an 8-month period between May and December 2022, the Coordinated Entry system has supported 166 households exiting homelessness into permanent housing, and in the first quarter of 2023, the system housed 81 households, an average of 27 households per month this year. The City expects this rate of enrollment and connection to permanent housing to continue. Furthermore, Chittenden County reports the creation of 112 new homeless dedicated units in CY2023.

It is for this justification, in addition to providing congregate and daytime shelter for adults as detailed in this proposal, the City strongly supports and has expressly advocated for the CCHA's including following for these vulnerable sub-populations:

- State of VT AHS funds continued motel stays for 165 vulnerable households, provided that;
- The household entered the program prior to May 1, 2023; and
- All households enroll in Coordinated Entry and engage with case management/housing navigation services; and
- All households eligible for the Homes Voucher Program apply; and
- Households with Homes Voucher engage in housing search; and
- The City and CCHA will intensely coordinate with Champlain Housing Trust, Burlington Housing Authority, Winooski Housing Authority, VT State Housing Authority, Cathedral Square, and private housing providers to ensure housing plans are created and implemented and that federal (or State) rental assistance programs are utilized to the highest extent possible; and
- The Chittenden County Homeless Alliances' (CCHA) Coordinated Entry System prioritizes households within this extended motel stay for appropriate housing resources; and
- The State provide funding for the congregate shelter proposal outlined in this LOI, alleviating the acute demand on the Coordinated Entry system to house the adult individuals utilizing this emergency shelter.

The CCHA steering committee has assessed discussed and developed terms of a proposal to be ratified by all 27 voting members of the CCHA on June 8th, at which time it is expected they will submit a companion LOI to DCF.