March 16, 2023

Dear Members of the Montpelier City Council:

Attached you will find the “Montpelier Homelessness Needs Assessment and Action Plan” which you contracted with Parker Advisors to complete.

Over the last five months, we have had the pleasure of working together with a broad range of City officials, local non-profit organizations, and Montpelier citizens, both housed and unhoused, to explore this issue and develop comprehensive, actionable recommendations to address homelessness in our community.

As you are aware, housing instability and homelessness has been a growing challenge in Montpelier in recent years. Rising rent and home prices, low vacancy rates, and the disruptions caused by the pandemic have increased the number of local people experiencing challenges around housing. This in turn has put added stress on first responders, law enforcement, and social service providers as the community has struggled to meet the evolving needs. We have worked hard, in concert with city and community partners, to identify some concrete steps you can take to pro-actively address this growing challenge in our community.

If, after reading the report and hearing our presentation, you have additional questions or want more information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Daniel Parker Towle

Daniel P. Towle, President
Parker Advisors, LLC
Montpelier Homelessness Needs Assessment and Action Plan

Presented to Montpelier City Council – March 22, 2023
Montpelier Homelessness Needs Assessment and Action Plan
March 2023

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Executive Summary

In recent years there has been extensive research, community debate, and government and non-profit work aimed at addressing the challenge of unhoused people in Montpelier, Washington County, and Vermont as a whole. There has been in-depth research carried out on the issue, as well as numerous articles developed from a variety of perspectives regarding existing services and needs. These documents, which we have drawn on extensively for this plan, are listed in the Appendix A, and several key ones are attached to this report in Appendix C. This needs assessment and action plan, commissioned by the Montpelier City Council, is an attempt to move beyond the previous research and ongoing discussions to identify tangible, sustainable, cost-effective approaches the City Council can take to help reduce the number of people experiencing housing instability and assist those who are currently unhoused in Montpelier.

The Scope of Services for this initiative is contained in Exhibit A of the original project proposal:

- Gain a better understanding of the existing service landscape for those experiencing homelessness in Washington County with focus on the City of Montpelier.
- Obtain input from unsheltered individuals on how best to serve their needs.
- Interview organizations and stakeholders that work with those who are homeless.
- Identify the needs and gaps in services for this population.
- Recommend approaches for addressing the identified needs and gaps, in the context of best practices, including highest leverage and cost-effective existing and new:
  • Services/approaches
  • Needed infrastructure/buildings.
- Provide estimated costs to accomplish recommendations.

The five-month process has included an intensive review of previous research, individual and group interviews and meetings, community listening sessions, evaluation of existing services, and discussions with unhoused individuals and social service providers (please see Appendix B for a comprehensive list of these stakeholder meetings). After much discussion with stakeholders at every level, the one thing virtually everyone agrees upon is that homelessness is a complex, multifactorial problem that defies easy solutions. This is evidenced by the fact that, despite being one of the wealthiest nations in the world, the United States has continuously struggled with the issue of homelessness for over four decades, and despite Vermont being consistently in the top ten of states in many health and social indicators, we continue to have a significant number of people experiencing housing instability, as well as unhoused citizens. The pandemic caused an acceleration in homelessness, despite a large influx of federal funds. Now as these American Rescue Plan Act (“ARPA”) and other federal moneys dry up, the unhoused problem deepens including dramatically reducing hotel and rental subsidies. With recent trends contributing to a growing housing shortage in the state and in Montpelier, it is reasonable to conclude the problem will continue to worsen without effective interventions.

While in Montpelier many individual services are already in place and should be built upon, preventing community members from becoming unhoused, as well as effectively meeting the needs of those already experiencing homelessness in Montpelier, will require greater focus and coordination at the local level. In developing and prioritizing interventions, we need to recognize the different populations experiencing housing instability, including those facing episodic homelessness due to a myriad of causes: rising rents, lack of affordable housing options, eviction, divorces, family conflict and domestic violence, as well as
people who have been chronically unhoused. The needs and solutions for each population can be very different, and a pro-active system must include a spectrum of interventions and services to be effective.

To achieve a more robust and integrated system for addressing the issue of homelessness in Montpelier, Parker Advisors is proposing the Montpelier City Council cause to be implemented the following three initiatives in 2023:

1. Facilitate the creation of an integrated **Housing Master Plan for Montpelier** in order to address the current fragmentation of efforts surrounding housing and homelessness, and to ensure Montpelier is positioned to take advantage of upcoming housing-related funding opportunities at the state and federal levels. Recognizing the fundamental solution to homelessness is more housing of all types, the Master Plan should be focused on: quantifying the amount and type of housing needed in the next five years to meet local needs; reducing barriers to housing creation; incentivizing infill development and the promotion of expanded use of the existing housing stock; and improving access to community services and social supports that promote housing stability in Montpelier. The logical entity to facilitate the development of the housing master plan is the Montpelier Planning and Community Development Department, incorporating elements from the 2017 Montpelier Master Plan, and including input from a wide range of stakeholders. Throughout the process, a special emphasis should be put on **prioritizing the creation of more permanent subsidized housing units in the community**. In order to help reduce the number of local people experiencing housing instability, as part of the plan it is imperative that the City Council and local government entities set policies to identify and remove barriers to current and future subsidized housing projects in Montpelier and then oversee implementation.

2. Create a **single point of entry** in Montpelier, both organizational and physical, for those who are experiencing either acute or chronic housing instability. This would involve the establishment of a centrally located **Montpelier “Housing Hub”** with drop-in center and emergency shelter capacity in the winter. By creating a focal point for Montpelier’s efforts at addressing homelessness it will help pro-actively engage people in need of housing-related assistance, facilitate greater integration among service providers, and reduce the burden on police and first responders by providing support and resources to those in crisis. The facility would be developed in stages and would meet a range of current needs including providing: a permanent home for the winter overnight shelter; a base for the City-supported Street Outreach Workers; increased access to public bathrooms and showers; and a drop-in center for those needing acute support. To implement this effort, City Council should appropriate the unspent earmarked ARPA funds (intended to assist those who are homeless and for public restrooms) in order to facilitate the first phase of this initiative, which can then be leveraged to attract additional state and grant funding.

3. **Implement a systematic public education plan** aimed at reducing stigma and increasing the knowledge of Montpelier residents about housing instability and the issues faced by the individuals who are unhoused in our community. This initiative is vital to help ensure continued support for mitigation efforts by building understanding, empathy, and knowledge in the community. This would be accomplished through the development of a systematic educational plan, initiated and overseen by the Homelessness Task Force, that will provide people in Montpelier both direct knowledge of, as well as personal experience with, the challenges of people in our community experiencing housing instability.

Detailed background information and rationale for these proposed initiatives, along with preliminary estimates of the costs, are contained in the body of this report.
Background Information

The Process

In developing this action plan and arriving at the proposed initiatives, the team from Parker Advisors began by reviewing existing research, articles, and resources related to homelessness in Montpelier, Vermont, and other parts of the US. The documents we reviewed and utilized are listed in Exhibit A. We then sought to better understand the structural and individual factors that lead to homelessness in our community from the perspective of local stakeholders at all levels, including people experiencing housing instability themselves as described below. The groups and individuals we met with are listed in Exhibit B. Finally, we conducted a comprehensive review of existing data relating to housing and homelessness to better understand the structural issues contributing to the problem and then shared and discussed our recommendations to selected key stakeholders as described below.

1) Stakeholder Outreach

The most labor-intensive part of the project was outreach to the stakeholder community. A comprehensive list of those with whom we met since the start of the project in October is included in Addendum B. The following is a summary of the different groups we consulted in Washington County, as well as the number of representatives in each group:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homeless Individuals</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing and Social Service Providers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Owners and Landlords</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Agency Representatives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Montpelier Officials</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Responders (Police/Fire/EMS)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the primary focus of our stakeholder outreach was groups and individuals within Washington County, we also met with representatives from state agencies (e.g., Office of Economic Opportunity and Agency of Human Services) and organizations (e.g., VT Coalition to End Homelessness and Balance of State Continuum of Care – now called Washington County Housing Coalition) across Vermont and the U.S. (Veterans Association National Center on Homelessness).

In addition to individual meetings, we also utilized community listening sessions, presentations, and panel discussions to elicit ideas, input and feedback including:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Method – Location</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Montpelier/Washington County Residents</td>
<td>Presentation - In Person (Kellogg Hubbard– Beth Burgess and Rick DeAngelis)</td>
<td>November 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montpelier/Washington County Residents</td>
<td>Focus Group – Zoom</td>
<td>December 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montpelier/Washington County Residents</td>
<td>Focus Group - In Person</td>
<td>December 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Community</td>
<td>Zoom</td>
<td>December 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown Business Owners</td>
<td>Focus Group - In Person</td>
<td>February 2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montpelier/Washington County Residents</td>
<td>Presentation/Panel - In Person (Kellogg Hubbard– Colby Lynch and Matthew Waylen)</td>
<td>February 2023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Socializing Recommendations

Once we had developed a draft of our major recommendations, we conducted meetings with several key stakeholders to gain additional input and feedback including Montpelier’s City Manager, Police Chief, the Homelessness Task Force in addition to the Executive Directors of Good Samaritan Haven and Another Way.

Through this socialization process we gained valuable feedback. The final step in the process was to submit a complete draft to members of the Montpelier Homelessness Task Force for additional feedback and input.

In addition to gathering ideas and information from key stakeholders in the community including those most directly impacted by housing instability and homelessness in our community, we consulted available data to better understand some of the root causes of the problem.

Empirical and Qualitative Data Regarding the Structural Causes of Housing Instability in Montpelier

The data are clear, with the median rental cost in Montpelier rapidly rising over the last several years, more and more low-income and fixed-income citizens are experiencing housing instability for structural reasons. The following data illustrate that local reality.
The baseline housing vacancy rate in the Montpelier area is currently extremely low:

As the vacancy rate has fallen, the average cost of rental units has steadily increased in recent years, with the median gross rent in Montpelier rising to $1,181 by the end of 2021:

As a result high of demand and low housing inventory, home purchase prices have also rapidly increased in recent years. According to Property Transfer Tax data processed by Vermont Housing Finance Agency (to look only at sales of arm’s length transactions), the
median value of a primary residence sold in 2000 was $97,500. By 2008 (pre-recession), the median selling price of a single-family home in the capital was $197,000. The median cost increased further to $207,000 by 2016, and by 2022 the median price for homes sold in Montpelier reached $370,000. This represents a 279% increase in median purchase price over the last 22 years.

Residents’ income and wages have not kept pace with rising housing costs. As a result, it is increasingly difficult for the average family to afford the average home in Montpelier. But even with high prices, there are still homes selling above the asking price because of the competition for scarce housing in the city. This has contributed to a housing affordability crisis for lower income people in Montpelier, with only 4.5% of four person families earning half the average income in the community being able to afford the cost of a two-bedroom apartment (an affordability gap persists in all family sizes, including for individuals, for anyone earning less than 100% of the average income in Montpelier):
At the same time, relatively few subsidized housing units are available to low-income individuals and families, and the number of units has not increased in recent years:

With the median home purchase and rental costs rapidly rising in Montpelier over the last several years, **more low-income and fixed-income citizens are going to experience housing instability unless the supply of subsidized housing increases.** In addition, more housing of all types needs to be created through the construction of new units or expanded use of existing housing stock to address the overall imbalance between supply and demand in the community.

**Root Causes of Homelessness in Our Community from the Individual Perspective**

To better understand the multi-factorial nature of the problem on a granular level, we utilized a tool called an Ishikawa/fishbone diagram to identify root causes of homelessness among individuals in our community. Originally developed as part of the LEAN process in Japan, an Ishikawa diagram is designed to help visualize the root causes of a problem or event, with the main problem or challenge being in at the center of the diagram on a horizontal axis, and primary and secondary causes of the problem branching off the main problem above and below like a skeleton of a fish. This diagram was developed over the course of several brainstorming sessions with a variety of stakeholders - while it is not exhaustive and could be further developed, it serves as a good starting point for understanding root causes of the problem in our community and how proposed interventions to assist people in our area who are facing housing insecurity may (or may not) address the root causes:
ROOT CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS IN MONTPELIER

**Causes**

- **Rising Housing Costs in Montpelier**
  - Primary Cause: The supply of rental units has not kept pace with the demand resulting in lower vacancy rates and higher rents

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Available rental units converted to higher revenue uses (ex. AirBNB)
  - Zoning and regulatory barriers to new development or infill development of existing housing stock
  - Subsidized housing units for low-income residents have remained flat
  - Inflow of people from larger cities during pandemic

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - High cost of college/graduate education
  - Difficulty of attending classes while still needing to work
  - Wage structure for service jobs

- **Primary Cause:** Lack of advanced education or limited marketable skills

- **Lack of Adequate Income Relative to Housing Costs**

- **Medical/Mental Health Issues Causing Loss of Income or Diversion of Income to Non-housing Related Uses**

- **Not Ready to Engage in Treatment or Services - Precontemplation Stage of Change**
  - Primary Causes: Person is overwhelmed by unstable circumstances forcing them to focus solely on daily survival; untreated trauma/mental health issues make seeking short-term relief of symptoms through dysfunctional coping mechanisms like substance use difficult to give up.

- **Rising Personal Challenges that Lead to Housing Instability**
  - Primary Cause: Support services are fragmented among government and non-profit agencies and aren’t accessed by all people in need of them in a timely way

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Lack of knowledge of available programs and assistance
  - Barriers to obtaining needed help in a timely way before eviction (bureaucratic delays, communication barriers, documentation challenges)
  - Wait times for appointments/services

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Lack of specific support programs/services in community

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Lack of insurance leading to high out of pocket costs
  - Lack of paid leave resulting in lost income while being treated
  - Insurance deductible and co-pays leading to high out of pocket costs
  - High cost of medication
  - Symptoms or treatment leading to disability and/or job loss
  - Lack of low-cost or no-cost medical and mental health

- **Primary Cause:** Lack of advanced education or limited marketable skills

- **Primary Cause:** Hospitalization, or chronic outpatient treatment

- **Lack of Timely, Integrated Interventions to Emergency**

- **Lack of Adequate Family or Social Support**
  - Primary Causes: No living family or relatives; no family in area; family members lack socio-economic capacity to assist; past interactions have led family members or friends to be unwilling to offer additional support secondary to substance use disorder or mental health issues

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - In the absence of a family or social safety net, acute crises such as job loss, accidents, medical or mental health emergencies, eviction, etc. can spiral and lead people to become unhoused

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Untreated trauma or mental health issues lead to difficulty finding or sustaining employment. Lack of income leads to being unhoused

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Untreated trauma or mental health issues lead to substance use disorder, making finding or sustaining employment difficult and/or diverting available income from use for housing, resulting in non-payment of rent and eviction

- **Secondary Causes:**
  - Untreated trauma or mental health issues, and/or substance use disorder, leads to interpersonal conflict resulting in legal difficulties, loss of family/social support network, or strife with landlord leading to non-renewal of lease

**Effect**

- **Eviction Related to Inadequately Treated Medical/Mental Health Issues**

- **Primary Cause:** Inadequately treated trauma or chronic mental illness leading to interpersonal conflict, organizational issues, or substance use disorder

- **Primary Cause:** Death, divorce, or family disputes leading to loss of housing or loss of income

- **Changes in Family Structure**

- **Problem:** Some people in Montpelier are unhoused
Gaps in Services and Unmet Needs

There are an impressive array of government and non-profit organizations active in our community that seek to address homelessness, or who target some aspects of the needs of people who are unhoused or are experiencing housing instability that could lead to homelessness. A quick review of Exhibit B will reveal over two dozen groups that are active in these areas. The vast majority of these efforts have discrete funding sources, processes for obtaining assistance, and disparate missions and visions. A missing piece at the local level is a **unifying source of guidance to help coordinate and integrate planning, as well as a mechanism to promote communication** and collaboration among groups and service providers.

Practically speaking this unmet need is manifested in many ways and at many levels in Montpelier. At the planning level, there is a greater need for a unified vision to guide groups such as the City Council itself, the Montpelier Housing Committee, the Montpelier Homelessness Task Force, and non-profit organizations and developers who are seeking to create new housing opportunities. At the level of service provision, there is **no functioning focal point for discussions about reducing siloed efforts and eliminating barriers to services, or a mechanism to discuss and coordinate services** to individuals who may be receiving support from multiple agencies. Finally, at the level of the person experiencing housing instability or who is unhoused, there is no single entity or place to go to obtain the information and support they need to successfully address their situation.

**Another unmet need** in the community over recent years identified by many of the people interviewed for this effort was a **stable, consistent location for people to obtain emergency assistance and shelter in the winter** when other shelter options are full or not appropriate. Over the last 5 years the emergency overflow shelter has been held in three different locations, none of which are viable going forward. This lack of a permanent location has led to a lot of wasted time, energy, and resources each year expended in trying to locate, permit, and implement service provision at different church sites. The transitory nature of the situation also makes it harder for people to locate services and hinders the development of a solid foundation of knowledge, expertise, and resources that could be built upon year-to-year without starting from scratch every fall.

Finally, another crucial gap identified in this process was the **lack of a mechanism to implement and sustain educational efforts in the community about the issues faced by the unhoused and those experiencing housing instability.** While there are currently sporadic educational efforts occurring from time-to-time, there is no coordination of these efforts or systematic plan for sustaining them. This is a vital unmet need because knowledge and understanding on the part of community members is crucial to continued local support for efforts and initiatives.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Rationale for Proposed Interventions – Why Change is Necessary

Housing instability and homelessness has been a growing challenge in Montpelier in recent years. Rising rent and home prices, low vacancy rates, and the disruptions caused by the pandemic have increased the number of local people experiencing challenges around housing. There are currently a variety of local government and non-profit committees and organizations in Montpelier and surrounding communities working on various aspects of the homelessness issue and supportive services delivered to this population. These include committees/departments such as the Montpelier’s Housing Committee, Homelessness Task Force, Department of Planning and Community Development and Police Department; and coalitions such as the Washington County Housing Action Team (WCHAT), Washington County Housing Coalition, Washington County Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care within the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness.

In addition, there are several area government and non-profit organizations involved in providing homelessness supportive services such as the Good Samaritan Haven, Another Way, Capstone Community Action, Downstreet Housing and Community Development, Washington County Mental Health Services, Pathways to Housing Vermont, Central Vermont Substance Abuse Services (CVSAS), Treatment Associates, Turning Point Center of Central Vermont, Vermont 2-1-1, People’s Health and Wellness, Washington County Economic Services District Office, Washington County HireAbility (Vocational Rehab), various congregations within the faith community, and local government entities such as the Montpelier Police and Fire/Ambulance Departments whose first responders are often on the frontlines of assisting those experiencing homelessness in our community.

Given the wide array of organizations and “silos” they represent, it is not surprising that current efforts to address homelessness can often appear fragmented at the local level, not the least to those experiencing housing instability in need of services and support. With no single identified location to obtain assistance, it is difficult for individuals to know where to get help or how to obtain it. This can result in people waiting until they are experiencing an acute crisis, and then utilizing emergency services through 911, unnecessarily involving EMT and law enforcement in the process.

The following proposed initiatives are intended to help create a more integrated and systematic approach to the issue of housing instability and homelessness in Montpelier by creating an overarching vision and roadmap for the individual groups and organizations involved, as well as establishing a local focal point for social service providers and those in need of assistance.
Initiative 1 - Develop a Housing Master Plan for Montpelier

Current efforts aimed at addressing housing and homelessness in Montpelier are fragmented, and often reactionary, due to the lack of a pro-active plan to guide and unite the various actors and initiatives. As a community, we lack a unified vision for the future that all parties can contribute to and help achieve. To use a musical analogy, we currently have many dedicated and capable groups and individuals playing their instruments and producing individual sounds - we need a shared score and a conductor in order to move from a cacophony to a symphony.

The first step in addressing this gap/unmet need is the creation of an updated Housing Master Plan for Montpelier. The logical entity to facilitate the creation of the housing master plan is the Montpelier Planning and Community Development Department. The plan should incorporate basic elements from the readopted 2017 Montpelier Master Plan (see extracts in exhibit below) and include input from a wide range of stakeholders in the community. In addition to helping guide the development of new housing initiatives, services and supports aimed at assisting those experiencing housing instability, having a current plan will help ensure Montpelier is well positioned to take advantage of upcoming housing-related funding opportunities at the state and federal levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extract From Montpelier Planning Commission Report – Housing Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date: September 20, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To ensure the availability of safe and affordable housing for all Vermonters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Housing should be encouraged to meet the needs of a diversity of social and income groups in each Vermont community, particularly those citizens of low and moderate income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New and rehabilitated housing should be safe, sanitary, located conveniently to employment and commercial centers and coordinated with the provision of necessary public facilities and utilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sites for multifamily and manufactured housing should be readily available in locations similar to those generally used for single family conventional dwellings. Multifamily housing and manufactured housing are not expressly discussed but is inferred in many places such as promoting high density development within the growth center (2c.1 on page 139) and integrating subsidized housing throughout the city with a mix of rental, owned and mixed income tenures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Accessory apartments are encouraged in the master plan in strategy 2c.5 where the city “encourages accessory dwelling units and home sharing through various means including renovation loans to homeowners who need assistance modifying their homes to better accommodate additional occupants”.

The plan should prioritize the creation of more subsidized housing units in Montpelier given the stark economic and demographic trends faced by the community. To help reduce the number of local people experiencing housing instability in the future, as part of the plan it is imperative that the City Council and local government entities identify and remove barriers to current and future subsidized housing projects in Montpelier.
During the development of this report, stakeholders and published articles have identified at least a half dozen initiatives at various stages of planning that could result in the creation of new housing in the community (including affordable/subsidized housing):

- Christ Church downtown property involving up to 30 units.
- Habitat for Humanity initiative on Northfield Street involving up to 115 units.
- Development of housing at the Country Club Road property including subsidized (243 units total based on Test Case C - Balanced Housing and Recreation)
- Isabel Circle development aimed at creating housing for the “missing middle” (56-unit “cottage cluster” development)
- Heaton Street property owned by WCMHS.
- Vermont College for Fine Arts property

There are a number of other area properties currently on the market that could be utilized to help meet short-term and transitional housing needs in Montpelier, including the Econo Lodge on Northfield Street and Hilltop Hotel in Berlin. These properties could be developed in a public-private partnership with non-profit housing agencies in order to fill unmet needs for housing identified in the master plan.

The plan should identify ways to facilitate the creation of dispersed, permanent, subsidized housing for low-income individuals and families by partnering with groups such as Downstreet Housing and Community Development, Habitat for Humanity, and housing developers creating larger projects. **Supporting these efforts by assisting the organizations involved in addressing barriers and securing necessary permits and funding is vital to appreciably increasing the supply of low-income housing in the coming years.**

Needless to say, any subsidized housing is going to need federal and state funding and that the City is going to have to be pro-active in going after such funding and will need to invest in infrastructure to support it, and perhaps even provide financial tax incentives.

The Montpelier Housing Master Plan (“Master Plan”) should also seek to:

- Quantify the amount and type of housing needed in the next five years to meet local needs.
- Identify barriers to local housing creation and ways to address them.
- Incentivize infill development and the promotion of expanded use of the existing housing stock.
- Improve access to community services and social supports that promote housing stability in Montpelier such as: affordable childcare; transportation; mental health services/counselling; smoking cessation; substance use treatment and support services; food and nutrition services; and access to educational and vocational training to expand earning potential and broaden future housing options.
- Consider regulation of short term rentals (e.g., Airbnb and Vrbo) to disincentivize and/or make more costly conversion of a property to a short term rental as well as creating a registry of short and long term rentals. A study of short-term rentals in Morrisville found that 15% of active rentals were Airbnb or Vrbo as of December 2021 and is growing at 7% per quarter. Meanwhile, in Lamoille County almost 10% of homes are used for short term stays. Over 14 communities in VT have taken steps to regulate this practice including Burlington, Killington, Greensboro, Woodstock and Chester.
• Assess the true capacity of the city's water and sewer systems, including the state of Berlin Pond, and a calculation of how many housing units can actually be added to those systems.

• Evaluate other city-related issues – including capacity and suitability - such traffic, transportation and schools.

To successfully implement the Master Plan, it must include clear goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART).

We recommend the Master Plan cover several key reforms and initiatives including:

• Use of subsidies, tax incentives, and permit and zoning reforms that facilitate the creation of low-income housing.

• Expanding permanent supportive housing in the community for people with chronic mental health conditions and disabilities by partnering with agencies such as Washington County Mental Health Services.

• Creating transitional housing with active case management services for the elderly, people coming from incarceration, hospitalization, or experiencing acute crisis by partnering with such entities as the VT Department of Mental Health, Department of Corrections, VT Division of Substance Use Program, hospitals, and public/private insurers, all of which end up incurring high costs when these groups of people are kept in institutions past the time necessary for treatment because no housing is available.

In the past the City in collaboration with public and private entities have led to changes/developments in public policy on housing related issues that taken together, have helped foster additional housing development in the City such as Downstreet’s development of Taylor Street and French Block affordable housing. As part of this recommendation, we support these policy initiatives that have included:

• Recent statutory changes to Vermont’s Planning and Development Act (Chapter 117) liberalizing rules for accessory apartments (i.e., Accessory Dwelling Units – ADUs) and the City’s full compliance with the same. In response to these changes Montpelier has amended its zoning to allow accessory units “by right”. While these changes represent ADU progress, additional steps to make it easier and less costly for homeowners to develop new ADUs.

• Montpelier’s receipt of Growth Center Designation and the benefits that come with that program. The Designation was approved in 2009 and amended in 2016 and is designed to help Montpelier continue to develop as a vital, walkable, mixed use community. The Growth Center envisions new areas for housing and commercial uses to be developed at higher densities which will help support our existing downtown.

• The establishment of the Montpelier Housing Trust Fund. This account (established in 2006 with an average annual appropriation of approximately $52,000) is used by the City to award grants to non-profit organizations to preserve, construct, or rehabilitate affordable housing.

• The contribution of annual city funds to support street outreach workers and motel vouchers to help stabilize and assist citizens experiencing acute housing instability.

In discussing the issue with the Montpelier Community and Economic Development Specialist, he estimated that $20,000 - $30,000 is needed to facilitate the development of an updated housing master plan for Montpelier.
**Initiative 2 - Create a Montpelier “Housing Hub”**

Montpelier currently lacks a focal point for the delivery of services to people in the community in need of assistance related to housing. This creates issues on several levels, making it challenging for those in need of support and services to identify what is available and how to access services, impeding the coordination of services across agencies and service providers, and creating a serious administrative and logistical challenge each winter when attempting to operationalize the emergency winter overflow shelter in Montpelier. To address this unmet need, we recommend the creation of a single point of entry in Montpelier, both organizational and physical, for those needing assistance related to housing. This would involve the establishment of a centrally located Montpelier “Housing Hub” with drop-in center, emergency shelter capacity, and onsite housing case management and street outreach services to help engage people in need of assistance, facilitate greater integration among service providers, and create a gateway to assistance for community members experiencing both acute or chronic housing instability. The facility would also allow struggling community members to receive social and emotional support by connecting with each other and supportive staff.

Due to current funding limitations, the Montpelier Housing Hub would be developed in stages and could meet a range of current needs including:

- Providing a permanent home for the winter overnight overflow shelter.
- Creating a base for the city-supported street outreach workers.
- Increasing access to public bathrooms (and showers) in the downtown area.
- Creating a drop-in center for those needing acute support and/or healthy social interactions.
- Developing a temporary shelter in inclement weather and extreme temperatures.

In subsequent stages, as funding allows, additional office space would be created for use by rotating social services agencies, housing case managers, mental and physical health practitioners, and other resources needed by people experiencing housing instability: accessing transportation, medical, dental, and mental health/counseling, domestic violence support, substance use disorder treatment, affordable housing options, as well as assistance with identifying and obtaining government and non-profit assistance appropriate to individual circumstances (ex. how to apply for Section 8 Housing, Vermont Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, etc.)

Onsite assistance that reflects needed ancillary support for issues contributing to housing instability would be provided by street outreach workers, housing case managers, and rotating social services staff. These providers would offer information including:

- How to access transportation, medical, dental, and mental health/counseling, domestic violence support, substance use disorder treatment,
- Affordable housing options,
- Assistance with identifying and obtaining government and non-profit assistance appropriate to individual circumstances (ex. how to apply for Section 8 Housing, Vermont Supplemental Nutrition Assistance),
- Where local food banks and soup kitchens are located
- Area homeless shelter programs including availability and how to seek entry.
Eventually, as funding allows the addition of a small number of transitional housing units for the hard to house could be added to or near the facility. The goal of the initiative is to build over time a one stop location that will increase access to services and provide a focal point for Montpelier’s efforts at addressing homelessness.

The following considerations have a substantial impact on the timing and implementation of this initiative:

- Need to have some aspects of the facility functional before next winter to avoid ongoing logistical and administrative challenges to operating the seasonal emergency overflow shelter.
- Importance of a central location in town for a population with transportation and mobility issues.
- Limited funding currently available through the earmarked ARPA allocation ($425,000).
- Availability of feasible buildings/sites in town (including potential community reaction to potential locations for a facility of this nature).

One of the key steps of his recommendation entails identifying a location followed by making necessary improvements to the physical infrastructure and beginning the process of permitting. In our discussions with key stakeholders, most notably the unhoused people, the outreach workers and an array of Washington Country not-for-profit organizations, state agencies and other entities providing services to the populations to be served, a recurring theme was the need for the facility to be in downtown Montpelier. With many folks unhoused not owning vehicles, walking, and being given rides by others is their primary method of transportation. Therefore, proximity to the other locations and services used by unhoused people is imperative. The facility, we were told, needs to be centrally located near regular venues such as the library, Another Way, the grocery store, and transportation nodes. Access to supplemental sources of food, such as provided downtown by the faith community and the Food Bank, is also an important consideration.

We also repeatedly heard what we refer to as the “reverse field of dreams” scenario, i.e., just because we build it doesn’t mean they will come. Based on stakeholder feedback and experience with folks who are homeless, providing spaces for the unhoused individuals must consider their psycho-social dynamics and needs. The facility must be convenient, comfortable and provide value-added services to the various subpopulations experiencing housing instability to be fully utilized. For example, the group sometimes referred to as “rough sleepers” need places they can socialize and obtain peer support, access phones, bathrooms, and showers, and avoid inclement weather, but many times are not suited or interested in more permanent congregate settings. The ideal facility would be centrally located but have the capacity to create different spaces for different groups who could then gather or separate, as needed, due to interpersonal conflicts and safety concerns, including for single women and those with a history of trauma.

The proposed housing hub will not only serve currently unhoused people and families, but also assist people experiencing housing instability at all levels including new residents moving to the community seeking housing, existing community members encountering problems with their current housing, and those experiencing challenges that are impacting their ability to stay housed (e.g., transportation problems, day care issues, family dissolution, domestic violence, medical or mental health crisis, employment issues, medical or substance use disorder treatment, etc.). This approach will provide a one-stop shopping environment and help address stigma by creating a positive, normalized service delivery environment. Finally, it will provide a central location where existing
service providers can deliver services onsite on a rotating basis, and meet regularly to discuss individual cases, new and emerging resources, and address barriers to assisting clients in need.

To “put a face” to this, a member of our community working on the homelessness issue offered the following comment about the need for such a hub among those who are unhoused:

“...how difficult it is to get out of the situation [homelessness], how hopeless and discouraged people become, how many hours they spend on the phone to get a "no" answer, and how a central connection point, with the participation of all the different agencies and counseling services, could potentially ease that transition.”

After extensive discussion with stakeholders regarding the key attributes needed in a facility of this nature, and analysis of the above considerations, two viable locations for the facility were identified for consideration by the City Council. Regardless of the ultimate location, this effort will need to be implemented in stages over several years with the short-term goal of putting in place a foundation on which a robust and sustainable program can be built over time.

Two locations determined to be feasible are 55 Barre Street, which currently houses, the Montpelier Recreation Center and it’s offices; and a separate annex attached to Another Way. Both locations are on the lower stretch of Barre Street, which already has a variety of facilities serving disadvantaged populations including:

- St. Augustine Church’s Friday soup kitchen (16 Barre Street)
- Sunrise Recovery Center, a mental health drop-in center operated by Washington County Mental Health Services (34 Barre Street)
- Two low-income apartment buildings operated by Down Street Housing and Community Development (39 Barre Street, 47 Barre Street)
- Two mental health overnight crisis beds operated by WCMHS (34 Barre Street)
- Montpelier Senior Activity Center which includes low income housing (58 Barre Street)
- Single Steps, a mental health recovery residence operated by WCMHS (62 Barre Street)
- Another Way, a drop-in center for psychiatric survivors (125 Barre Street)

This existing concentration of non-profit service providers and affordable housing in the area serving low-income and disadvantaged populations makes community opposition to placement of a facility of this nature less likely. In addition, the proximity to town and access from both Barre Street and the Siboinebi multi-use path helps address accessibility issues. No site is perfect given the many needs and limitations cited above, and both potential locations have several pros and cons discussed below.

Regarding other options, we looked at models across the country and found that as organized religion declines, churches have been repurposed for this type of use. However, none are currently on the market in Montpelier. Another suggestion was to utilize an existing state government property that may currently be underutilized in the post-pandemic climate. However, we did not receive positive feedback from Vermont’s Department of Buildings & General Services regarding state-owned properties downtown. Given the tight timeline and need to move quickly, we ruled out the possibility of new construction.
Proposed Site A – Montpelier Recreation Center

Background:
The Montpelier Recreational Center is located at 55 Barre Street, across the street from the Montpelier Senior Activity Center. The Recreational Center has two floors and a street level basement. There is public parking on Stone Cutters Way which runs behind the building on its west side. The main entrance on Barre Street is accessed by stairs to and inside the first floor. On the south side of the building the other means of egress connects to an exterior staircase. The two floors and basement are connected by interior staircases. The basement level contains multiuser toilet room, changing area and shower area, and extensive storage space. The first floor has a gymnasium with a basketball court, stage, a game room, a drinking fountain, the Montpelier Recreational Center main office, a single user toilet room and a classroom. The second floor has a single-user toilet room with shower, and several rooms including offices.

Key Accessibility/Safety Issues:

For use as the hub, two key elements need to be addressed in the short run: accessibility and safety. Issues regarding these elements include:

- **Entrance and Egress:** lack of an accessible entrance and means of egress.
- **Interior Accessible Route:** lack of an interior accessible route between floors and lack of an accessible route to the stage in the gymnasium.
- **Stairways:** lack of rail extensions and insufficient railing height (29.5”) at the central staircase, and lack of railings on one side at the main entry stairs, and on both sides at the stairs to gymnasium stage.
- **Bathroom/Showers:** lack of an accessible urinal at the multi-user bathroom in the basement, and no current access without the use of stairs.
- **Roof Integrity:** the roof is currently leaking in several places.

Regulatory Issues:
The City will need to review the current zoning status and determine if any additional changes are needed for the proposed use. Further clarification is needed regarding the issue of the necessity of a sprinkler system if the gym area is utilized for temporary overnight habitation during the winter. Opinions currently seem to vary on this given that the gym has a very high ceiling, and that non-sprinkled spaces in churches have been used in the past for the emergency winter overnight shelter. In addition, it appears as if because most of the downstairs area would not be utilized for anything other than storage during Phase One (see below), lead and asbestos mitigation efforts would not need to be addressed in the initial phase.

Implementation Plan and Timeline:

**Phase One (April – December 2023):**

- **Step 1.** Develop a cooperative use agreement with the Montpelier Recreation Center staff to establish expectations and protocols for dual use of the facility until the recreation function is
relocated to the Country Club Road location which is evolving as one of the top 2 uses of this property (along with housing). Initial discussions with rec center staff revealed an openness to this possibility, and there is precedence with the use of church spaces in recent years for the emergency winter overflow shelter in various dual use church spaces.

**Step 2.** Put out a request for proposals from contractors to do the basic modifications necessary to meet the code requirements for this initial use. These would include:

- Meeting ADA accessibility requirements for the building through the addition of a ramp or lift. This work would also benefit those using the space for recreation purposes during the co-location period.
- Repairing active leaks in the roof.
- Creating an outside entrance to the street level bathroom/shower area. This will not only improve access for unhoused individuals but will create another accessible bathroom in the downtown area for public use. This will require both the creation of a ground level door in place of an existing window, and the installation of lockable doors to control entrance to the area when the building is unoccupied and to keep people from accessing storage areas in the basement when entering the bathroom area from the outside.

Reconfiguring and renovating the bathroom/shower area to be suitable and safe for members of all genders would likely also require asbestos mitigation or containment in this area (but this would not require such mitigation beyond that area at this time), so depending on costs, this street level entrance might need to be part of Phase Two, funded from other sources.

**Cost Estimate:**

It is not possible to secure a current quote for the above modifications until the City Council indicates an intent to potentially utilize the space for this initiative, but a previous estimate to address ADA accessibility throughout the entire building by IDH Design in November 2018 (in Exhibit A) came in at $161,000. Two other studies of Rec Center have been done over the last 7 years but for both the scope was much broader than our Phase 1 plan (see Breadloaf and Reserve Plus reports in Exhibit A. While recent inflation in building and construction will undoubtedly add to this total, it is reasonable to expect Phase One could be comfortably completed within the $425,000 in ARPA funds already designated for homelessness and public bathroom efforts.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of the Montpelier Recreation Center Site:**

**Advantages:**

- The location is ideal, close to downtown with access from both Barre Street and the Siboinebi multi-use path, in an area that would not pose problems to area businesses and would likely engender minimal community opposition (the site is bordered by a property owned and operated by Downstreet Housing, and in an area with a high concentration of service providers for disadvantaged populations as previously noted).
- As a city owned building, implementation of Phase One could therefore take place quickly, with the goal of using it as the emergency overflow shelter next winter.
• Costs associated with Phase One are within the constraints of already allocated ARPA funds. GB Architecture and VT Center for Independent Living representatives have reviewed the various studies of the Rec Center and opined positively regarding the feasibility of doing Phase 1 within the ARPA budget of $425,000.

• The building has a large amount of potentially usable square footage, making the creation of discrete spaces for different populations and the addition of new services feasible with further renovation.

• Parking on Stone Cutters Way.

Disadvantages:

• Some City officials have expressed skepticism about the long-term viability of this structure calling it a “money pit.”

• The building is old, and additional modifications necessary to expand its use as a drop-in center, transitional housing apartments, or other services would be costly, especially in light of the poor insulation, outdated heating systems, and necessary lead and asbestos mitigation efforts.

• Some concerns have been raised about the potential impact on seniors utilizing the Montpelier Senior Activity Center located across the street. However, the location provides an opportunity to involve willing seniors in volunteer service activities that would generate goodwill and understanding between the two groups.

• Recreational Center staff have expressed some concern that if the building is too well updated, they would be forced to remain at the location rather than being relocated to the Country Club Road facility.

Proposed Site B – Renovating an Existing Structure on the Another Way Annex

Background:

Another Way is a private, non-profit organization that currently operates a drop-in center for psychiatric survivors located at 125 Barre Street. The property abuts Stonecutters Way and the bike path on the back side. The physical structure consists of 2 main sections:

Main operating and administrative space: This main part of the physical plant, consisting of 3 floors and a basement houses the space for programming and administrative office. There are bathrooms on the first 2 floors, a commercial kitchen for making community meals, kitchen for use of clients and shower. Clients have use of a large TV and computers located in the 2 common areas on the first floor. The second floor has music therapy facilities and fitness equipment. The administrative offices are also located on the second floor. The 3rd floor has renovated office/programming space. Egress is through 2 doors on first floor and at basement level. There is a wraparound porch on the east and north side of the 1st floor.
Annex space (Orange room and workshop): Attached to the back (south) side of the main structure is the 2nd floor annex space which is separate from the operating/administrative section with no mutual access. The lower level consists of the workshop with power saws and equipment accessed by a door and garage door. Above the workshop is the “orange room” – an open community space that has been used for meetings and programming (e.g., yoga and acupuncture). The southeast corner of this room is a greenhouse. The orange room is accessed by 1 entrance via a staircase from the outside.

In addition, between the annex space and bike path is a small amount of open space used for a large garden and sitting/outside function area with picnic table and grill.

Preliminary discussions were held with Another Way’s Executive Director about the possibility of renovating the Another Way annex space for use as the Housing Hub. He has in turn raised the topic with his Board of Directors for preliminary discussions, although no decision about this proposed idea has been reached at this time.

Key Accessibility Issues:

Use of the annex for the Hub would require a build out to meet the needs outlined above. Accessibility issues for use of this AW space include:

Entrance and Egress: the first floor has adequate means of egress with 2 entrances while the second floor lacks a second entrance.

Interior Access Route: currently interior access between the 2 floors requires exiting the first floor outside to access the outside door to the stairs. The site plan will determine the need and how to address internal movement within this facility.

Stairways: the stairway to the 2nd floor meets code for current use. Site plan will address any need for modifications.

Bathroom/Showers: while there are adequate bathrooms in the operating/admin space, the annex currently lacks both.

Structural/Regulatory Issues:

Immediate Facility Maintenance Issues: the annex currently has no major structural or maintenance issues.

Regulatory Issues: The plan to convert the annex for use as the Hub will require an assessment and modifications, as needed, by the City and state permitting and zoning authorities.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Another Way Site:

Advantages:

• Like the Rec Center the location is ideal, close to downtown with access from both Barre Street and the bike path, in an area that would not pose problems to area businesses.
• The fact that Another Way currently offers daytime services used by some segments of the homeless population including meals, showers, and programming (art, music, support groups, etc.) would make community opposition less likely.

• Oversight and support of staff at the Housing Hub could be provided by the Another Way leadership team who have years of experience working with unhoused clients.

• The property has sufficient square footage to allow for the creation of discrete spaces for different populations and the addition of new services with renovation.

• The annex is currently an underutilized space.

• Parking on Stone Cutters Way.

Disadvantages:

• The major disadvantage and threshold issue is the debate within Another Way regarding its mission. The tension is between the psychiatric survivor and homeless communities. The resolution of this dynamic might preclude Another Way being a suitable site for a homelessness services hub.

• the need for Another Way Board approval to use the annex for the Housing Hub. This is currently subject to additional discussion and approval by the Board. Another Way’s existing mission is to serve the needs of psychiatric survivors with lived mental health experience. While some unhoused people are psychiatric survivors, and the majority are experiencing mental health issues including trauma and depression, the Board would need to assess the unique needs of these two groups and determine if they are willing to re-envision their current mission to embrace this expanded role.

• A change in permitting/zoning would be needed to allow the Annex building to be used for a housing hub.

Cost Estimate:

Preliminary plans would need to be developed and an estimate obtained by a contractor to determine the cost for Phase 1 following approval by the Board for use of the space. The fact that Another Way is a non-profit social service provider largely funded by the State of Vermont (Department of Mental Health) opens the possibility of accessing current and future federal/state funding targeted mental health and substance use solutions which are a stated priority by both VT’s governor and the legislature.
**Initiative 3 - Create a Systematic Public Education Plan To Increase Awareness and Take Steps to Reduce Stigma Around Homelessness**

A systematic public information campaign is needed to increase the knowledge of Montpelier residents about housing instability and the issues faced by individuals unhoused in our community. This is vital to help **ensure continued support for mitigation efforts by building understanding, empathy, and knowledge in the community**. This could be coordinated by the Homelessness Task Force to provide people in Montpelier both direct knowledge of, as well as personal experience with, the challenges of people in our community experiencing housing instability.

The Homelessness Task Force has already engaged in some preliminary efforts in this area, including facilitating a public presentation by a person with lived homeless experience at the public library, and the publication of her story in local news outlets. In addition, the task force has facilitated volunteer opportunities at the Winter Overflow Shelter, giving many Montpelier residents the opportunity to experience firsthand the realities of the unhoused folks in our community. It is these kind of experiential opportunities that are vital to expanding awareness and building empathy in the community.

Another important part of this effort is ensuring that those with **lived experience**, both directly and as frontline service providers, play a key role in the future planning and implementation of local housing-related initiatives. This will help ensure that those participating in initiatives can draw upon real world experience and consider the diverse sets of needs and experiences that contribute to housing instability when prioritizing and developing new interventions. This will **help individual organizations and groups reframe their perspectives and better identify the impact of proposed initiatives on those receiving services, while also reducing stigma** around unhoused people by giving them an active role in program development and decision-making.

Components of this effort should include:

1. **Creation of a Homeless Peer Council (“HPC”)**

The first step in comprehensively engaging the unhoused individuals as key players in policy and decision making is establishing a “peer” council comprised of and run by individuals with current and past lived homeless experience – “unhoused peers.” We have had exploratory conversations with a few key unhoused peers who are enthusiastic about this idea. However, one important piece of feedback from these peers is that recruiting and active involvement of others is predicated on the HPC having **real authority** and not being set up as token “rubber stampers.” For example, one leader in the unhoused peer community stated that if this is set up and called an “advisory” council or group they would likely not get involved.

**Implementation Plan:**

**Phase One:**

- Identify and recruit the founding membership (“Founding HPC”)
- Discuss skill set and training with these founding members to ascertain training and mentoring they believe would facilitate them to operate effectively.
• Work with Founding HPC to create charter and by laws with a guiding principle that all actions by the HPC be predicated on minimizing bureaucracy and maximizing creativity.
• Have HPC identify and, with support as requested, reach out to establish collaborations with entities with complementary missions.

Structure of HPC

To succeed the HPC should have meaningful authority and responsibility in all issues relating to the unhoused folks in Montpelier as well as the broader community. As such the structure should reflect the following:

• **Size**: ideally 6 to 9 unhoused peers.

• **Reporting relationship**: initially the HPC could be formed by the Montpelier Homelessness Task Force (“MHTF”). One problem with this approach is that MHTF is an advisory body to City Council and therefore creates an obstacle for the HPC to garner real authority.

Potential activities of the HPC

• Provide input and advice to MHTF and Montpelier City Council.
• Conduct outreach across Washington county to:
  o gather input from marginalized communities in our region.
  o serve as “ambassadors” and role models within homeless communities.
• Work with the MHTF to conduct community outreach and awareness raising activities to work toward normalizing the community of those unhoused and the issues with which they contend.
• Serve as liaisons and spoke persons for the unhoused community in the legislature and state agencies. For example, write and tell their stories and encourage their peers to do the same.
• Be available for press/public relations.
• Create homeless peer support groups. Entities such as NAMI Vermont could be tapped to provide facilitator training.

Potential Issues to Address

**Meaningful and Purposeful Authority and Responsibility**: Establishing an HPC with true authority is a threshold issue in its successful implementation. Vermont’s leadership in the social service sectors (including homelessness, mental health, and substance use) have unfortunately demonstrated a pattern of behavior when it comes to truly involving and actively listening to those “peers” with lived experience in the subsectors they serve. While these peer communities espouse “nothing for us, without us,” all too often the state policy and decision makers talk of how vitally important peer input is, they frequently end up minimizing their roles.
The Transient Nature of Unhoused Population: A good portion of those homeless individuals in our community move in and out of the area. The HPC should be set up to accommodate this transient pattern.

Public Perception: Stigma and discrimination of the unhoused folks remains a recurring problem even in our community, in the progressive state of VT. Creation and ongoing activities of the HPC will likely face skepticism and resistance from both those in power and the public. Leaders in our community – MHTF, City Council, head of social service agencies, our legislative delegation, etc. – must be on board to consistently, actively, and vocally support the work of the HPC.

Cost Estimate: Costs to implement the HPC are: 1) opportunity cost of staff time or contractor fee for facilitation of start-up activities if outsourced (contractor fee should be under $3,000) and 2) compensation to HPC members.

2. Community Outreach

Reducing stigma, raising awareness, and normalizing the unhoused population within Montpelier will require active community outreach and public educational opportunities. One of the most important steps in this outreach effort is telling stories. Appealing to people’s emotions, and not their intellect, when it comes to shifting social norms and attitudes is far more effective.

We recommend the Montpelier Homelessness Task Force develop and coordinate a systematic program of community outreach and education. Specifically, we recommend:

Partner Collaboration: Working with community partners such as Good Samaritan Haven, Another Way, WCMHS, Capstone and Downstreet alongside the Homeless Peer Council to create a communication plan to slash stigma and elevate awareness. This communication plan could include:

- Identify target audiences.
- Develop specific plan that address the unique characteristics and needs of each target audience.
- Implement targeted plans.

Community Interaction: Create opportunities for the community to interact in positive, constructive and appropriate ways with folks who are unhoused:

- Do presentations and panel discussions with people unhoused and housed side-by-side.
- Develop opportunities for those housed to engage in volunteer activities with unhoused individuals such as the team of volunteers successfully working at the Christ Church winter overnight shelter to cultivate relationships, normalize homelessness and reduce stigma.
Cost Estimate: As with the above recommendation, cost to implement this recommendation is opportunity cost of staff time or contractor fee for facilitation of communication plan if outsourced. If outsourced, fee should be under $5,000.

3. Perceptions – Community

One of the major obstacles in overcoming homelessness stigma, is negative perceptions in the Community. Unfortunately, many jump to conclusions regarding negative behaviors on the street. They confound behaviors of individuals (e.g., aggressive panhandling, violence, and public intoxication) with generalized identities of groups (e.g., “the homeless,” criminals, and “drunkards”). They conveniently forget that at some point in their lives most people (including themselves) have committed a crime, but that does not make them criminals. They ignore the fact that many people occasionally drink too much, but do not have substance use disorder. Furthermore, they do not seem to understand that the vast number of people who are experiencing housing insecurity in our area now are probably not chronically homeless. See “Colby Lynch Report” in Exhibit A for the story of 2 folks – Colby and her husband - who are working fulltime but homeless.

Countering the narrative of the unhoused population as being dangerous is a critically important component of the Education Plan. One of the themes that surfaced in our stakeholder discussions, most notably from the downtown businesses, was negative perceptions that arose in part from negative interactions with people on the street who were perceived as being homeless. This is not only an issue for owners and their staff but also a deterrent to tourist visitors. Here is an illustrative excerpt from comments from a downtown business owner:

“The main thing I have observed is the first reaction I am getting from other business owners is fear and anger. Less than a year ago my first response was 100% empathy for the homeless population. After being in business for over a year my response is definitely not empathy. I think a lot of this comes from feeling like we are dealing with the issues that come up around homelessness without support. I hope that this will change.

One morning around 4:30 or 4:45 I was on my way to work when I saw a man swaying a little...A few minutes later, I looked outside and realized he had followed me around the corner ...and I was all alone...I was about to call the police when my coworker called me to tell me that he could see someone spying through the window... I felt very unsafe and so did my coworker. In another instance one of employees opened the backdoor to bring out the trash and ran into someone urinating on our back door...In another instance we had a clearly inebriated person in the store who fell asleep, panicked when they woke up, tried to leave out the back door with unpaid merchandise but without their own belongings. We don't think he was trying to steal, we just think he was confused and inebriated.”

Excerpts from downtown business owner who attended the Montpelier Alive Listening Session
In addition to awareness raising sessions, part of beginning to breakdown this negative perception is to assess and address the external conditions that contribute to this stigma reinforcement. Among these issues raised by business owners:

**Lighting** – owner complained of dark and blind spots downtown that could be more adequately lit. They mentioned that some seasonal lighting should exist year-round. More broadly, they speculated that both spot and systemic malfunctions in the City electrical infrastructure also contributes to the illumination problem. An example they mentioned was lighting around Rabble Rouser.

**Business Owner Information Sharing Sessions** – The business owners expressed an interest in continuing the dialogue on homelessness specifically suggesting we follow-up with them and schedule information sharing sessions as the Homelessness Action Plan is implemented.

**Bathrooms** – They reinforced the need for properly maintained and monitored public bathroom(s) downtown that are suitable and available for use by all.

**Employee Housing** – another area of concern for business owners is on the broader issue of lack of housing in general. Specifically, they mentioned the difficulties attracting and retaining employees due to high costs and lack of available housing.
Additional Recommendations

1. **Continue to Support Street Outreach:** In recent years the City of Montpelier has provided financial support for two part-time street outreach workers who are integral to the process of assisting residents experiencing housing instability. This vital funding should be continued.

2. **Continue to Support the Emergency Motel Fund:** To provide additional resources to help manage worst case scenario situations, the City has traditionally contributed to a small “motel fund” each year to help ensure nobody is left without a safe place to sleep when all other alternatives have been exhausted. This is an important part of the Montpelier safety net and should be continued.

3. **Pursue Additional Funding:** The City has currently allocated a total of $425,000 of ARPA funds for homelessness and public restrooms. As the above recommendations are implemented, we suggest the City actively pursues additional State and grant funding in order to leverage the existing resources and allow for full implementation of the action plan over time. Some potential sources of funding include:

   - **State Funds:** Office of Economic Opportunity, State Budget
   - **Federal Funds:** Congressional delegations have helped other municipalities to land such grants (e.g. Barre’s restoration of “The Aud”), but that this would require the City to be proactive in seeking such grants.) Specific funding opportunities include:
     - **Current:** American Rescue Plan Act ($1.05 billion), Covid, Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Agency, Section 8, HUD
     - **Future potential:** New legislation (Runaway & Homeless Youth & Trafficking Prevention Act – $300 million)
   - **New City Tax:** Hotel tax (e.g., 1% of hotel revenue)
   - **Foundations:** private (e.g., MacLeay Foundation, Dreamers Fund), business (e.g. National Life)
   - **Philanthropists:** individuals (e.g., Funders Together to End Homelessness - funderstogether.org)
   - **Donor Advised Funds:**
     - **VT:** VT Community Foundation
     - **National:** Fidelity Charitable
   - **Specialized Social Change Investment:** Calvert Impact Capital
   - **Special Purpose Debt:** Private placement bonds with recoverable grants

   The City should consider actively collaborating with local non-profit partners to access larger pools of funding.
4. **Develop a Vacant Property Inventory**: Develop and maintain an inventory of vacant properties/spaces including residential, commercial, retail and upper floors in old buildings. This initiative could be best done by the Housing Committee working with the right City department(s) (e.g., Planning and Community Development Department). This inventory would then be used to begin a dialog with owners to see how those spaces can be used for housing of any type.
## Exhibit A - Primary and Secondary Source Material

The following documents and articles were referenced in the development of this plan:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2017 Roadmap to End Homelessness</td>
<td><a href="https://www.google.com/search?q=2017+Roadmap+to+End+Homelessness&amp;rllz=1C1GCEA_enUS926US926&amp;oq=2017+Roadmap+to+End+Homelessness&amp;aqs=chrome.69i57j3i160j0i15&amp;sourceid=chrome&amp;ie=UTF-8">https://www.google.com/search?q=2017+Roadmap+to+End+Homelessness&amp;rllz=1C1GCEA_enUS926US926&amp;oq=2017+Roadmap+to+End+Homelessness&amp;aqs=chrome.69i57j3i160j0i15&amp;sourceid=chrome&amp;ie=UTF-8</a></td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Barre Winter Preparedness Meeting - 10 11 22</td>
<td>Document - Parker Advisors</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bridges to Housing - Accelerating Progress on Homelessness in Vermont - February 2023</td>
<td><a href="https://www.vtaffordablehousing.org/">https://www.vtaffordablehousing.org/</a></td>
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<td>California's Homekey Program Unlocking Housing Opportunities for People Experiencing Homelessness - Terner Center</td>
<td><a href="https://ternercenter.berkeley.edu/blog/homekey-locking-housing-opportunities-homelessness/#:~:text=Developed%20in%20the%20midst%20of,or%20at%20risk%20of%20homelessness">https://ternercenter.berkeley.edu/blog/homekey-locking-housing-opportunities-homelessness/#:~:text=Developed%20in%20the%20midst%20of,or%20at%20risk%20of%20homelessness</a>.</td>
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<td>City of Montpelier January 7 2020 Recreation Center Public Forum Presentation (1)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.montpelier-vt.org/1084/Recreation-Center-Renovation-Options">https://www.montpelier-vt.org/1084/Recreation-Center-Renovation-Options</a></td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>ColbyLynchReport</td>
<td>Document by Unhoused Individual (Colby Lynch)</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Community Listening Session - flyer - w Zoom link</td>
<td>Document - Parker Advisors</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Homelessness Winter Coverage &amp; Gaps Data Updated 10_5_22</td>
<td>Peter Kelman Document</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Housing in Vermont update – From Eva Dayon - Department of Mental Health</td>
<td>Document from Dept of Mental Health</td>
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<td>Housing Programs Operated by the Montpelier Housing Authority</td>
<td><a href="https://www.montpelier-vt.org/434/Housing-Authority#:~:text=The%20Authority%20operates%20a%20wide,Street%20Apartments%2C%20and%20Prospect%20Place">https://www.montpelier-vt.org/434/Housing-Authority#:~:text=The%20Authority%20operates%20a%20wide,Street%20Apartments%2C%20and%20Prospect%20Place</a>.</td>
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<td>chrome-extension://efaidnmbnpmpcjakpckpgclefindmkaj/<a href="https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/sites/default/files/Mayor%20Miro%20Weinberger%E2%80%99s%202021%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Fulfill%20the%20Promise%20of%20Housing%20as%20a%20Human%20Right%20in%20Burlington.pdf">https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/sites/default/files/Mayor%20Miro%20Weinberger%E2%80%99s%202021%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Fulfill%20the%20Promise%20of%20Housing%20as%20a%20Human%20Right%20in%20Burlington.pdf</a></td>
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<td>26</td>
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<td>Document - Parker Advisors</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>Press Release - Parker Advisors launching Listening Sessions Thursday Dec 22 - final</td>
<td>Document - Parker Advisors</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td>Short-Term Solutions to Vermont's Housing and Homelessness Crises - White Paper - Will Eberle</td>
<td>Will Eberle Document</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Stakeholder Summary - The Unhoused Feedback</td>
<td>Document - Parker Advisors</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>Unwittingly Unhoused - Introduction – Kellogg Hubbard Library February 27, 2023</td>
<td>Carolyn Ridpath Document</td>
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<td>Update on Homelessness Needs Assessment and Action Plan 12 16 22 v1</td>
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<td>Wash Cty CoC Document</td>
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### Exhibit B - Stakeholder Meetings

Over the course of the project, meetings were held with the following individuals and groups:

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<tr>
<th>Entity</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Category/Title</th>
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<td>Sarah Truckle</td>
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<td>Another Way</td>
<td>Ken Russell</td>
<td>Peer Entities</td>
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<td>Another Way</td>
<td>Ericka Reil</td>
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<td>Kelly Murphy</td>
<td>Asst. City Mgr.</td>
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<td>Nicolas Strellicastro</td>
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<td>Leigh McCaffery</td>
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<td>Barre Interfaith Group</td>
<td>Earl Kooperkamp</td>
<td>Faith Community</td>
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<td>Michelle Savary</td>
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<td>Ramsey Papp</td>
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<td>City of Northampton, Dept. of Community Care</td>
<td>Sean Donovan</td>
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<td>Quasi Gov’t Entity</td>
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<td>Downstreet</td>
<td>Angie Hardin</td>
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<td>Josh Jerome</td>
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<td>Ethiopian Community Development Council's Multicultural Community Center</td>
<td>Joe Wiah</td>
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<td>Kathi Partlow</td>
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<td>Suzy Laidlaw</td>
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<td>Housing Expert</td>
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<td>MadFreedom</td>
<td>Wilda White</td>
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<td>Montpelier Alive</td>
<td>Katie Trautz</td>
<td>Downtown Businesses</td>
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<td>Conor Casey</td>
<td>Municipalities / VT</td>
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<td>Diane Mathews</td>
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<td>Sandra Jenkins</td>
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<td>Pathways Vermont</td>
<td>Hilary Melton</td>
<td>HL Service Provider</td>
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<td>Rights and Democracy</td>
<td>Tom Proctor</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
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<td>City of Montpelier</td>
<td>Arne McMullen</td>
<td>Recreation Director</td>
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<td>The Haven (White River Junction)</td>
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<td>Turning Point</td>
<td>Bob Purvis</td>
<td>Substance Use</td>
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<td>Unhoused Individual</td>
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<td>Jose Aguayo</td>
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<td>White &amp; Burke</td>
<td>David White</td>
<td>Real Estate Consultant</td>
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Exhibit C – Key Reference Documents

The following key documents will be included in the hard copy of this report. Each can be found electronically via the URL in Exhibit A.

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<td>2017 Roadmap to End Homelessness</td>
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<td>City of Montpelier Master Plan --- Required-Report-for-2017-Readopted-Plan-revd-09-22-17 (Table of Contents)</td>
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<td>Master-Plan-2017 - Excerpt: 4.4 Goals for Montpelier’s Built Environment - Goal C - Housing and Buildings</td>
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<td>Master-Plan-2017-Adopted-December-20-2017 - City of Montpelier</td>
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<td>Montpelier-Recreational-Center-American Disabilities Act Transition Plan-Nov 2018</td>
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