



February 1, 2016

Dear Ms. Streeter,

I appreciate the CPA Committee's continued consideration of our request for funding made by Amherst Community Connections (ACC) to extend and supplement our existing services to Amherst's homeless community. Please find in this letter answers to the questions you posed in your January 27, 2016 email to me, as well as responses/reasons given in opposition to ACC's proposal by the Housing and Sheltering Committee. I would propose to you that ACC is actually **uniquely positioned, suited and utterly capable** to carry out the activities required to achieve the goals of our proposal.

As you read the following, please note that our track record spans over six years of constant expansion in our staffing and in our successful service delivery to the community of people who find themselves homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The following accounts of our recent work and pursuits of funding will allay any questions of whether ACC has the "administrative infrastructure and experience" in implementing the needed projects.

RESPONSES TO YOUR JANUARY 27 QUESTIONS

Why doesn't ACC apply to the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund/Mass Rental Voucher Program?

Since 2009, ACC has been an active, contributing member of Western Mass Network to End Homelessness, a network of more than 40 agencies in Western Mass working to end homelessness. Despite our participation in this broad network focused on homelessness, we were not aware of the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund/Mass Rental Voucher Program, a new fund established in 2013 by the Department of Housing and Community Development. I appreciate that you brought it to my attention. Now that we know of it, we will explore opportunities to obtain support for our services to the homeless before the next grant cycle begins. Based on our reading of the DHCD's Notice of Funding Availability and the eligibility spelled out in it, it appears that public housing authorities such as the Amherst Housing Authority might be in a better position to apply.

Although always hopeful, I am not certain that ACC will be eligible to receive funding support under this program, because it appears that DHCD will *only* accept applications from applicants who have experience in housing construction, building, renovation, and/or MRVP voucher management and dispensing. ACC does not have experience in those areas. Thus, we are not sure if we want to apply that we would eligible to apply.

The program does, however, detail the need for Support Services, stating:

Support services for individuals or families living in supportive housing units must be based on an individualized and detailed assessment of the individual or family's strengths and areas of needed support and improvement (p. 3 of HPSTF application).

ACC excels in this area of support services and case management as you read further.

Following are funding requests ACC pursued in 2015 to various entities regionally and nationally to provide permanent supportive housing for the people ACC serves:

Supportive Housing Grants

- 1.** Last winter, ACC applied for funds for case management with the at-risk or homeless population. Based on our application and an excellent site visit, we received a one-year grant. Last spring, we applied for funds to the Corporation for Supportive Housing for people who have been incarcerated and who experience chronic homelessness. Despite a strong application in this national competition, ACC did not receive funding, but the funder asked us to re-apply in the next round to be re-considered. We will do that. Last fall, we also submitted a funding application to the Tri-County Continuum of Care (CoC) to establish a housing stabilization program. Although the application was not successful--- due to the merits it possessed, we were offered the option to apply directly to the National CoC.
- 2.** In February 2015, ACC met with Tom Kegelman, executive director of Home City Housing, to discuss the possibility that his organization might build housing for the chronically homeless, with ACC to provide support services at no charge to the agency. Similar efforts were made with the officials from ServiceNet, Eliot Homeless Services, and the Mental Health Association in Springfield.
- 3.** In September 2015, ACC met with Denise LeDuc, the executive director of Amherst Housing Authority, to discuss the possibility that ACC provides support service while AHA sets aside two units of housing for the chronically homeless.

Unfortunately, the overall conclusion from the various meetings and discussions about those respective agencies establishing a housing stabilization program in Amherst area was that due to their lack of funding or capacity issues, no one has expressed interest to do so to serve this particular population. At the end, ACC decided to file an application for CPA fund for the housing stabilization program. The consideration, as of this moment, needs to be one seen in terms of the homeless population ACC serves; these residents of our community that remain **without housing**.

4. Additionally, we have applied for funds through the CDBG process and were selected to be one of the six considered for five applications that were to be approved. At this point, the recommendation of that committee is that our application was not chosen to be among the five.

Does ACC have the administrative capacity or experience to operate a housing stabilization program for the chronically homeless?

Yes. ACC has a proven track record of serving the homeless and other people with needs in our community. ACC began its operation serving the at-risk and homeless in 2009. We provide service seven days a week at 50 hours or more per week, in our downtown office, the public libraries and Amherst's seasonal winter shelter.

ACC has a strong administrative capacity to operate the various programs it provides which I detail below:

a.) Drop-in service at public libraries and the Hampshire County Jail and House of Correction

ACC has drop-in hours two afternoons a week at the Jones Library to serve anyone in need. The collaboration with the Jones Library began in 2011. We serve 10-15 people a week in the Library. In 2015, ACC established drop-in hours at the Forbes Library, as well, extending the reach of our services geographically.

Between these two libraries, patrons made nearly 1,000 visits to our drop-in sites a year. The service helps those in need to:

- pay their rent/utility arrears, get to appointments with bus passes we provide, buy groceries/pampers with funds from our People's fund, and to access other emergency services that may be able to provide funds to meet their urgent needs.

Since 2012, ACC has provided:

- monthly service and print materials to inmates at the Hampshire County Jail and House of Correction on a monthly basis, helping prisoners who have ties to the Amherst area to prepare for life in our community after their release.
- After release, ACC provides support and services to continue to assist them in the resettling process. The reduction in recidivism is the outcome of the service.

b.) ACC's One-Stop Resource Center

The lack of consistent, comprehensive, and convenient service for the homeless has made shelter stay a prolonged experience for many. To address their needs to exit from shelters quickly and to

get back on their feet to find employment and housing, ACC established a One-Stop Resource Center pilot project in early November, 2015. So far, the daily attendance averages 10-15 people during the Center's morning operation. The Center supplies support staff, laptop computers, printer, copier, phone, and food for all, at no cost.

- Each person receives an individual one-on-one service with trained caseworkers on housing, employment and other referral service participants need.
- On average, the One-Stop Resource Center has four caseworkers onsite to field questions, and to accompany participants to their meetings with the Amherst Housing Authority or to go with them to pay for and to provide ID verification to pick up prescription medications.
- From time to time, caseworkers also provide childcare to mothers who come in for service with their young children. The child-friendly playroom with childcare provided by our caseworkers allows the parent(s) to work on the crises that bring them to ACC's Center.

c.) Research and Development

ACC currently has 6 staff and 12 interns to serve the day to day needs, conduct research and to write grant proposals. Two of the staff are paid as part time workers or on contract for services. The four other staff vary in their time commitments between 6 to 50 hours per week. We submitted six proposals last year with \$600,000 in funding requests. We publish op-ed pieces in the local newspaper, based on our Housing First research. Nearly 50% of our 2,500 donors have made additional financial contributions for our Annual Fund drive or our People's Fund drive. Over 25% of the 33 local businesses that participated in this year's Amherst Downtown Donations Days made donations to ACC.

d.) College Interns and Community Volunteers Worksite

ACC works with graduate and undergraduate interns from Smith College, Hampshire College and UMass. The twelve interns on the roster this season have begun passionately to accomplish goals in challenging and rewarding projects such as case management and advocacy, law library research, and community relations. Along with our dedicated community volunteers from diverse backgrounds such as the performing arts, business, law, and human services, the two streams of workers have bolstered our capacity greatly. The recent addition of one halftime worker from the Mature Workers Program under the management of Franklin and Hampshire County Career Center helps to create a very diverse and rich working environment that benefits the program participants we serve. Our interns keep strictly to an agreed upon schedule, providing reliability and consistency in delivery of services for the participants.

All told, we are receiving in-kind contributions of four full-time workers: the equivalent of the service hours from interns and community volunteers. This translates to approximately \$160,000 of in-kind contribution in wages and benefits.

This is a line item that does not show up on our annual tax filing or financial report. Thanks to the contribution of interns and community volunteers, ACC is able to grow its program and its capacity without growing its budget.

As a result, our sound financial management has allowed us to put our precious funds directly to our participants to help pay for their move-in costs, utilities, medications, transportation and things that will help them stabilize. Every year, we help hundreds of our participants who are members of this community to achieve their goals of getting into housing, obtaining employment, applying for food stamp/free cell phone, getting into drug treatment program, and more.

The Rev. Alison Wohler, the minister of Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst, commented one day recently to one of ACC' staff members, "The line of people waiting outside for help after Sunday church service seems to have disappeared," she observed that, "This could be due to the service your agency provides during the week working with people to get them out of crisis."

Does ACC have the experience to operate the Housing Stabilization Program?

Yes. ACC operated a transitional housing program--a pilot project, in Amherst for two years spanning 2013 and 2014. Working with volunteers and interns plus one paid-staff, ACC managed a duplex on a bus route in East Amherst. During those two years, the Program housed over 30 homeless residents of which, out of those 26 who graduated, 22 had housing and income at the time they graduated. This success rate was about 90%, clearly demonstrating the power of a stable housing environment. It is also evidence of ACC's case management capability, including coordination of diverse services. Among the graduates were a public school teacher, a lawyer, an award-winning chef, an auto mechanic, and others, who have successfully integrated into the community.

What we learned:

ACC learned from this pilot project that support service is **necessary and crucial** to successfully re-house our homeless residents. Partners in the community who did the heavy lifting:

- Provided mental health support, encouraging attendance in substance abuse treatment programs, and a welcoming and open community, all helped to achieve the success.

The success of this work:

- Helped participants form enduring and life changing habits to overcome substance abuse, criminal mentality, and the desire to become a contributing member of the community.
- Shows that it takes hard work on the part of the program participants **and** staff.
- Demonstrated that the availability of housing to allow all this hard work to take place is the central piece of the equation. With **stable housing** and **wrap-around support**, everything is possible.

ACC is working tirelessly to find support from funding bodies and programs to give the homeless population the fighting chance for the success that cannot be achieved without stable housing. The recommendation by CPA Committee for our request for CPA funding for the Housing Stabilization Project before Town Meeting will be in the right direction to end homelessness in our Town.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hwei-Ling Greeney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'H'.

Hwei-Ling Greeney
Executive director