

**Community Preservation Act Committee - Proposal Request Form for FY 2019**

**Project Title: Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program**

**CPA funding category:** Check all that apply

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Community Housing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Open Space
<input type="checkbox"/>	Historic Preservation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Recreation

**Amount of CPA Funds Requested:** \$112,815

**Submitting Entity:** Amherst Community Connections

**Contact Person:** Hwei-Ling Greeney

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**Please complete this form in its entirety and include the following in your proposal.**

**Overview of Proposal:** Please describe your project and your feasibility analysis

Amherst Community Connections (ACC) requests \$112,815 in CPA funds to provide three housing vouchers to chronically homeless Amherst residents for three years from Fall 2018-Fall 2021. This request comes as a result of the tremendous success of CPA's funding for ACC's Housing Stabilization Program in FY 2017. The Housing Stabilization Program is designed for Amherst residents who have been chronically homeless for at least a year, and have serious disabling conditions such that supportive housing services are required in order for them to remain housed. The goal of the Program is for self-sufficiency.

To differentiate from CPA's funding for ACC's Housing Stabilization Program in FY 2017, which will be called the Phase (I) Housing Stabilization Program, this proposal submitted to CPA for FY 2019 will be termed the **Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program**.

ACC's current Housing Stabilization Program has been extremely successful:

- Since Nov. 2016, three (3) of the original six (6) participants have graduated from the Program with housing or housing vouchers.
  - One of the remaining three participants is working part-time locally and is contributing substantially toward his rent. He has applied to six subsidized housing programs and is on the emergency housing priority waitlist. He is expected to receive a state housing voucher within the next six months.
  - Another participant completed her Associate Degree this spring and is a full-time Francis Perkins Program scholar at Mount Holyoke College, with a full scholarship. She expects to graduate within two years.
  - Another participant—who is 70 years old and has been homeless for over 30 years, is planning to move into secured housing in January 2018.
- Currently, all three of ACC's Housing Stabilization housing vouchers are fully utilized. There is a waitlist of six (6) Amherst residents who are eligible to participate in the Housing Stabilization Program.
  - These participants – though they are on the waitlist – are currently regularly engaged with ACC case workers to address personal challenges such as substance abuse, mental health or various medical complications. They have been receiving individualized service from ACC ranging from two to five years.
  - They have been on the streets of Amherst or staying in Craig's Place Shelter for periods ranging from two to five years.
  - We understand that one of the participants on the waitlist has used the ambulance service for transport to the Emergency Room at Cooley Dickinson Hospital more than 40 times in the past six months. Another participant has attempted to commit suicide twice in the past four years and has been hospitalized multiple times.
- Without even considering the overall societal costs, the medical costs alone associated with one of these four participants could reach as high as \$100,000 per year.

- If this Proposal is funded by CPA, the costs of housing per year for the three people on the waitlist would be \$37,605 or less. Compared to the much greater medical costs, participation in the Housing Stabilization Program would be to be a very cost-effective way to the problem of chronic homelessness in the Town of Amherst.

Thanks to CPA's FY 2017 funding to ACC, in a little over a year ACC has successfully helped six chronically homeless Amherst residents get off the streets and live in safe housing. Based on the most recent annual Point-in-Time count, it was estimated that there were 18 chronically homeless Amherst residents. In ACC's Phase (I) Housing Stabilization Program, one third (1/3) of that estimated number of homeless Amherst residents have exited from chronic homelessness.

ACC attributes this very positive result to the network of systematic support it develops for participants, and its ability to successfully engage participants with various programming and assistance strategies.

Participants' Support System: This network of support includes our collaboration with Amherst Housing Authority, Eliot Homeless Services, Craig's Place Shelter, ServiceNet, Clean Slate Drug Treatment, Amherst Survival Center, and Not Bread Alone. This network integrates and addresses food and shelter needs, while also addressing participants' needs for mental health/substance treatments. Thus, subsequently they are able to focus their attention on other higher order needs, such as employment, higher education, vocational training, and others.

ACC's Engagement Strategies with Program Participants:

- **Pre-Housing Stabilization Engagement:** Those who are on the Housing Stabilization waitlist are incentivized to participate in ACC's Frequent Flyers Program. The Program motivates them to work on any goals they choose with ACC staff. This might include attending an AA or NA meeting, setting up an appointment with their therapists, or looking for work. For every visit paid, they earn 10 points; for every 50 points accumulated, they can cash in either for 5 bus passes or a \$5 gift card for food and goods from Antonio's Pizza, Bueno Y Sano, Dollar Tree Store, Stop & Shop, Big Y, and other businesses.
- **Weekly Incubator Meeting/Empowerment Workshop:** Every week, a presenter from the community runs a workshop designed to increase participants' life skills and capacity. More than 100 weekly meetings have taken place. Workshop topics have ranged from how to apply for public housing for individuals with challenging pasts, to how to utilize humor to get through life's difficult moments. In addition, the Weekly Incubator Meetings and workshops serve as a support network and space for participants to share their daily joys and struggles with one another. Everyone is welcome to attend, including those who are on the program waitlist. Sandwiches and drinks are provided after the meeting as an additional incentive to draw people in. The weekly attendance for the Incubator Meeting/Empowerment Workshop averages 15 people or more. For more information, please go to ACC's website <http://www.amherstcommunityconnections.net/>
- **Post-Housing Stabilization Engagement:** Once participants receive the housing voucher and enter into the **Housing Stabilization Program**, they are required to meet with their caseworkers regularly at intervals of once a week or four times a month, at their convenience. A monthly Self-Sufficiency Checklist-Evaluation is completed by both participants and his/her caseworker on their progress. Please see **Attachment 1.) Self-Sufficiency Checklist-Evaluation.**

A biannual evaluation on is conducted on April 1 and October 1. Program participants need to have an average score of 3 out of 5 in order to continue to stay in the Housing Program. So far, the monthly and the October biannual evaluations have been completed for all three participants. They all passed the October, 2017 evaluation and are on track in the Program.

ACC staff regularly evaluates the outcomes of the housing stabilization through a variety of ways. Quantitative outcome objectives include:

- Tenants who enter without any income will have income from employment or public assistance for which they are eligible within six months of enrollment, as feasible.
- Within 30 days of engaging in services, 100% of participants will develop an individualized housing and services plan, which establishes goals, objectives and action steps.
- Support service staff will conduct outreach and engagement with 100% of the program participants.

**Describe how your request meets the CPA criteria:**

**1. Description of funding needed, including:**

- **Documentation of cost estimates, budget**

ACC estimates that the housing-related cost of the Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program (or Phase II Program) with three housing vouchers will be \$37,605 per year and \$112,815 for three years---the duration of the grant funding. ACC will

provide support service and case management and will absorb any associated cost. See **Attachment 2.) Budget for Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program for 3 vouchers, FY 2019 - FY 2021.**

**a. Other sources of funding, e.g., grants, self-funding, fund-raising**

ACC will absorb the cost of support service through its ongoing fundraising efforts.

**b. Timeline on how CPA funds would be spent, including over multiple years**

ACC expects to begin the Program in the summer of 2018 and to complete it by the summer of 2021. See **Attachment 3.) Summary of CPA funds spent Timeline.**

**2. Urgency of the Project, if any:**

As previously mentioned, the Annual Point in Time (PIT) Count conducted in January 2015 reported that there are 18 chronically homeless individuals in Amherst. The 2013 Amherst Housing Production Plan intended to prioritize “stable and affordable” housing for homeless individuals through Housing First/rapid rehousing efforts, with the level of need being for about 15 housing units. As we go into 2018, the housing needs remain unmet and Amherst’s chronically homeless individuals and the community continues to suffer.

Chronically homeless individuals often find themselves going through the “revolving door” of emergency responses, such as homeless shelter, police calls, psych units, hospitals, ambulance, and jails, all of which can cost towns and taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars each year. For example, the Springfield 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness refers to Baystate Hospital’s study that depicts how ten chronically homeless individuals who frequently interacted with the emergency response system accumulated hospital costs averaging \$100,000 per person each year.<sup>1</sup> It would be much more cost-effective to direct just some of those funds to permanent housing options, coupled with supportive services.

Chronic homelessness is also fatal. In 2015, at least 3 people who had histories of chronic homelessness died due to exposure in Amherst. In winter of 2017, one of those who was surveyed in 2015 as being chronically homeless died just before Thanksgiving, due to inclement weather exposure. As New England’s cold winter arrives this year, some chronically homeless individuals, due to social anxiety or as the result of being trespassed out of shelter, will be forced to sleep outdoors instead of in the Amherst shelter. For those who utilize the shelter, they may need to vie for space given the limited beds and the consistently high number of shelter guests. In past shelter seasons, such as the November 2013 - May 2014 season, the Craig’s Place Shelter statistics reports that on average, 3 people were turned away from the shelter per night.<sup>2</sup>

Individuals without safe, stable, and affordable housing have a greater likelihood of drawing upon municipal resources that do not help them stabilize in the long run. In 2012, the Amherst Police Department reported that 775 calls were made regarding homeless individuals, which amounts to approximately \$58,000. These temporary interventions are expensive, yet they do not help individuals leave homelessness behind. Sarah La Court of the Business Improvement District also pointed to the presence of homeless individuals in downtown. These individuals spend time there, because they have no place to call home. These signs underscore the need for our community to secure stable housing for chronically homeless individuals as soon as possible.

If funded, ACC’s Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program will further reduce the number of chronically homeless individuals in Amherst from the current double digits to a single digit number.

**3. Estimated timeline from receipt of funds to Project completion**

ACC expects to begin the Project in August 2018 and complete it within 36 months as outlined in the Attachment 3.) Summary of CPA funds spent Timeline.

**4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources**

Not applicable.

**5. Population(s) to be served by the Project.**

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/homelessness/All\\_Roads\\_Lead\\_Home.pdf](https://www.springfield-ma.gov/housing/fileadmin/housing/homelessness/All_Roads_Lead_Home.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30355>

ACC will serve chronically homeless individuals with the Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program. Chronically homeless individuals often have special needs, which include mental illness, often times co-occurring with substance abuse issues, physical disabilities, and developmental disabilities. Their average income ranges from no income to 20% Area Median Income or \$11,275.

Eligible applicants must fulfill the following criteria to participate in the Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program:

- A. Meeting HUD chronic homeless definition, and
- B. Being an Amherst resident, and
- C. Meeting vulnerability assessments criteria (see below for more details)

Criteria	Description	Documentation
1. Federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s definition of chronic homelessness.	Must have been homeless continuously for a year or have had 4 homeless episodes in the past 3 years AND have at least one disabling condition. Disabling conditions may include diagnosable substance abuse disorder, serious mental illness, chronic physical illness, etc.	Written verification from social service provider on length of homelessness.
2. Amherst resident	Must be an Amherst resident.	Written verification from service provider of individuals' homeless history.
3. Two tools for assessment: a.) Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT) b.) Three County Continuum of Care (CoC)-Coordinated Entry Client Assessment	Two evidence-formed and field-tested standard assessment tools, a.) VI-SPDAT, and b.) Three County Continuum of Care-Coordinated Entry Client Assessment, gauge the risk level of homeless individuals and recommends the most appropriate housing and service interventions.	ACC will utilize both tools to assess the vulnerabilities of individuals. Using the industry standards, those who tested with 10 points or more in VI-SPDAT assessment, or 20 points or higher in the CoC assessment will be eligible to participate in the Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program.

**6. How will the CPA investment in your property, facility, or project be maintained over time?**

ACC's mission is to help people achieve housing stability. To maintain its ongoing operation, ACC fundraises and writes grants. Since its establishment in 2009, the agency has been able to rely primarily on private donations and grant funding to meet its operational costs. The fact that ACC is able to successfully provide ongoing and consistent high-quality support service to its participants in the current Phase (I) Housing Stabilization Program, even after the social service funding was removed from the original contract due to state CPA regulation, is a testimony to ACC's commitment to its participants and its ability to rally the community's financial support. If the Proposal is funded, ACC will increase its capacity to do additional fundraising and grant-seeking.

**7. Which relevant Town committees and/or commissions are you working with?**

ACC will make present this Proposal to the members of the Amherst Housing Authority Commission, and to members of the Amherst Affordable Housing Trust in the coming months.

**8. Other information regarding the Project deemed necessary for CPAC**

Amherst Community Connections has successfully housed chronically homeless individuals and provided outreach services at its main office, mobile sites, on-site shelter services, and direct networking with the chronically homeless population of Amherst for over seven years. ACC staff supports chronically homeless individuals in the full range of the housing process, from identifying suitable housing options and their eligibility criteria and completing numerous housing applications, to practicing for housing interviews, gathering sufficient move-in funds, and maintaining housing tenure. Despite ACC's best efforts, and those of other agencies and departments serving the needs of Amherst's homeless, these individuals' needs for low barrier housing is far greater than the supply. ACC looks forward to working with CPA to administer the Phase (II) Housing Stabilization Program to give participants the kind of new lease on life that CPA's support has made possible for participants in Phase (I) of the program. For the array of support service ACC provides to its Housing Stabilization participants, please see **Attachment 4.) Menu of Services & Referrals Available to Program participants.**