

Amherst Housing Authority

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December 12, 2018

Dear Members of the Community Preservation Act Committee;

The Amherst Housing Authority Board of Commissioners enthusiastically supports the Valley CDC's application to the Community Preservation Act Committee for funding to build an enhanced SRO in Amherst. The Valley CDC has an excellent track record as a developer of affordable family housing and of housing for homeless individuals.

In 2008, the Amherst Housing Authority worked with the Valley CDC to build eleven units of affordable housing on Main Street on property that the AHA owned. The apartments are an attractive addition to the neighborhood, designed to meet the needs of the tenants living in them, and well maintained. In Northampton, the three apartment buildings for homeless individuals that the Valley CDC bought and rehabilitated are a testament to their mission to create high quality housing for low income people. We are confident that the Valley CDC will create an SRO for homeless individuals in Amherst that meets these same high standards.

It is easy to equate homeless individuals with the familiar panhandlers on sidewalks and median strips on Route 9. While the people who panhandle are very likely to be homeless, there are many more homeless people who remain invisible to most of us. They live temporarily with family, friends, or acquaintances, never able to settle in one place, or they may camp in the woods during the warm months and stay at the shelter on winter nights. While homeless, they may maintain jobs, religious affiliations, or family commitments. They may have a long history of homelessness, they may have a psychiatric illness, or they may have a recent life event such as a medical emergency, a job loss, or a divorce that caused them to lose their homes. They are a diverse group of people who need a place to live.

A review of the Amherst Housing Authority's Centralized Section 8 waiting list, shows that in the last five years, 54 local applicants identify themselves as being homeless individuals. In addition the Alternative Housing Voucher Program waiting list has 5 local applicants who identify themselves as being homeless.

Once applicants are selected and given a voucher for a one bedroom or studio apartment, it is almost impossible for them to find a unit in Amherst. Essentially, the one bedroom Housing Vouchers pay approximately \$150-\$200 a month less than the average monthly rent for a one bedroom apartment in Amherst. For example, an AHA applicant lived with his girlfriend until they recently broke up and he had to move out of the apartment they shared. He had been on the Section 8 waiting list for years, and finally received a voucher in August. As a lifelong resident of Amherst, he spent months trying to find a studio or one bedroom apartment in Amherst with a low enough rent to meet the Voucher requirements. He didn't find an apartment in Amherst. In December, he moved to Greenfield with his Voucher.

The Valley CDC's plan to build an enhanced SRO is a wonderful opportunity for low income, homeless individuals to live in high quality housing in Amherst. We applaud the CDC's efforts to bring this housing to Amherst and urge the CPA Committee to fund their proposal.

Thank you,



Michael Burkart
Chair, Board of Commissioners
Amherst Housing Authority