

Project #1: Affordable Housing Mapping

Community Partners: Vermont Legal Aid staff Rachel Batterson, Housing Discrimination Law Program Director & David Koeninger, Deputy Director



Background / Context

The two largest issues Vermont faces regarding affordable housing are that 1) there is not enough affordable housing and 2) there are issues with where the existing affordable housing is located. The latter issue is salient for a variety of reasons including avoiding the creation of segregated areas of concentrated low-income housing and to ensure that, through programs like [Moving to Opportunity](#), all children have access to high quality schooling and the ability to have interactions with children from higher-income families who tend to have more expansive views of future opportunities. Research has shown that this program makes a substantial difference for children who have moved into areas with more opportunities by the age of 12.

Your partners at Vermont Legal Aid “bring impressive credentials and experience together with a deep commitment to making a difference in the lives of our clients to create a powerful force for justice in Vermont.” One area of their work includes [housing discrimination in VT](#) which includes racial, socio-economic, and disability discrimination among others. Their main advocacy in this space is around both creating more affordable housing and being attentive to WHERE this housing is placed to avoid the segregation and disadvantaging of children noted above since, unfortunately, Vermont has [growing trends in this direction](#).

According to the latest [Vermont Housing Needs Assessment](#), challenging trends related to the availability and accessibility of affordable housing are clear:

- home building is declining steadily statewide while households are increasing
- new home construction prices are often out of reach for low-moderate income Vermonters when unsubsidized
- 36% of all households in the state are “cost burdened” by their housing costs meaning these costs represent more than 30% of household income. Of these, 16% spend more than half of their income on housing.
- Vermont will need to increase the state’s total housing stock by about 5,800 primary homes before 2025 to meet expected demand among new households while also housing the state’s homeless and replacing homes likely to be removed from the stock
- Vermont is becoming more racially diverse; however, Black Vermonters are much more likely to be homeless and are much less likely to be homeowners—even as compared to national rates of Black homeownership.¹

¹ <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/CEDO/Fair-Housing>

In terms of where housing gets located, there are a variety of influential factors. The first is that the U.S. Treasury Department's [Low Income Housing Tax Credit](#) (LIHTC) is the largest driver of new affordable housing in Vermont as in the rest of the country. Further, under the federal Fair Housing Act, it is lawful to exclude children from housing that is set aside for people aged 55+ or 62+ and such housing is popular. Compounding this issue is that folks in the 55+ category also have access to unrestricted housing, putting additional pressure on limited unrestricted housing. Data for Vermont show that affordable housing units in the state are disproportionately age restricted (See Housing Needs Assessment and other VHFA studies).

The second is related to tenant-based assistance programs which offer vouchers for assisting with rent. These vouchers can travel with the person seeking housing and tend to be held by families with children. In theory, this gives you more choice with where you can live but both nationally and in VT, your partners see discrimination against people with vouchers. Outside of Vermont, people holding vouchers also tend to be people who already face discrimination based on race, having minor children, or disability. Finally, when one considers systemic racism in our country, there is a high correlation of being BIPOC and low income. If you don't allow affordable housing in your town, you effectively operationalize not having BIPOC people in your town. This enacts long-term segregation because of the perpetuity of the built environment. This trend is critical for Vermont to avoid as the state becomes browner.

Research Description

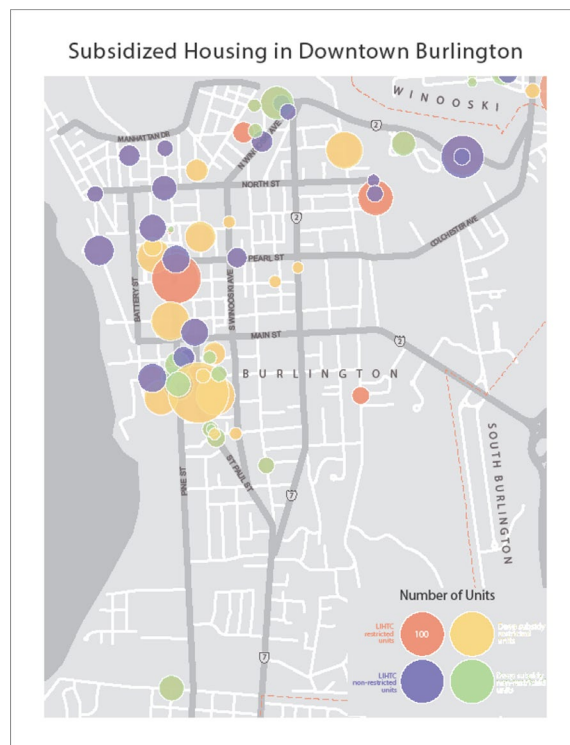
In order to inform their policy discussions and advocacy, Vermont Legal Aid is requesting updated and high-quality visualizations of available data related to affordable housing. The geographic scope and scale of this work can be determined by your team but should at a minimum focus on Addison and Rutland counties to complement ongoing work in Chittenden County.

The Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) maintains a database of housing indicators that serves as a resource for anyone interested in the demographic makeup, housing needs, and economic indicators for communities and regions around Vermont. See www.housingdata.org, [Community Profile](#), and [Example county profile for Addison County](#) for more details. Since there is no required registry for rental housing in Vermont, data on rental units are only available when voluntarily reported. This database will serve as one of the key data sources for this project. Additional sources include the Vermont State Housing Authority (through their tracking of [section 8 housing choice vouchers](#)), the Vermont Housing Conservation Board (through their administration of HOME, NHTF, CARES Act, and ARPA funding), Regional Planning Commissions, and non-profit organizations such as the [Addison County Community Trust](#) and the [Housing Trust of Rutland County](#).

Below is an example of the type of map that would be quite useful for your partners. It provides a visual representation of the location and rough number of housing units that are part of the Federal Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) [Low Income Housing Tax Credit \(LIHTC\)](#) in both the restricted (55+ age or qualifying disability) and unrestricted categories as well as housing that qualifies for deep rent subsidies (subsidies based on income), also categorized as restricted and unrestricted.

Additional analyses and visualizations of interest include layering income level and race/ethnicity data over locations of available housing to illustrate 1) potential mis-matches between areas of high opportunity vs. areas of greatest availability and 2) trends over time in terms of where this housing is being concentrated and the implications for segregation and access to the [Moving to Opportunity](#) program. You should plan to contextualize the “state of the state” work you are doing for VT within the national context in order to demonstrate what the housing shortage in VT means relative to other spaces and places.

In addition to your map-based visualizations, additional desired products include a written report detailing your methods and analyses and a high-quality presentation for stakeholders.



Project #2: Communicating Embedded Value of Farmworker Housing Solutions

Community Partner: Devon Artis-White, Co-Director and Project Manager for New Frameworks Gryphon Panels Project

Additional Resource Contacts: Shelly Pottorf, New Frameworks Resident Architect and Middlebury College Visiting Assistant Professor of Architecture and Peter Schneider '97, Senior Energy Consultant, Vermont Energy Investment Corporation

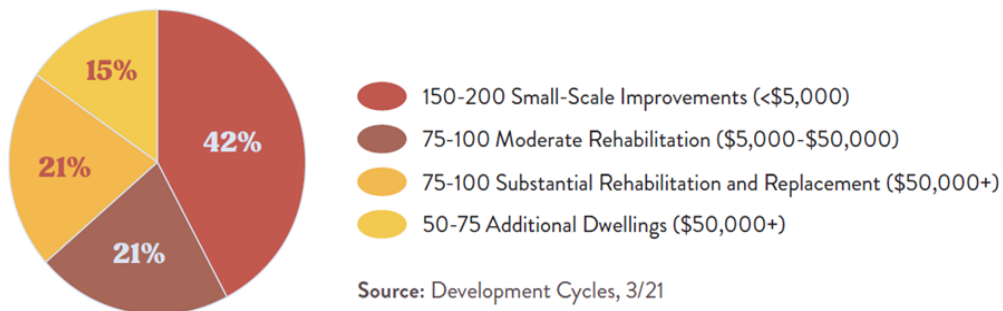


New Frameworks

Background / Context

10% of the agricultural workforce in Vermont is made up of immigrants with 1,500 migrant workers sustaining the state's iconic working landscape. These workers are the backbone of Vermont's agricultural economy, but they have been historically mistreated.[1] 40% of workers receive less than the Vermont minimum wage, often never have a day off, and work and live under incredibly challenging conditions.[2] A 2021 Farmworker Housing Needs Assessment commissioned by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board states that, "A wide range of farmworker housing conditions exist in the state, ranging from excellent to unacceptable by nearly anyone's standards." [3] The below chart from the assessment details the scale of need related to repair, replacement, and additional needed housing.

FIGURE EX-1: SCALE OF FARMWORKER HOUSING NEEDS, BY TYPE, 2021 ESTIMATE



Several innovative programs are underway to address these urgent housing needs including New Frameworks' [plant based prefabricated structurally insulated panels](#) (SIPs) and Efficiency Vermont's [Mobile Home Replacement Program](#). Both programs have detailed specs on site needs and costs for their replacement housing and repair solutions and actively track and manage potential sources of funding, available incentives, and loan programs to ensure that their products and services can be offered to farmers at ideally the same monthly cost as what farmers currently pay in energy costs for the current substandard housing, around \$500-\$600 a month. Both are also working to capitalize on this time of supplemental funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act State Fiscal Recovery Fund which included earmarked funds to address farmworker housing needs administered through the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the Champlain Housing Trust.

Research Description

When talking with your partner about key needs to advance their work, they kept coming back to the themes of “funding, resources, communication, and connections”. Your work will assist them with *communicating* and demonstrating the embedded value of the sustainable and replicable solutions to the farmworker housing crisis that they are offering by producing a multi-media product that can serve as a persuasive call to action to enable *connections* with even more lenders, funders, and farmers in this critical work.

While media format of this product can be determined by the skills and interests of your team, key components that should be included are:

- Scope and scale of current farmworker housing needs, noting that these needs are compounding every year
- Highlighting what future could / would look like if innovative solutions were widely adopted and how might we get from where we are now to this ideal future, i.e., in terms of financial, political, zoning, and land/housing ownership structures
- Detailing all of the additional values and nexus points that these projects offer in addition to the improvement of living conditions for farmers. Examples include, but are not limited to:
 - Links with UN Sustainable Development Goals and Regenerative Economics (see Climate Justice Alliance’s, *14 Planks: Regenerative Economy Policy Stances*)
 - Achieving goals of state and local energy and climate action plans
 - Supporting a strong and local agricultural, manufacturing, and trades-based economy
 - Realizing regenerative design frameworks. For example, using agricultural byproducts from Vermont farms (e.g., straw) as building materials for farmworker housing moves us towards a closed loop, regenerative economy and ecology, and connects food systems with building systems in mutual benefit
 - Working towards climate justice by identifying critical areas of the work that can be leveraged to increase social, economic, and ecological impact

A few examples of media pieces that might help get your creative juices flowing include:

[“Climate: A Crisis Averted 2055”](#)

[“This isn’t the California I married”](#)

[“Advancing the Vermont Farm Labor Housing Initiative”](#)

Partner Details: “New Frameworks is a multi-racial, women-, queer- and trans-owned worker cooperative committed to a kinder sort of building. Locally sourced natural materials like native hardwood, clay, and stone soften our impact on the planet. Our ecologically-minded building practices and comprehensive, full-service systems design make our buildings at home on earth while providing state-of-the-art comfort and efficiency for the people that rely on them. New Frameworks practices high performance natural building towards the construction of climate justice and regeneration in our region.”

[1] <https://migrantjustice.net/milk-with-dignity-campaign>

[2] <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-vermont;> <https://migrantjustice.net/about>

[3] <https://vhcb.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/pubs/Vermont-Farmworker-Housing-Needs-Assessment-Study-4-2021.pdf>

Project #3: Building for Belonging

Community Partners: Amber Arnold, Founder and Collaborative Director; Jarmal Arnold, Youth Belonging and Place Director; and Kegan Refalo, People and Place Director, SUSU community Farm



Background / Context

The [SUSU commUNITY Farm](#) is a Afro Indigenous stewarded farm and land based healing center in Southern Vermont that elevates Vermont’s land and foodways. They do this “by co-creating a life affirming and culturally relevant platform for Black, Indigenous, People of color, youth, under resourced folx, and allies to thrive and experience safety and connection while beginning to develop the tools and agency to heal from the trauma of colonization. Through collective commUNITY they aspire to co-create an equitable and just culture for the global majority to thrive in Vermont that centers access to safe and affirming food, commUNITY, and job opportunities.”

Further, SUSU commUNITY Farm “creates health equity by offering culturally relevant spaces that center earth based and afro-indigenous health and healing traditions as well as reclaiming and centering the wisdom, stories, and legacies of their ancestors.”

Currently the Farm has two building goals:

- 1) developing temporary on-farm housing for refugees and immigrants as part of a supportive resettlement process, and
- 2) designing and building an education center as part of an upcoming capital campaign

Goals for both spaces are building for belonging, building for community, designing spaces in relation to the earth, designing spaces that are culturally relevant and welcoming, and incorporating BIPOC ways of seeing in building what VT future will look like.

Research Description

This team of students will support SUSU commUNITY Farm’s above goals by undertaking two facets of work:

- 1) An interview / creative storytelling project to bring forward personal thoughts and reflections about *what being in community and belonging in relation to social, built, and environmental / land contexts means. How do people define this for themselves?* This work is of key importance because it can inform building design AND will be useful for cultivating donor / funding relationships
- 2) For the temporary housing project, there are still a range of policy hurdles via Act 250, village vs. town designations, restrictions associated with area housing trust projects etc. to learn about. Students can research and document these policy hurdles and suggest solutions through case studies and model zoning ordinances from elsewhere.

A unique facet of this project is that this team will work in collaboration with a team of students from the Architecture and the Environment Practicum led by Shelly Pottorf. Her students will be working on a conceptual design / site plan (potentially multiple options) for the SUSU commUNITY Farm that builds upon the storytelling and policy pieces that you will be working on.

Project #4: Mapping Access to Energy Technologies and Efficiency Programs

Community Partners: Cara Robecheck, Energy Action Network Deputy Director & Network Manager and Mei Butler, Energy Action Network Dashboard and Data Manager



Background / Context

As required by Vermont's Global Warming Solutions Act, the Vermont Climate Council passed an [Initial Climate Action Plan](#) (CAP) for the state in December of 2021. A key part of the CAP is a commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through a just transition that takes into account the needs of impacted and frontline communities. For this to happen, it will be important to examine policies to make sure that they are not leading to unintended consequences. For example, some long-standing policies advantage wealthier individuals, such as federal Electric Vehicle tax credits, while others are specifically targeted to lower income individuals, such as the funding that goes to the Weatherization Assistance Program. This project hopes to identify trends and expectations about how existing policies may impact vulnerable communities.

This work is of critical importance as a range of policies and programs are currently being proposed and designed based both on CAP implementation as well as through the influx of more than \$1 billion in federal ARPA funding, of which \$216 million will be directed towards climate change and community resiliency projects and another \$145 million for housing initiatives.

Research Description

This student team will support the Energy Action Network (EAN) in examining geographical and socioeconomic data to analyze how state and federal energy policies impact how well different Vermont residents are able to access new and improved energy technologies and efficiency programs and identify which communities may need more focus and support as Vermont moves forward in meeting the requirements of the [Global Warming Solutions Act](#). Using data from the [EAN Community Energy Dashboard](#) (10 years of data from 2010-2020), [Efficiency Vermont's Energy Burden Report](#), Efficiency Vermont Community Managers, and other sources from EAN's data partners, students will map correlations between energy burden and uptake of cleaner technologies. You will use any observed differences as the basis of research into current policies that drive technology uptake and how these policies might lead to different outcomes by 1) town and region and 2) by income and wealth levels. Your findings can then in turn inform the design of proposed policies as noted above. A model for your work researching policies and programs incentivizing household energy efficiency, weatherization, and renewable energy technology uptake is the work of EAN intern Ellie Curtis on [Equitable Access to Electric Vehicles and Incentives](#).

The final research will be presented as a formal report and slide deck. This should include a variety of graphics, with options ranging from heat maps to basic charts.

Starting Resources

- EAN's [Community Energy Dashboard](#)
- Efficiency Vermont's report on [Vermont's Total Energy Burden by Town](#)
- Research by EAN 2021 Summer Intern Ellie Curtis [Equitable Access to Electric Vehicles and Incentives](#)
- [Initial Vermont Climate Action Plan](#)
- [The Climate Council Doesn't Want Its Plan to Burden Vermonters. Did it Deliver?](#)
- [Ben Edgerly Walsh: A 2022 blueprint for bold, equitable, essential climate progress](#)
- [DOE Low Income Energy Affordability Data tool](#)

Partner Details

“Energy Action Network (EAN) is a diverse network of over two-hundred non-profits, businesses, public agencies, and other organizations working together in a collective impact framework and supported by a core staff to further the Network’s mission:

Energy Action Network (EAN) works to achieve Vermont’s climate and energy commitments in ways that create a more just, thriving, and sustainable future for Vermonters.

Specifically, EAN is working to help Vermont:

- Meet the requirements of the Global Warming Solutions Act, which includes reducing Vermont’s greenhouse gas pollution to 26% below 2005 levels by 2025, to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, and to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.
- Meet the goals of the Comprehensive Energy Plan, which includes meeting 25% of Vermont’s total energy needs from renewable sources by 2025, 40% by 2035, and 90% by 2050.”