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HOUSING AGENCIES PUBLISH FAIR HOUSING REPORT

Report identifies impediments to fair housing choice in Burlington; suggests solutions

BURLINGTON—Burlington’s Community & Economic Development Office (CEDO) has published “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.” The 50-page report examines hurdles that might prevent Burlington residents from equal access to housing opportunities and suggests potential solutions.

The report cites five primary impediments to fair housing choice in Burlington:

1. High rental and homeownership prices, and limited land and public resources
2. Policies and practices of some housing professionals that intentionally or unintentionally limit housing options
3. Ongoing fair housing violations left undetected and unaddressed
4. A limited supply of housing with features needed by people with disabilities, elders, larger families and others
5. Development and occupancy policies that constrain the availability of affordable housing

“A vital part of this process is examining the action items associated with each impediment,” says Brian Pine, CEDO Assistant Director of Housing & Neighborhood Revitalization. “We’ll be taking a close look at each to help assure Burlington stays a place where safe, decent, affordable housing is available for everyone.”

The Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) Fair Housing Project (FHP) was instrumental in the planning, funding and creation of this report. FHP Director Kevin Stapleton said, “Fair Housing is the right to access housing free from discrimination. In Vermont, it is illegal to discriminate against someone because of their race, color, national origin, gender, presence of minor children, disability, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or receipt of public assistance. These protected classes are a growing part of the Burlington community and it is imperative that the city take proactive steps to address potential discriminatory practices. This report is an important step in this direction and we look forward to working with the city to implement the prescriptions detailed in the report.”

“This list of five impediments really reflects the complex nature of housing in Burlington and throughout Vermont,” according to VHFA Executive Director Sarah Carpenter. “There’s no single cause to the area’s housing challenges, and there’s no single solution. Still, it’s clear that high prices driven by a lack of available and accessible housing stock plays a key role in Burlington and elsewhere.”

The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) mandates the report by requiring all “entitlement communities” — urban areas and cities, such as Burlington, with populations of 50,000 or more that receive Community Development Block Grant funds from HUD — undertake fair housing planning. This latest report, last published in 1999, becomes part of Burlington’s FY2008-13 Consolidated Plan.

Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) produced the report. CEDO awarded VHFA the contract last December, following a competitive bid process.

“VHFA is increasingly putting the skills of its Policy & Planning Department to good use creating reports such as this,” according to VHFA Policy & Planning Manager Maura Collins, who oversaw the report’s production. “Engaging in projects like the CEDO report we further our mission of promoting affordable housing for all Vermonters, build stronger ties with communities, and create additional revenue streams for the Agency.”

The report is available as a PDF download at the CEDO and VHFA Web sites: www.cedoburlington.org and www.vhfa.org. A limited number of hardcopies are available from CEDO upon request. Contact Brian Pine at (802) 865-7232.

Community members with fair housing questions or concerns should contact the FHP at (802) 864-3334 x202 or visit www.cvoeo.org/html/housing/fair_housing/fair_housing.html.

Representatives from CEDO, FHP and VHFA will present results of the report to the Burlington City Council at 7:00 pm on Monday, Nov. 22, at Contois Auditorium in City Hall. The meeting is open to the public.

CEDO is a department of the City of Burlington that works with the community to foster economic vitality; preserves and enhances neighborhoods, quality of life and the environment; and promotes equity and opportunity for all residents of the city.

The FHP is a program of CVOEO, a non-profit community action agency. The FHP works to eradicate housing discrimination in Vermont through education, outreach, and enforcement of fair housing laws. The FHP assists victims of discrimination, investigates complaints, and works with attorneys to pursue litigation when necessary

The Vermont Legislature established VHFA in 1974 to finance and promote affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income Vermonters. Since its inception, the agency has provided low-cost homeownership financing to approximately 27,000 Vermont families, and financed the construction or rehabilitation of approximately 8,400 affordable apartments.