

# **Putney Housing Collaboration Meeting**

Advancing collaboration and coordination between groups  
working on housing issues and solutions in Putney

April 14, 2025



Facilitated by the Vermont Council on Rural Development







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### **Vermont Council on Rural Development**

PO Box 1384, Montpelier, VT 05601-1384

802-223-6091 | [info@vtrural.org](mailto:info@vtrural.org) | [vtrural.org](http://vtrural.org)

Laura Cavin Bailey, *Climate Economy Program Director*  
Lauren Brady, *Community Engagement & Policy Coordinator*  
Margaret Gibson, *Operations Director*  
Kaziah Haviland, *Village Trust Initiative Director*  
Alyssa Johnson, *Community Visit Program Director*  
Nick Parker, *Community Programs Associate*  
Dani Parkins, *Technical Assistance Coordinator*  
Jessica Savage, *Director of Programs & Strategic Initiatives*  
Denise Smith, *Executive Director*

# I. Introduction

The Vermont Council on Rural Development's (VCRD) "Our Future Putney" Community Visit was a 3-month process that brought community members together in late 2022 and early 2023 to actively participate in examining issues, decide top priorities, and develop action plans for the future of the town. VCRD provided the overall structure and neutral facilitation each step of the way.

Since then, much work has been accomplished by the three Task Forces that formed through the Our Future Putney process: Revitalizing Putney's Downtown, Developing a Community Center, and Developing Housing Solutions.

In 2024, the Town invited VCRD back to Putney to facilitate a meeting among the various groups in town working on housing. A planning group worked with VCRD staff to help define the event and attendees.

On April 14, 2025, representatives from the Select Board and Town Administration, the Planning Commission, the Housing and Home Energy Advisory Committee, and the Our Future Putney Housing Solutions Task Force came together to:

- Continue to advance community building and housing efforts in town; highlight how to best work together around aligned projects and housing efforts.
- Build trust around the areas where the Housing Solutions Task Force and the Town of Putney will intersect and identify ways to make that work efficient and effective.
- Clarify roles, goals, projects, strengths, and constraints for each group.

Meeting participants included: Peg Alden, Karen Astley, Phil Bannister, Sue Coakley, Marcella Eversole, Doug Grandt, Dawn King, Ruby McAdoo, Mike Mrowicki, Aidan Paradis, Fletcher Proctor, Coni Richards, Bex Slattery, Heather Small, Burt Tepfer, Mary Thomforde, and Elizabeth Warner. Staff attending from the Vermont Council on Rural Development included: Lauren Brady, Alyssa Johnson, Dani Parkins, and Jessica Savage.

The event kicked off with a potluck dinner and conversation. As an icebreaker, attendees engaged in a visioning exercise where they were asked to imagine a bright future of housing in Putney and then shared in pairs. The group agreed on the following shared norms for the meeting: open and respectful dialogue; active listening; forward, solutions-oriented thinking; speak for yourself: use "I feel" statements; step up, step back; assume good intent; and shared accountability for these agreements.

For the first part of the meeting, attendees broke into four groups to outline their roles and responsibilities, current projects, and assets or challenges they see in collaborating with other groups related to housing in Putney (see notes at the end of the report). The groups were organized based on their project and role alignment as follows:

- ▶ Select Board and Town Staff
- ▶ Planning Commission
- ▶ Housing and Home Energy Advisory Committee
- ▶ Housing Solutions Task Force

Participants came back together to hear presentations from each group, then broke into three mixed groups to identify strengths, challenges and action ideas for future collaboration. At the end of the day, the whole group prioritized actions from the list of ideas that were brainstormed throughout the day.

There is much to celebrate and a bright future for collaborating on housing initiatives in Putney. Throughout the meeting, attendees were communicating, connecting and creating the right energy for the next steps. You already have the ingredients for success!

## II. Priorities for Action

By the end of the meeting, participants identified these priorities for action for how to best collaborate on housing issues and actions in Putney:

- 1 Provide input in 2-3 weeks on zoning updates (Planning Commission to invite Task Force input).
- 2 Apply for Environmental Justice for New England Grant (Planning Commission and Housing Solutions Task Force in partnership).
- 3 Define Housing Coordinator role (Planning Commission to coordinate with Housing Solutions Task Force).
- 4 Lay groundwork for Housing Fund (Housing Solutions Task Force to coordinate with Planning Commission).
- 5 Create a roadmap of 5-year housing project using 2024 Housing Needs Assessment as a starting point once there is agreement on housing needs/goals (All groups).
- 6 Quarterly Meetings with representatives from Housing Solutions Task Force, Planning Commission, Putney Cares and other relevant stakeholders (All groups).
- 7 Quarterly reports from these meetings produced and shared (All groups).

### Other Ideas for Action

Identified in breakout and full group discussions throughout the day:

- Town Housing Coordinator.
- Establish a committee in the task force to establish a housing fund development, Philanthropic fund. Explore useful models i.e. 501c3 status or fiscal sponsorship.
- Task force has an agenda item at Planning Commission meeting.
- Building on advisory work.
- PC request formally input/recs on bylaws/zoning from task force.
- Dissolve advisory committee. Could minimize some of the distrust of the past
- Clear purposes for all groups & cut any that don't have clear purposes.
- Changes/shifts happen!
- "5 year plan" with stages.
- Create opportunities to understand each group and perceived/real agenda.
- Talk about shared goals => Collaborate with other towns => What is possible in a town of 2,000.
- List of priorities plus implementation plan.
- Use 2024 Housing Needs Assessment to create Collaboration Implementation Plan.
- Gantt Charts: Timeline goals, interdependencies.
- Create a freestanding nonprofit to house the collective work (or an existing nonprofit). Who houses this work? Discover Putney's role?
- Education and Awareness is important, both to and from the Select Board.
- Quarterly report from Task Force & Housing Advisory Committee.
- Communication between all bodies regularly.
- There's a lot going on! Need a road map & process for seeking funding.
- Define groups? Or consolidate?
- Especially define roles of Task Force & Housing Advisory Committee.
  - Building trust, defining collaboration.
  - Process for working together.
- Each group contributes toward a process for addressing the housing strategy.
- ID areas of need, come to agreement on housing needs, divvy out tasks:
  - Use Camoin Study as basis.
  - Reps from groups establish process for task assignments.
  - 2024 Housing Needs Assessment as framework, plus find money.
- Environmental Justice for New England: Task Force and PC work together on this grant.
- Housing coordinator role:
  - TA/project management
  - qualified contractors network
  - laying groundwork for fund
  - pilot with Bellows Falls
- Roadmap of 5-year project.

- Share quarterly report from task force (or more).
- Housing advisory committee? Task force, PC, Putney Cares and other groups: reps meet regularly.
- 2-3 week timeline for suggestions towards zoning updates.
- Discover Putney as a coordinating entity?
- Task force present ideas.
- More messaging materials.
- Asset map of regional supports.
- Support for coordination work.
- Meet to understand EJ grant and work together on it. LOS example.
- Plan B for grant.
- What will we do in absence of funding?
- Define what we mean by 5-year plan
- Collaborate with employers and students at Landmark College





### III. Breakout Group Notes

Participants joined affiliated breakout groups to outline roles and responsibilities, current projects, and assets or challenges in collaborating on housing issues and actions with other groups in Putney. Here are the notes from each group.

#### ► Select Board and Town Staff

##### Roles & Responsibilities - Legal Obligations:

- Select Board approves initiatives and drives the town plan
- Zoning and planning
- Policy setting
- Supporting studies like the Housing Needs Assessment study and for the Town Plan

##### Roles & Responsibilities - Leadership:

- Joining other groups as a select board member
- Education and awareness
- Aligning other groups in the community and/or with other towns
- Overseeing collaboration among the various groups
- Being representatives in other groups

##### Current Projects:

- Working with Bellows Falls (or other bigger towns) for different grants
- Comprehensive Village Plan will be updated soon
- Water and sewer upgrade

##### Current Priorities:

- A clear communication channel between all the different housing groups
- Policy Setting
- Aligning other groups in the community and/or with other towns

##### Challenges:

- Because so much is going on with different groups we don't all come together to work through things. We seem to be in silos sometimes.

#### ► Planning Commission

##### Roles and Responsibilities - Legal Obligations:

- Write/revise the Town Plan
- Manage regulatory obligations for the Town Plan

##### Roles and Responsibilities – Leadership:

- Offering recommendations
- Collaborating with the public and implementing plans
- Lead funding opportunities (lots of grant writing)
- Engaging the public to be working with us

##### Current Projects and Priorities:

- Zoning Bylaws Modernization
- Transportation Alternatives Grant implementation: creating a crosswalk across Main Street
- Modeling test version for a housing coordinator services position, ideally partnering with Bellows Falls (pending grant award). Entails creating a qualified contractors network and a low barrier, low-cost home improvement fund

##### Challenges:

- The closing of the Paper Mill
- Money is a big challenge: What does funding look like over the next couple of years? Where do we source new funding from to ensure we're running at full capacity?
- The Planning Commission is not at full capacity either. Only had three people, now four, but still trying to fill the 5th seat.
- Urgency does not bode well with easy collaboration, and it's a big challenge in relation to grant opportunities that usually have very short deadlines.
- Creating a new process for talking about things.

##### Bright Spots:

- New planning commission members coming on board

## ► Housing and Home Energy Advisory Committee

### Roles and Responsibilities:

- Historically, the committee has served a number of roles:
  - liaison between the select board and the community
  - pseudo mediator within the community at times
  - Served as advisor to the select board, either scientific advice, or simply conveying the will of the community to the select board
- Currently, it is somewhat dormant
- Increasing emphasis on the new home energy aspect

### Challenges:

- No real tangible role in the community right now
- Charter needs to change in order to more effectively connect community housing needs to the select board through the housing and home energy committee

### Bright Spots:

- A direct line of communication with the Select Board

## ► Housing Solutions Task Force

### Roles and Responsibilities:

- An amalgamation of many different groups of people
- Education and awareness sharing, specifically about landlord meetings, apartments and ADUs.
- Public Engagement (like the needs assessment process)
- Work on expanding opportunities for small lots and accessible housing
- Helping to develop a caring community

### Current Projects:

- ADU 1.1: active program
- Construction for safety program

### Current Priorities:

- Funding/financial support
- Search for overlapping projects
- Encouraging Innovation and creativity

### Challenges:

- Inviting all community members to participate
- Getting the “doers” to the table as well
- Trying to put into action some of the housing goals
- We, as a group are not officially a part of the town, and sometimes feel excluded
- Zoning needs, in terms of changes that need to happen and how to identify these needs
- Relationship between landowners, homeowners and housing supports
- Capacity limits of committees

### Bright Spots:

- We, as a group are not officially a part of the town, so we are less constrained
- Collaborating with other

Participants reorganized into mixed groups to share strengths, assets, challenges, and action ideas.

## Strengths and Assets

- Needs Assessment Project was collaborative and impactful
- Many more folks are starting to participate
- There are a lot of innovators and that's valuable
- People show up and are positive
- Collective hope that we can achieve big things together
- Home improvements and weatherization activities, so far, have been very collaborative
- There are many smart people who care and that take the time to inform others
- People have a lot of aspirations for big things but we need to focus
- Leaders in town share their energy and knowledge and are seeking to improve coordination.
- Regional collaboration has gone well to raise funds and bring more capacity
- People show Up! We're all in this together
- Committee groups are well attended
- A lot of public turn out—A great sign of community buy-in
- A positive community feeling



- There's a lot of perseverance in the town
- Good at sharing opinions and listening to others
- Good will is present in the town and people participate
- Positive acknowledgment of others opinions
- Active response that demonstrates care
- Focus on specific projects has been effective
- People are open to hearing feedback and changing

## Challenges

- So many varying perceptions - own views, trust, what community looks like
- Honoring different perceptions
- Don't trust that all motives are transparent
- Transparency - Gossip!
- Volunteer time for collaboration- especially when folks are already spending time volunteering in groups
- For Selectboard and Town Admin, there's just too much to do
- Putney's human capital - a lot of folks with 90 minute chunks of time
- Desire for multiple approaches to work- considering those to support social capital and more volunteer capacity
- Knowing how to plug in as a volunteer
- Volunteers want to know what they're serving
- Same folks involved in a lot of efforts
- Language, especially NIMBY, "senior housing," "affordable housing" and "low income housing"

- behaviors when needed
- Good organizational structure
- People understand that housing is really important. "The Town is at stake."
- People are open to very different ideas and new ways of doing things

- Some folks don't want change in Putney (not here)
- Language is important & evolves
- Dispersiveness in the project of creating housing
- Accessibility for understanding this for folks not in the room - how do we present opportunities for engagement - pull in & explain
- Folks living in horrible conditions now - how are they being helped (numeric goal in plan)
- Messaging/framing to make housing work more attractive for more folks - Affordability narrative
- Goals & set of action - no way to move it forward collaboratively and open trust and accountability
- Timelines to get things done
- "Official" vs "unofficial" channels for things
- Burnout
- Divisive vs supportive messages
- Past litigation deters developers and makes people skeptical about possibilities



## IV. Resources, Reflections, and Ideas for Consideration

VCRD offers the following reflections and ideas for consideration. Please know VCRD is ready to support you as capacity allows in whatever comes next.

**Identify shared goals and move in the same direction:** the meeting attendees identified an upcoming grant writing process as one way to practice transparency and collaboration in a proactive way. In addition, the group prioritized creating and implementing a shared 5-year housing roadmap. That will require consensus on shared goals. Using the 2024 Housing Needs Assessment as a starting point, we wonder if each group can ask themselves: What are the housing goals of the Housing Task Force? Of the Planning Commission? Of the Town? Then, what are your shared goals and where can these groups support each other in moving in the same direction?

**Clearly define roles and responsibilities:** both the Planning Commission and the Housing Solutions task force are pursuing similar or overlapping projects (i.e. Housing Fund and Housing Coordinator), while also pursuing different ones. Where there is overlap, roles and responsibilities could be clearly defined.

**Regular connection and check ins:** the groups clearly see value in connecting with one another, and likely other local groups that can or could play a role in housing development in Putney. The groups could agree to a cadence, format and facilitation plan for regular meetings between representatives from each group. A shared facilitation and notetaking style might be helpful: a rotation of roles where one person facilitates the meeting, one person takes notes, and then moves into the next meeting as facilitator with a new notetaker who is on deck to facilitate is one way to ensure equity of voice.

**Trust building, collaboration, and navigating conflict:** this meeting was a level setting experience for attendees, but it is not the end of the journey towards trust and collaboration. Acting in good faith means moving at the speed of trust: if something feels urgent, sometimes the best approach is to slow down and make sure people are included. As groups begin to actively partner on projects and initiatives, it will be expected that some conflict will naturally arise. This isn't a bad thing: it just means growth and change are happening. If the groups can create agreements with each other that include how to manage and address conflict, that will help you be prepared for those moments. We encourage the group to build from places of agreement, and focus on the agreed upon priorities first and wait to enact other ideas that don't have current consensus or a clear pathway.

### Other Potential Resources

The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston has various programs and resources related to community development: <https://www.bostonfed.org/community-development.aspx>.

The Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI), a program of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, helps rural communities access funding for community and business development: <https://vhcb.org/redi>.

The Vermont Bond Bank makes low-cost loans for capital projects: <https://www.vtbondbank.org/loan-programs>).

The Vermont Community Loan Fund provides financing for projects that build or rehabilitate homes for lower-income Vermonters or other vulnerable populations: <https://www.investinvermont.org/borrowers/affordable-housing-vermont.html>).



Windham Regional Commission provides services to southeastern Vermont towns to help them address regional issues: <http://www.windhamregional.org/>.

Homes for All is a 'Design & Do' Toolkit for small-scale home builders, investors & community leaders: <https://accd.vermont.gov/homesforall>.

Look at examples of community dialogues and charrettes around current and future housing developments such as Plainfield and Bridport: contact VCRD for connections.

## **Possible Funding Sources**

TD Charitable Foundation – Housing for Everyone Grant: <https://www.td.com/us/en/about-us/communities/ready-commitment/funding-opportunities/housing-for-everyone>. Deadline: February 6, 2025, by 4:00 PM EST.

Fannie Mae Sustainable Communities Innovation Challenge: <https://challengedatabase.fanniemae.com/>. Deadline: Varies; check for current opportunities.

New England Grassroots Environment Fund – Grow Grants: <https://grassrootsfund.org/grant-programs>. Deadlines: March 18 and September 16, 2025.

ACCD Housing Funding Resources: <https://accd.vermont.gov/housing/funding>. Deadline: Varies; check for current opportunities.

Jane's Trust Foundation: <https://www.hembar.com/janes-trust-foundation>. Deadlines: January 25 and July 15 annually.





