

**Community Preservation Act Committee - Proposal Request Form for FY 2020-2022**

**Project Title: Phase (III) Supportive Housing Program, FY 2020-2022**

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

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

**Amount of CPA Funds Requested: \$115,627.50**

**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:**

Amherst Community Connections (ACC) requests \$115,627.50 in CPA funds to provide three housing vouchers to chronically homeless Amherst residents for three years from FY 2020-2022. This request comes as a result of the tremendous success of CPA's funding for ACC's **Phase (I) Supportive Housing Program** which runs from **FY 2017 to 2019**. The Phase (I) Supportive Housing 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 be able to successfully transition to their own permanent housing, ending years and decades of homelessness. The goal of the Program for its participants is to 1.) Achieve self-sufficiency, and 2.) Secure permanent housing.

This proposal submitted to CPA this year is for the continuation of the Phase (I) Supportive Housing program. Phase (I) will end in FY 2019. The continuation will be termed the **Phase (III) Supportive Housing program**. Phase (II) was funded last year by CPA and will run from FY 2019-2021.

Before describing the Phase (III) Supportive Housing program, it would be instructive to review the key components and success of the Phase (I) program.

**Here is a summary of the Phase (I) Supportive Housing program:**

- 1) Phase (I) Supportive Housing program is in the beginning of its third year operation. It will end in September, 2019.
- 2) In the past 24 months, 10 participants have been in the Phase (I) Supportive Housing program. Seven (7) of them have graduated from the Phase (I). They have all received their own subsidized housing vouchers and have vacated from ACC's housing units. Currently, 3 participants are in the three housing units ACC leases. They have only been there since November of this year. They meet with ACC caseworkers multiple times a week and are adjusting to life away from the shelter and streets.

- 3) The time they spent homeless before entering into the Phase (1) Supportive Housing program was between 4-40 years, averaging about 15-20 years.
- 4) The time it took them from moving into ACC housing to getting their own housing voucher is between 3 to 18 months, averaging about 9 months for the 7 graduates.
- 5) On average, these graduates applied to 10-15 subsidized housing entities.
- 6) Their income and public benefits received has risen by about \$1,500 to \$3,000 per person per year during their time in the Program. The increase in income has to do with employment, fuel assistance, and SNAP benefits.
- 7) Anecdotally, case workers observe that they are more likely to do the following than when they were homeless:
  - Seek medical treatment/mental health counseling
  - Stay more compliant with treatment regimen
  - Open a bank account and keep a budget
  - Pursue higher education
  - Stay in touch with family and friends
  - Engage in arts, crafts, gardening, and other activities
  - Attend church/synagogue/house of worship
  - Do volunteer work in the community
  - Attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
  - Practice harm reduction through reducing smoking/alcohol consumption
  - Eat better by doing more home cooking and food preservation
  - Explore additional interests and hobbies
  - Reduce encounters with local police or court system
- 8) About \$50,000 from CPA in the past two years has paid for the housing cost for the 7 graduates. It averages about **\$7,000 per person during the time when the participant is in the program for rental assistance.**
- 9) In turn, ACC contributed approximately \$35,000 providing wrap-around social service to these 7 participants. It averages about **\$5,000 per person during the time when the participant is in the program for social service.** CPA does not pay for this service; ACC covers the costs entirely and completely.
- 10) In ACC's Supportive Housing program, the total program cost—including rental assistance and supportive service, is **\$12,000** per year per person.
- 11) In contrast, it has been estimated that it costs taxpayers **\$35,000-150,000<sup>1</sup>** per person per year when chronically homeless people cycle in and out of jail, detox, emergency rooms, crisis centers, and homeless shelters. It is much more cost-effective for taxpayers and the people who experience chronic homelessness will have better quality of life when supportive housing is provided to them.
- 12) The program is especially cost-effective when the actual cost to CPA is only \$7,000 per person while ACC absorbs the cost of \$5,000 per person supportive service.
- 13) Even with the 3 additional units from the Phase (II) coming online in September this year, the Phase (I) occupancy rate of the 3 units is 100%.
- 14) Eligible participants who are working with ACC case workers in the Pre-housing phase stand ready to move into a vacant unit when someone graduates and moves out of ACC unit. This explains the 100% occupancy rate.
- 15) ACC rents one unit each from Kamins, Eagle Crest and Kendrick Property. All the units are on bus route, in downtown or village centers. ACC inspected all units before signing the lease. ACC is the leaseholder and participants pay program fees monthly to ACC. The program fee is

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<sup>1</sup> <http://grandchallengesforsocialwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/WP9-with-cover.pdf>

based on one's income—about 25 to 30%.

- 16) ACC pays rent on time; works with participants to ensure good tenancy; and addresses landlords' concerns promptly. So far, ACC has built strong and trusting relationship with these rental agencies. ACC was successful renting additional units from them in September, 2018 at the start of the Phase (II) program.
- 17) ACC secures services and resources for its Phase (I) 10 participants from Eliot Homeless Services, Health Care for the Homeless, Amherst Survival Center, and John Musante Community Health Center.
- 18) Participants continue to receive service from ACC after they graduate from the program: home visits, text/phone check-ins, or office visits. This continued engagement allows them to transition smoothly into greater self-sufficiency while retaining a network of supports.

In summary, ACC's first Supportive Housing program which began in 2016 has been very successful. Within 2 years, seven (7) participants have received their own housing vouchers. The average number of years they were homeless were 15-20 years; the average time they secure the permanent housing voucher and moving off ACC's housing unit is 9 months. Currently, all 3 units are occupied, with no vacancies and four people on the waitlist. The housing cost is about \$7,000 per person. ACC provides supportive service and absorbs about \$5,000 per person. In contrast, the social costs to taxpayers of allowing people to remain chronically homeless are estimated to be about \$35,000-150,000 per person per year. This is much more than the \$7,000 per person CPA is paying on rental assistance.

The Phase (III) Supportive Housing program will be similar to the Phase (I) program:

- 1) Only Amherst residents who have been chronically homeless with severe disabilities such that they require intensive case management would be eligible to apply. A screening test will be done to assess if one will need supportive housing or just rapid re-housing.
- 2) Income is NOT a requirement to participate in the Supportive Housing program. However, commitment to at least once a week one-on-one supportive service is.
- 3) ACC's engagement strategies with Program participants:
  - **Pre-Housing weekly meeting:** Those who are on the Supportive Housing waitlist will begin to meet weekly with case workers to start applying for public housing, social security income, SNAP benefits, CORI, a bank account, a home health aide or representative payee service if needed.
  - **Supportive Housing weekly meeting:** Once participants move into ACC-leased housing, they are required to meet with their caseworkers at least once a week, or more depending on their needs. At this stage, the areas of priority are:
    - a) Learning to be a good tenant and good neighbor; attending anger management class if appropriate.
    - b) Securing the often missing but absolutely essential housing-related documents: state ID, Social Security Card, and birth certificate.
    - c) Completing multiple public and subsidized housing applications: the goal is to apply to at least 10 -15 housing agencies and do follow-ups on these applications monthly.
    - d) Increasing/managing income and public benefits:
      - ❖ Completing application for social security disability income and state's emergency cash
      - ❖ Completing application for food stamp, MassHealth and free cell phone
      - ❖ Completing application for representative payee service for managing

- ❖ social security income, paying bills/rent
  - ❖ Completing resume and cover letter
  - ❖ Searching for employment and filing applications online or in person
  - ❖ On-going employment support
- e) Meeting one’s medical, dental and mental health needs by setting up appointments with one’s own health care provider and therapists
  - f) Working with ACC’s lawyer to address one’s court histories that can interfere with one’s public housing applications, and to do CORI sealing
  - g) Doing follow-ups on the housing and job applications

## **Feasibility Analysis**

Supportive housing is an adaptive intervention tailored to the needs of the chronically homeless. It serves people who have encountered multiple barriers to securing permanent housing, which can include disability, domestic violence, trauma history, and mental illness, and may require extra support in their efforts to transition out of homelessness. For those receiving services, supportive housing has been shown to have a positive impact on housing stability, employment, and physical and mental health.<sup>2</sup>

From a disability justice perspective, supportive housing creates greater housing accessibility for those with disabilities and provides assistance in navigating able-ist systems to achieve long-term stable housing. The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance recognizes that many of the people who are candidates for supportive housing interventions “suffer from complex medical, mental, and addiction disabilities that are virtually impossible to manage in the unstable setting of homelessness.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, housing is a necessary first support for these individuals to overcome any barriers that they encounter due to their disability. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has called supportive housing “the solution” for ending long-term or recurring homelessness among people with disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Supportive housing has been shown to be an effective way to help people with disabilities live stably within the community, achieve better health, and reduce their use of emergency healthcare and corrections systems.<sup>5</sup>

Supportive housing is also a cost effective intervention that has been shown to reduce emergency department usage and total costs of crisis medical and behavioral healthcare services by participants in other communities.<sup>6</sup> Because the goals of supportive housing include continued long-term housing stability, this intervention has the potential to not only reduce an individual’s use of emergency medical services for years to come, but also to relieve some of the burden placed on emergency shelters being used year after year by those experiencing chronic homelessness. The diversion of those using shelters as a long term support into stable housing would allow others to access the shelter for emergency use. Continuing to expand this intervention into a Phase (III) Supportive Housing program responds to recent policy recommendations from USICH to supplement emergency shelter interventions with “pathways back to safe living arrangements or directly into housing for people in emergency shelter.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.csh.org/toolkit/public-housing-agencies-toolkit/primer-on-homelessness-and-supportive-housing/supportive-housing/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mhsa.net/PSH>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.usich.gov/goals/chronic/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/supportive-housing-helps-vulnerable-people-live-and-thrive-in-the-community>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2018/01/18/housing-and-homelessness-as-a-public-health-issue>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.usich.gov/goals/setting-a-path/>

ACC's experience of providing earlier phases of its Supportive Housing Program and seeing the individual progress of participants has informed its plan to continue using this intervention. Based on the solid performance of the Phase (I) Supportive Housing program, where people who have experienced chronic homelessness for an average of 15-20 years were able to graduate and move off ACC's housing unit within an average of 9 months, ACC believes it has developed a well-tested work-plan for helping people exit from chronic homelessness into stable housing quickly and at a cost of \$7,000 per person which is far below the social costs that taxpayers incur of \$35,000-150,000 per person per year.

Secondly, the demand for the Supportive Housing program has not leveled off. So far, the 6 vouchers from Phase (I) and (II) Supportive Housing programs are all being used, and still there are six Amherst residents who are chronically homeless on the waitlist. The fact that there is no gap between when one graduates and exits from the Program and when the next participant moves in demonstrates the need for continuation of the Phase (I) supportive housing.

Thirdly, based on the point-in-time (PIT) count done in January 2018, it shows that there are 13 chronically homeless individuals in Amherst on the day when the count was taken place. This is better than the height of the problem in 2014 where there were 23 chronically homeless individuals in Amherst in the PIT count. The 43% reduction in chronic homelessness from 23 people in 2014 to 13 people based on a PIT count in 2018 in Amherst is very substantial. I think it would be fair to say that the Supportive Housing voucher has contributed to this decrease. It appears the Supportive Housing program Phase (I) and (II) are working well. Together, 6 chronically homeless Amherst residents are living in ACC's six housing units, and 7 chronically homeless individuals have received permanent housing vouchers and moved off ACC housing in the past two years.

## **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 costs of the Phase (III) Supportive Housing Program with 3 housing vouchers will be \$38,542.50 per year and \$115,627.50 for three years---the duration of the grant funding. Supportive Housing program participants are expected to pay 25-30 % of their income toward their program fees. So, based on ACC's experience from its Phase (I) Supportive Housing, the cost estimates is an overestimate. It could be \$7,000 to \$8,000 lower per year than is requested. ACC will provide support service and case management and will absorb any associated cost. See **Budget for Phase (III) Supportive Housing Program for 3 vouchers, FY 2020 - FY 2022.**

#### **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 and other grant support.

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

ACC expects to begin the Program in the summer of 2019 and to complete it by the summer of 2022.

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

As previously mentioned, the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count conducted in January 2018 reported that there are 13 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 for about 15 housing units. As we go into 2019, 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 department, 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 a study done by Baystate Hospital 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>8</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 three 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, three people were turned away from the shelter per night.<sup>9</sup>

While many of the people who would be eligible for this Program have experienced chronic homelessness for years if not decades, it is important to respond to their ongoing situation with a sense of urgency. The more time an individual spends without stable housing, the more likely they are to have poorer outcomes in a variety of areas. HUD recommends that "the length of time a household experiences homelessness should be minimized by helping them return to permanent housing as quickly as possible [...] rather than remain homeless while awaiting a vacancy in another program."<sup>10</sup> Many of our current Supportive Housing participants are on waitlists for several housing authorities and for emergency housing, but could wait years to advance on housing lists. It is essential that we intervene quickly and with housing-based interventions that will allow these individuals to finally transition out of homelessness.

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 was estimated by APD to be 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 (III) Supportive Housing Program will further reduce the number of chronically homeless individuals in Amherst from the current double digits to a single digit number.

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<sup>8</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>9</sup> <https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30355>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Rapid-Re-Housing-Brief.pdf>

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

ACC expects to begin the Project in the summer of 2019 and complete it within 36 months.

### 4. Acquisition or preservation of threatened resources

Not applicable.

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

The Phase (III) Supportive Housing Program will serve only Amherst residents who have been chronically homeless. 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 zero income to less than \$10,000 a year.

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

- A. Meeting the HUD definition of chronic homeless, 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.) 3 County Continuum of Care-Coordinated Entry Client Assessment, to 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 (III) Supportive Housing 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 Phase (I) Supportive Housing 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 has met with the chair of Amherst Municipal Affordable Housing Trust and the executive director of Amherst Housing Authority. It will present this Proposal to the members of the Amherst Housing Authority Commission, and to members of the 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 through direct networking with the chronically homeless population of Amherst since 2009. 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 hopes CPA will balance the need for funding long term affordable housing construction with the short term need to fund rental subsidies to meet the immediate needs of Amherst residents who are very rent burdened and are facing eviction, and also those who live on the streets of Amherst with no place to call home.