

Tenant Selection and Screening Overview

***Valley Community Development Corporation (Valley), Developer / Owner
Housing Management Resources (HMR), Property Manager***

Valley has owned and operated more than 134 rental units for several decades, including 11 family rental units in Amherst that were constructed 10 years ago. Valley has another 55 family apartments coming online on Pleasant Street in Northampton next month – The Lumber Yard apartments. We operate 53 single room occupancy or small studio apartment units located in Northampton, primarily serving very low income tenants. At these properties, 4 units are reserved for clients referred by the Department of Mental Health and 23 units have a homeless preference. The proposed project at 132 Northampton Road is distinct from Valley’s other small studio properties because it is a mixed income development that will blend typical moderate income renters (16 units) with low income special populations (12 units).

Valley engages a professional property management company--Housing Management Resources (HMR) to manage its rental housing. HMR manages over 8,500 rental units throughout New England with a focus on affordable housing. They manage developments ranging in size from a handful of units to hundreds of units. They have managed Valley’s portfolio since 2016 and have local property management and maintenance staff based in Northampton. HMR maintains a 24-hour call service for tenant emergencies, so someone can always be reached if there is a problem at a property.

Summary of Tenant Screening Protocol:

We do not accept tenants with a criminal record as a sex offender or anyone listed on the State Registry for Sex Offenders. Looking at the State Sex Offender Registry we note that there are 4 persons listed who live or work within 1 mile of the proposed development site at 132 Northampton Road. So, while Valley will not be accepting tenants who are sex offenders, these persons already reside in the immediate area, as they do in almost every neighborhood. Valley’s tenant screening process includes credit and CORI checks, as well as 5 years of landlord references, and interviews. For homeless tenants who lack landlord references, we can accept service provider references. We screen out persons with a history of production or distribution of methamphetamine (this is a federal requirement). We screen out those with a criminal record of offenses that involve physical danger or violence to persons or property or that adversely affected the health, safety and welfare of other people. We do not accept tenants we believe would pose a threat of any kind to other tenants within a building or to neighbors. We believe this level of screening and due diligence is more comprehensive than is undertaken by most private landlords. All of Valley’s tenants are subject to screening.

Special Populations:

Referrals from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) are for persons receiving mental health services. Most commonly these are issues like depression and anxiety. These persons are referred by their social service provider to Valley; Service Net is the largest provider in our area. These referred prospective tenants must go through the same screening process described above. We do not take every tenant who is referred, nor are we required to. We are

looking for a good match between a tenant and a building. Clients referred by DMH receive on-going services such as case management and clinical services. If there is a concern about a tenant's behavior, Valley and HMR have social service allies we can call upon to resolve any issues. This is a much better situation than for the *many* people in our society with undiagnosed and untreated mental illness. From our perspective, undiagnosed, untreated folks (and they cross all income, class, and racial groups) are higher risk than those who are working within a service system. Two DMH referral units are proposed for the development at 132 Northampton Road.

At units that have a homeless preference (and units for homeless persons is one of the main reasons Amherst encouraged planning / development of these small studio apartments), we rely upon referrals from service providers who can vouch for the prospective tenants. One of our admittance rules is 6 months of sobriety for those with a history of substance abuse. The service provider makes the referral and, at the same time, pledges on-going support services for their client for a period of time (typically at least 9-12 months) to help the person become stabilized in their new housing. The screening process described above also applies to these tenants. We are not required to accept, nor do we accept, every homeless tenant who is referred. We are looking for tenants who may need some support, but are able to live independently and cooperatively within a building and a neighborhood. Valley has a good track record of its homeless tenants remaining successfully housed for at least 1 year (over 95%). We have one gentleman who has been a resident for 20 years. We currently operate (3) buildings with a total of 23 homeless preference units. None of these buildings has an on-site Resident Services Coordinator. Two of the three have no on-site property management staff. Ten homeless preference units are proposed for 132 Northampton Road. We also plan to have part-time on-site property management staff plus a half-time on-site Resident Services Coordinator at 132 Northampton Road. On-site staff are not being proposed out of concern that tenants will do any harm; they are included to help improve the quality of life for tenants.

The definition of a homeless person is broad and diverse and relates to a person's housing status. It is not defined by a history of criminal activity or substance use or mental illness. A person could be fleeing domestic violence, doubled up in a unit with family or friends, living in a building that is being condemned or has suffered a fire, paying an unaffordable percent of their income for rent, or be otherwise without adequate, permanent housing.

Track Record with Special Populations:

Valley has operated this type of housing, for these same populations, for decades. All of our 4 similar properties located in Northampton have closer neighbors than at 132 Northampton Road and one abuts the playground of the Bridge Street Elementary School. Sometimes there is work to help tenants get along and navigate relationships within a building, but there are very rarely issues that impact neighbors. In almost 3 decades of having a similar property directly next to an elementary school (the property back yard abuts the school playground), we have never received a call or complaint from the school. We characterize the DMH and homeless tenants we have housed and currently house as sometimes damaged and knocked about by life, sometimes as vulnerable and at risk, but not as dangerous.

When Smith College eliminated a long-standing low income single room occupancy on Green Street to construct Ford Hall, the College re-built the same type of units on its own property,

adjacent to its riding stables, on Earle Street. This building has 14 small studio apartments all targeted to extremely low income individuals. According to the property manager, there have been no incidents or complaints about this housing from Smith College.

Valley's Executive Director participates in regular meetings with the Department of Mental Health and area providers serving extremely low income and homeless tenants. At these meetings, individual tenants who may be struggling (i.e. withdrawn, behind in rent, having conflict with other tenants) are identified and a plan is made to reach out and help these tenants. Valley's goal is to preserve tenancies. However, if a tenant's behavior does not conform to house rules, they will be evicted.

Other Low and Moderate Income Tenants:

The majority of apartments in the proposed development (16 of 28 units) are for typical single-household renters who meet income guidelines. Screening of these tenants is the same as described above. Based on our past experience these tenants will include employees earning a modest income, retirees, persons in recovery from illness, persons with disabilities, persons going through a divorce, and others.

The income ceiling for these units is \$49,700. This income level captures over 70% of Amherst renter households. Many College and University employees, including dining service and maintenance staff, administrative staff, and adjunct faculty will be income-eligible and may welcome the chance to live in an affordable apartment within walking distance of their employment. Similarly, many persons employed by the Town, working in restaurants and stores in Town, in health care, and in local schools will be eligible.

SAMPLE TENANT BIOS – VALLEY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SINGLE ROOM & STUDIO HOUSING

For a short video containing interviews with current Valley Community Development tenants who were formerly homeless, please go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjxJnBQrw58>

Bridge Street Tenants Bios

- Tim had been homeless; as an older student, graduated from STCC in IT Security; currently works FT at Stop & Shop; currently works PT at ServiceNet at seasonal shelter; self-employed as comedian and organizer of comedy events in the Valley. (5+ years as tenant)
- BS Tenant – works at a wine bar in Nton
- BS Tenant – works at Coca Cola bottling plant
- Marcellino – long term tenant; now retired; worked at Hotel Nton. Never learned to read/write English or Spanish. (10+ years)
- Several folks are disabled. Have lived in our buildings between 1-7 years. Some keep to themselves; others are involved in the community both in the property they live in (cooking communal dinners) as well as in the wider community.
- Two tenants from Bridge Street serve on a Valley Community Engagement Committee along with two other tenants – one from our Amherst family property and another in Northampton planning activities for our properties/community as well as advocating for more affordable housing.

Go West Tenants Bios

- Dave H., who grew up in Northampton, travelled around the country taking odd jobs and came back to Northampton about 20 years ago as his mother was aging. He was homeless and moved into one of Valley's properties. He got a job for a cleaning company; when the owner decided to retire, he took over the company after careful thought and moved from an SRO to an Enhanced SRO/studio where he had his own kitchen and bathroom. He's been running the business ever since and plans to retire next year when he turns 70. He's also a long term volunteer at Valley. (20+ years tenant)
- Dave A. has worked off and on for years seasonally for a local fencing company.
- Other tenants include a mix of disabled individuals including veterans.

King Street Tenants Bios

- M works at a local fast food restaurant while at the same time receiving cancer treatments and struggles to pay her rent due to her illness. Limited English proficiency.
- A Pakistani immigrant moved in after becoming homeless through divorce. Works full-time at a local fast food restaurant in Hadley. His three sons have attended and graduated from UMass/Amherst (7+ years as tenant)

N. Maples SRO Tenant Bios

- Everyone who moves in here comes from a homeless situation. (Dave who now lives at Go West for almost 15 years (see above), originally lived at the Maples.