

## **Chapter VI: Rhode Island State Strategic Plan 2010-2015**

The State of Rhode Island Strategic Plan is divided into two parts per Section 91.315's organization. The first part describes the state's overall General Priorities and Rationale as well as its Priority Needs, Obstacles to Meeting Underserved needs and a Summary of its projected accomplishments for 2010-2015. It also contains specific objectives for categories b-f of Section 91.315:

- Affordable housing (b);
- Public housing (c);
- Homelessness (d);
- Other special needs (e); and
- Non-housing community development needs (f).

The second part examines the categories g-m of Section 91.315 and provides narratives and objectives describing those issues.

### **PART I: Rhode Island's Priorities and Objectives**

#### **A. General Priorities and Rationale**

There are several overarching priorities that Rhode Island will continue to evaluate and address during the period covered by this Consolidated Plan. These include:

- increasing production of affordable rental homes in key geographic locations for priority populations;
- focusing on the need for affordable homes linked to supportive services;
- addressing the negative impacts of the foreclosure crisis, particularly for minority and low- and moderate-income households and hard hit urban communities;
- ensuring that Rhode Island's aging housing stock is safe, healthy and energy efficient
- reducing barriers to the development of affordable homes; and
- preserving our natural resources by working together to prioritize development in areas close to jobs, transportation, infrastructure and services.

Rhode Island continues to make headway into its many affordable housing needs despite significant setbacks over the last five years. On the heels of the historic rise in housing prices, the recent foreclosure crisis coupled with the state's second-place unemployment ranking at 12.7% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, November 2009) has placed enormous pressures on the state and its residents to meet housing needs. However, the strategies set forth here for the coming five years seek to address these issues, including new construction and rehabilitation; prioritization of supportive housing; community revitalization; an increased emphasis on all aspects of Healthy Homes, to complement lead-based paint abatement efforts; and a continued commitment to breaking down barriers to affordable housing as well as supporting anti-poverty efforts. These strategies are especially aimed to address the needs of extremely and very low-income households, special needs populations and homeless populations as discussed below.

Rhode Island's geographic priorities reflect the unique geography of the state. Being the smallest of 50 states, yet the third most densely populated, the state seeks to maximize opportunities for

affordable housing that best uses its existing public infrastructure and provides ready access to services and amenities. At the same time, however, the statewide need for affordable housing is acknowledged and supported by the HOME program scoring system, which gives extra points to projects in areas that have not met the state's statutory 10 percent goal for low and moderate income housing. Rhode Island has consistently awarded funding throughout the State and expects to do so again during the term of the Consolidated Plan (for an example of funding patterns, see the HOME Action Plan).

There are numerous obstacles in achievement of affordable housing goals for extremely low-income families and individuals Rhode Island. Among these is the gradual decrease in Federal funding, particularly in relation to the Section 8 housing voucher program, which has traditionally been relied upon, along with public housing, to meet the needs of the extremely low-income population that is not homeless and does not have special needs. Rhode Island will continue to make the most effective use of these programs to meet the needs of these households. However, without increased Federal support it will be difficult to maintain, let alone increase housing support for extremely low-income residents.

When developing priorities and strategies, consideration was given to the availability of other funding sources for each strategy. Specific objectives and strategies are included in the Strategic Plan. This plan includes a discussion of how the market influences the use of funds available for rental assistance, production of new units, rehabilitation or acquisition. Rhode Island will use its HOME, CDBG and ESG distribution to leverage other funds to meet its priority needs. This distribution of funds, when used to implement Rhode Island's strategies in accordance with the relative priorities described below, will help Rhode Island meet its housing and community development goals.

Table IV-1 below, which is HUD's required Table 2A (Parts 2 and 3), relies on the data available through the HUD CHAS last updated in 2000 along with the updated housing market analysis provided in Chapter V.

### **Basis for Priority**

Rhode Island assigned relative priority based on the analysis of the housing market and the severity of housing problems faced by renters and owners in each income group. Rhode Island has developed scoring systems for the HOME, CDBG and ESG proposals that address the State's priority needs. Through this system, Rhode Island will address its highest priority needs first. Each household category, including the **basis for the priority** assigned, is discussed further below.

### **Rental Housing**

#### ***Extremely Low-income Households (0-30 percent of MFI) and Low-income (31-50% of MFI).***

Rhode Island has assigned a relative need of "High" to all extremely low-income and low-income households because of the limited supply of affordable housing available to these households. The needs of Rhode Island's extremely low-income households will continue to be addressed through rental assistance and public housing.

***Families.*** Due to the State's shortage of affordable family rental housing, increasing housing opportunities for families remains a high priority in Rhode Island. Within the rental housing

category, both small related and large related households received high priority in each income category. This is due to the shortage of family assisted housing available in Rhode Island's current housing stock, as described in the Housing Needs and Homelessness Assessment. Rhode Island anticipates creating a fairly equal number of two and three bedroom units for families and a limited number of four bedroom units. Rhode Island's greater proportion of small family renters than large family renters dictated this distribution. Rehabilitation is a priority for rental units. Even in rural areas, where there are fewer opportunities for rehabilitation, re-use of mill and other buildings is a priority.

**Elderly.** Because the majority of Rhode Island's assisted and public housing is elderly (53%), this category will be a medium priority for the term of this Consolidated Plan. However, because the frail elderly population is projected to grow, projects that address the needs of this population, such as assisted living, and programs that will help the elderly age in place, will receive high priority.

The growth in Rhode Island's elderly population, especially its frail elderly, will continue to accelerate through 2020. In addition to the expected need for medical services, the evolution in the diversity of this population and their household compositions drive a need for housing units that are able to accommodate caregivers and sometimes grandchildren as well as for units that support aging in place.

**Other.** Other renter households at extremely-low and low-incomes, which include individuals with special needs, unrelated households and non-elderly single persons, will continue to receive high priority. While growing in number, there is still insufficient permanent supportive housing in Rhode Island relative to the population's needs, therefore, increasing the supply of affordable housing of this type remains a priority.

## Owners

**Extremely Low-income** (0-30% of MFI) and **Low-income** (31-50% of MFI). These income groups are a medium priority for homeownership because although they do not typically have sufficient funds to purchase a home, many current homeowners in these income groups, including many elderly, are struggling to maintain their homeownership.

**Moderate-Income** (51-80% MFI). This income group is a medium priority for Rhode Island's homeownership programs for both new and existing homeowners as this population generally has sufficient income to purchase and maintain a home. This is the target group for Rhode Island Housing's mortgage programs.

**Elderly.** Rhode Island will continue to help the elderly remain in their homes by offering reverse mortgages to elderly homeowners. This continues to be a medium priority for Rhode Island as it helps the elderly age in place.

**Table 6-1**

**Table 2A, Pts 1-2 (Required): State Priority Housing/Special Needs/Investment Plan Table**

<b>PART 1. PRIORITY HOUSING NEEDS</b>		<b>Priority Level Indicate High, Medium, Low, checkmark, Yes, No</b>	
<b>Renter</b>	<b>Small Related</b>	0-30%	High
		31-50%	High
		51-80%	High
	<b>Large Related</b>	0-30%	High
		31-50%	High
		51-80%	High
	<b>Elderly</b>	0-30%	High
		31-50%	Med
		51-80%	Med
	<b>All Other</b>	0-30%	High
		31-50%	High
		51-80%	Med
<b>Owner</b>	0-30%	Med	
	31-50%	Med	
	51-80%	Med	
<b>PART 2 PRIORITY SPECIAL NEEDS</b>		<b>Priority Level: High, Medium, Low</b>	
Elderly		Med	
Frail Elderly		High	
Severe Mental Illness		High	
Developmentally Disabled		High	
Physically Disabled		High	
Persons w/ Alcohol/Other Drug Addictions		High	
Persons w/HIV/AIDS		High	
Victims of Domestic Violence		High	
Other		Med	

**Table 2A, Part 3 (Optional): State Priority Housing Activities/Investment Plan Table**

<b>PART 3 PRIORITY HOUSING ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>Priority Level Indicate High, Medium, Low, checkmark, Yes, No</b>
<b>CDBG</b>	
Acquisition of existing rental units	High
Production of new rental units	High
Rehabilitation of existing rental units	High
Rental assistance	Low
Acquisition of existing owner units	Med
Production of new owner units	Med
Rehabilitation of existing owner units	High
Homeownership assistance	Med
<b>HOME</b>	
Acquisition of existing rental units	High
Production of new rental units	High
Rehabilitation of existing rental units	High
Rental assistance	Low
Acquisition of existing owner units	Med
Production of new owner units	Med
Rehabilitation of existing owner units	Low
Homeownership assistance	Med
<b>HOPWA</b>	NA
Rental assistance	NA
Short term rent/mortgage utility payments	NA
Facility based housing development	NA
Facility based housing operations	NA
Supportive services	NA
<b>Other</b>	NA

### **Obstacles to Meeting Underserved Needs**

The primary obstacle in meeting the underserved needs of the state of Rhode Island is insufficient financial capital. While obstacles such as land-use restrictions and NIMBY reactions, as described in the barriers sections, also play a significant role, the lack of sufficient funds to create additional affordable apartments and homes in the state is the primary obstacle to serving the approximately 43,000 Rhode Island households that earn less than 50% AMI and pay more than 50% of their monthly income toward housing costs.

Falling in the “small state” category for its tax credit funding, Rhode Island’s needs far outstrip its ability to create new affordable housing opportunities. The state’s \$50 million affordable housing bond, passed overwhelmingly by the voters in 2006, is entering its fourth and final year. While advocates discuss a campaign for a new bond as well as restoring, if not increasing, the state’s Neighborhood Opportunities Program, which serves rental households up to 40% AMI, the state’s dire economic situation, threatens the future of both programs. Although dollars from all programs are proven to be leveraged \$8 to \$1, it is simply not enough to increase production to meet housing

needs.

Adding to these dismal circumstances, Rhode Island has ranked in the top ten for foreclosures since the housing crisis first began in 2007. In its wake, its core municipalities, and especially its capital city of Providence, are scarred with vacant and abandoned single- and multi-family homes and have lost the tax revenues and economic activity these properties and their residents once generated. The state did receive \$19.6 million for the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) to acquire and rehabilitate foreclosed properties or help homebuyers purchase foreclosed homes, and Rhode Island Housing submitted an application for additional funds through Round 2 of the program. However, the scale of foreclosures' impacts on the state far outstrip the funding available to address it.

Rhode Island Housing along with the state's Office of Housing and Community Development and Housing Resources Commission continue to cooperate and seek new opportunities for funding and leveraging to meet the underserved needs of the state. Each agency has sought the federal opportunities recently made available through stimulus programs, including the U.S. Department of Treasury's bond program for state housing finance agencies, the Tax Credit Exchange Program (TCEP) and the Tax Credit Assistance Program (TCAP); and the NSP, NSP2, and Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing (HPRP) program.

However, clearly additional resources or a reordering of the state economy will be needed to fully address the housing needs of Rhode Islanders.

### **Summary of Priorities and Specific Objectives**

In summary, as noted in the tables above and the pages to follow, the state's objectives seek to prioritize the needs of its extremely-low and low-income residents, especially with affordable rental and supportive apartments. However, acknowledging the added resources needed to meet these needs, the state intends to balance meeting these needs while not ignoring opportunities to create affordable rental apartments and, when appropriate, ownership opportunities for moderate-income households, which require less investment and helps strengthen the economic and social fabric of the state's municipal neighborhoods.

The priority for the state is to meet these needs primarily in the areas where public water and sometimes public sewers are available, especially when they are near amenities such as shopping, jobs, public transportation, schools, libraries and other cultural and religious opportunities. The state is also committed to providing affordable housing opportunities across the state and to helping all municipalities meet their affordable housing goal of 10% of their housing stock, and will seek opportunities in municipalities that lack public infrastructure by the most sound environmental means.

As indicated in the charts below, with estimated funding over the next five years of \$77,709,284, it is the state's intention to create at least 1,827 new units of affordable rental and ownership housing. Its lead and weatherization programs will assist an additional 1,046 units.

**Table IV-2**  
**Estimated Five-Year Funding Levels for Affordable Homes in Rhode Island, 2010-15**

<b>Program</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>Totals</b>
HOME Rental	\$3,400,000	\$3,400,000	\$2,975,000	\$2,975,000	\$2,555,000	\$15,305,000
HOME Homeownership	\$850,000	\$850,000	\$1,275,000	\$1,275,000	\$1,695,000	\$5,945,000
HOME DPA	\$150,000	\$120,000	\$100,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$520,000
BHRI	\$13,080,000					\$13,080,000
LIHTC (allocation only)	\$2,430,000	\$2,551,500	\$2,679,075	\$2,813,029	\$2,953,680	\$13,427,284
TCAP	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
TCEP	\$8,262,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$8,262,000
State Lead	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$650,000	\$3,250,000
Multi Family Weather.	\$4,500,000	\$1,500,000				\$6,000,000
NSP	unknown	unknown				
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>\$77,709,284</b>

**Table IV-3**  
**Estimated Five-Year Unit Production of Affordable Homes in Rhode Island, 2010-15**

<b>Program Production Estimates</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Totals</b>
HOME Rental	150	150	130	130	50	610
HOME Homeownership	24	24	44	44	100	236
HOME DPA	5	5	3	3	3	19
BHRI	248					248
LIHTC	100	100	100	100	100	500
TCAP	0	0	0	0	0	0
TCEP	50	0	0	0	0	50
NSP	94	70				164
<b>SUBTOTAL NEW UNITS</b>						<b>1827</b>
State Lead	42	42	42	42	42	210
Multi Family Weather.	650	150	36			836
<b>TOTAL PROGRAM UNITS</b>						<b>2873</b>

## **B. Affordable Housing**

Rhode Island's objectives for affordable housing fall into three broader categories:

- I. Increasing the supply of affordable housing;
- II. Meeting the unique needs of the elderly; and
- III. Sustainable affordable housing.

Within each of these categories there are one to four specific objectives.

### **I. INCREASING THE SUPPLY OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Numerous studies over the years cite the lack of housing affordable as a contributing factor in a number of social and economic problems. Nearly one-half of Rhode Island's low-income renter households, approximately 60,000 households, report one or more housing problems. These families often experience associated problems, from childhood asthma and lead poisoning to longer commutes, poor schools, and inability to afford decent child care.

As described in the market section of this Plan, despite Rhode Island's recent drop in housing prices, a gap persists between what average workers can afford and what it costs to own or rent a home in the state. In suburban and rural areas the stock of rental houses is often quite limited, while in the less expensive markets, multi-family properties are more likely to be in poor condition..

While some inroads have been made, securing local approvals for affordable housing in rural and non-metro areas continues to be difficult. Especially for family housing, the "not-in-my-back-yard" phenomenon as well as fears of stretched school capacity and increased property taxes have slowed development and even blocked projects. Overcoming these beliefs requires public education and working collaboratively to look at affordable homes as critical element of the broader community. The state will continue to work with its partners to increase outreach efforts in local communities to promote mixed-income homes.

HOME Program funds will be used to assist in the financing of substantial rehabilitation and new construction of homes affordable to working families particularly those with income that qualify them as very low and low-income. The development of mixed-income, mixed-use, and family housing will all be supported through this activity. HOME funds are often used in conjunction with Low-Income Housing Credits, or as a subsidy for projects developed by Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO) and other not-for-profit developers. Other activities, including the financing of soft costs, mortgage guarantees, and construction of infrastructure, may also be undertaken, to help reduce project costs and make units more affordable to targeted income groups.

Several communities in Rhode Island have struggled to redevelop low-income or economically stagnant areas. Concentrations of poverty and a high incidence of housing problems exist in many of these communities, including in many non-participating jurisdictions. Housing investments can be a catalyst for community renewal efforts. New housing construction and housing renovation generates economic activity beyond the actual construction expenditures. It often stimulates additional investment in the neighborhood or community, as other residents and owners gain confidence from seeing the improvements that are made. As new owners and more stable renter families establish

social capital and become active participants in the community, crime rates may fall, participation in civic activities may increase, and even school performance may improve.

HOME Program funds will be used as development subsidies for infill new construction and substantial rehabilitation of existing underutilized properties. Rental and homeownership projects will be developed or sponsored by CHDOs, non-profit development organizations and for-profit development organizations.

Rental housing developed with HOME funds as part of this initiative will primarily be intended for occupancy by very-low income households. Any homeownership housing developed with HOME funds as part of this initiative will be primarily intended for sale to low-income households.

**Objective I.1:**

**Rehabilitate and re-use existing residential and commercial buildings for additional affordable homes while eliminating health and safety hazards, with a specific priority on foreclosed properties**

Rhode Island Housing, the HRC and the Office of Housing and Community development, along with our many community-based partners, recognize the opportunity that foreclosed, vacant, and abandoned properties represent to increase the supply of affordable housing in the State. Across the state under-utilized and/or abandoned residential and commercial stock exists that could be converted to safe, healthy and affordable homes. Re-use and rehabilitation represents a pragmatic and responsible use of the state's scarce geographic resources allowing us to preserve greenspace whenever possible while preserving the character of our communities.

Recognizing the value of its existing housing stock, Rhode Island has made the acquisition and rehabilitation of housing for rental, homeownership and special needs populations a priority under the HOME program. Reuse and rehabilitation of existing properties is also a priority under the state's Qualified Action Plan (QAP) which governs the allocation of low-income housing tax credits. The 2010 tax credit round also gives special consideration to projects that involve the rehabilitation of foreclosed properties.

Rhode Island Housing has also developed a Land Bank program to allow nonprofit developers to respond more quickly when potential properties go on the market. Through the program, Rhode Island Housing purchases the property and holds it for up to twelve months (and sometimes longer) while the nonprofit puts together a financing and development package. The program has allowed many nonprofits to purchase properties for affordable housing that would otherwise have gone to market rate housing development.

Although Rhode Island had its own Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit program to encourage reuse of historic properties for residential or commercial uses, the program was ended in 2008 because of concerns about the cost of the program at a time when the state was facing significant budget shortfalls. Project still in the pipeline at that time received reduced benefits and were required to pay a fee to receive the benefits of the tax credit. In its original form, the credit provided 30% income tax credit for individuals and organizations substantially rehabilitating commercial historic buildings. The credit went into effect in 2002 and provided financing to more than 100 projects around the state, including a number of affordable housing developments in Providence and other communities.

Preservation and re-use of existing structures will continue to be priorities for the HOME Program funds. All health and safety hazards that exist in assisted units must be addressed when developing work scopes for buildings to be assisted. These include lead paint hazards, building code violations (including electrical hazards, fire hazards, and other life-safety issues), mold and moisture problems, and environmental health concerns.

Training and technical assistance will be provided to non-profit staff that apply for HOME-funded programs. Training will focus on construction management and cost estimating techniques, building science/building performance, techniques for disability access, and, increased contractor outreach and training to advance quality of work.

The mix of re-use and rehabilitation activities should increase affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income residents.

### **Proposed Accomplishments**

Rehabilitate and/or re-use 1,425 units over the next five years, which represents 75% of the state's production goal of 1,900 units of affordable rental and homeownership units

These units will serve the following percentages of income populations:

20% extremely low ( $\leq 30\%$  AMI)

55% low ( $\leq 31-50\%$  AMI)

25% Moderate ( $\leq 51-80\%$  AMI)

These goals are dependent upon the State continuing to receive sufficient funding from State and federal sources. Some housing developed as part of the assisted projects will be market-rate rental and home ownership units as necessary to cross-subsidize lower-cost units and achieve mixed-income housing, although such market-rate units will not directly receive any Federal subsidies.

### **Objective I.2:**

#### **Increase production of affordable homes through new construction, especially family rental units and supportive housing**

While focusing on reuse and rehabilitation of existing properties is a priority for the state, particularly given our limited land resources and the impact foreclosures is having on many communities, new construction of affordable homes is also needed. Often new construction may be coupled with rehabilitation activity, filling in "missing tooth" vacant lots. Other existing properties may be too far gone for rehabilitation to be economically feasible in which case they may need to be demolished and new homes built in their place. In addition, many communities in the state will not be able to meet their 10% affordable housing goal solely through reuse and rehabilitation. In these communities, whenever possible new construction should be targeted to those areas with existing infrastructure and development so that these residents will have easy access to jobs, public transportation, and services.

All of Rhode Island's available resources for affordable homes for families are used to some extent for construction. These resources include both federal and state programs: Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, the HOME program, Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP), and Building

Homes Rhode Island (BHRI). As with the previous reuse and rehabilitation goal, the state will prioritize proposals to construct new affordable housing that targets very low and low-income residents, and rental housing for families. Priority consideration will also be given to projects that best reflect the smart growth approach outlined in the state's Land Use 2025 plan and Rhode Island Housing's KeepSpace Initiative.

### **Proposed Accomplishments**

Construct 475 units over the next five years, which represents 25% of the state's production goal of 1,900 units of affordable rental and homeownership units

These units will serve the following percentages of income populations:

20% extremely low ( $\leq 30\%$  AMI)

55% low ( $\leq 31-50\%$  AMI)

25% Moderate ( $\leq 51-80\%$  AMI)

These goals are dependent upon the State continuing to receive sufficient funding from State and federal sources. Some housing developed as part of the assisted projects will be market-rate rental and home ownership units as necessary to cross-subsidize lower-cost units and achieve mixed-income housing, although such market-rate units will not directly receive any Federal subsidies.

### **Objective I.3:**

#### **Preserve existing, affordable housing stock**

Rhode Island continues to make strides in the preservation of its existing affordable housing stock throughout the state. Since the inception of the state's efforts more than 10,000 units have been preserved. In the next five years approximately 4,500 units may need to be refinanced and rehabilitated to preserve affordability. The preservation of approximately 1,500 units is already under discussion, and the state will seek to preserve all of these units over the next five years. Most owners are expected to seek to renew their contracts. However, if market conditions changed in such a way as to make conversion to market rate housing attractive, the loss of any of these deeply subsidized units would be very difficult to replace.

The Rhode Island Housing Preservation Program was first established in 1992 to provide owners of existing Section 8 housing developments with incentives to maintain them as affordable housing. The regulations allow owners to access existing reserves to facilitate a sale or transfer of the property. Rhode Island Housing provides both taxable and tax-exempt mortgage financing and low-income housing tax credits, depending on the resources that are needed and available, to finance the new transaction. In exchange for new financing, owners must agree to maintain the property as affordable for at least an additional forty years, enforced by a regulatory agreement. This program has seen a significant increase in activity over the last several years.

The state also requires that any units proposed to be demolished or removed from public housing stock by PHAs within its jurisdiction be replaced one-for-one.

While the development of new affordable housing is sometimes met with opposition at the local level, preservation of existing affordable housing is generally very well received. Through this process the properties themselves are usually improved and made more attractive and energy

efficient, and existing residents have the piece of mind that comes from knowing that their homes will remain affordable for the long-term. One challenge we do face with both the development of new affordable homes and the preservation of the existing affordable stock is the current instability in financial markets. Housing credits and tax-exempt bonds are the state's primary tool for building and preserving affordable homes. Unfortunately, those tools are no longer functioning effectively as investors have pulled out and the Federal government has been obliged to step in and try to stabilize the market. However, the preservation of existing units continues to be a high priority for the state, and we will leverage the resources available as effectively as possible to accomplish this objective.

**Proposed Accomplishments:**

Refinance and rehabilitate at least 1,500 units to preserve affordability for low and extremely low income households

**Objective I.4:**

**Work toward the creation of new rental assistance opportunities**

The passage of a \$50-million affordable housing bond in 2006 added an important new resource for the state to develop affordable housing, particularly rental units. The bond has contributed \$12.5 million a year toward the development of affordable homes from 2007-2011, of which 80% is dedicated to the development of rental housing. However, first the rapid appreciation in housing costs, and then the economic downturn and accompanying increase in unemployment, have left even more Rhode Islanders unable to afford their housing costs. As noted previously, there are insufficient Federal capital subsidies to increase the supply of affordable housing to address the problems of all those with cost burdens. In addition, many households with the lowest incomes cannot afford operating costs of housing units even if capital subsidies eliminate all housing debt service payments. For these people rental subsidies or other income enhancements are needed to eliminate cost burdens.

While the housing bond and other development subsidy programs like HOME and Housing Credits reduce the cost of a home, for an increasing number of Rhode Islanders, an even deeper subsidy is needed. That is one of the reasons why the state's Neighborhood Opportunity program (NOP), now celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, is so important. In addition to providing capital funding, NOP has traditionally providing operating support through its Permanent Supportive Housing fund, essentially making an apartment affordable to tenants whose only income is social security disability insurance (SSDI). Unfortunately, a worsening budget deficit has resulted in this critical program being cut from a high of \$7.5 million a year to \$2.5 million limited to supporting operating expenses in Permanent Supportive Housing for the homeless. The loss of this funding is a severe blow to the state's ability to meet the needs of residents earning less than 40% AMI, which represents a significant amount of Rhode Island's lower wage workforce. It is the state's objective, later in this Plan, to seek restoration of NOP funding to at least \$7.5 million.

Another alternative to meet the housing needs of very low-income families and individuals is rental assistance where tenants living in market rate apartments pay 30% of their income for rent and the remaining costs are picked up by the rental assistance program. In the past, the federal Section 8 voucher program has filled this role, and indeed the program remains the largest source of tenant-based rental assistance. However, funding for section 8 vouchers has continued to decline in recent years while demand for rental assistance has not.

In response to this rising need for rental assistance, the state has engaged in the creative use of vouchers to address the needs of some of its most vulnerable populations.

In 2007 Rhode Island Housing began its Road Home is a program which was designed to integrate rental assistance and supportive services for populations who are homeless, or provide limited cash assistance for those at risk of homelessness. The intent of the Program is to reduce the population of shelters. The program is funded through Rhode Island Housing's operations and is intended to replace the State RAP program as developments subsidized through that program are refinanced and rehabilitated. Since launching RoadHome in July 2007, 360 people have been assisted through the program. Of the current 226 tenants, 23% have been housed for more than 2 years, 26% more than 1 year and 38% between 6 months and 1 year.

Other sources of rental assistance that the state will continue to seek to build on are the Shelter + Care Program, which is also administered by Rhode Island Housing and rental assistance vouchers that are made available for veterans, family re-unification and other targeted populations.

For Rhode Islanders that need short-term rental assistance or assistance getting into an apartment that they will be able to maintain moving forward, the State will continue to provide assistance through RoadHome Emergency Housing Assistance (RHEHA) and the new federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP). RHEHA provides up to \$1,200 for security deposits, first months rent or mortgage assistance to Rhode Islanders who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and can demonstrate that they will be able to maintain their housing costs moving forward. HPRP provides a source of short-term rental and utility assistance to Rhode Islanders who would be homeless but for the program.

### **Proposed Accomplishments**

Secure 250 additional rental assistance vouchers over the next five years

All of this assistance will be provided to extremely-low income households.

### **Objective I.5:**

**Promote development of affordable homes in communities that lack affordable housing stock**

One of the primary goals of the State of Rhode Island's Consolidated Plan is to provide more affordable housing opportunities in every municipality. Changes to the State's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act in 2004 required Rhode Island's 29 rural and suburban municipalities to adopt affordable housing plans detailing local strategies to increase their supply of affordable housing to 10% of their housing stock. All of these plans have now been adopted by the local communities and approved by the State.

In the last five years, strides have been made toward greater production of affordable rental and homeownership units in these 29 municipalities, with an estimated production of nearly 700 units. Though original affordable housing plan goals have not been met for this timeframe, the groundwork has been set in most municipalities for future production. Affordable housing committees have been formed and technical assistance from the state and advocacy organizations has been made available. CDBG and HOME as well as other state programs prioritize use of

funding toward affordable housing programs in these 29 municipalities.

HOME funding used in these municipalities will continue to target primarily low-income renters (50% and 60% AMI) and moderate-income homebuyers (up to 80% AMI). The programmatic uses of the state's affordable housing bond, known as Building Home Rhode Island (BHRI), apportions 80% of its funding toward rental development and 20% for homeownership. While some of the funding for rental may sometimes fill gaps for units serving extremely low-income households, the primary population for this funding are moderate-income renters (up to 80% AMI) and middle-income homebuyers (up to 100% AMI).

**Proposed Accomplishments:**

Approximately 40% of the state's affordable housing to be built between 2010-15 will be developed among these 29 municipalities—an anticipated goal of 700 units. Of that goal, approximately 500 units will be rental for low-to-moderate income households, and 200 units will be homeownership for moderate-to-middle income households.

## **II. MEETING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY**

**Objectives:**

- II.1 Preserve affordable senior housing**
- II.2 Accommodate evolving needs and household structures of senior households with larger units to care for grandchildren or live-in aides and full-time nurses**
- II.3 Promote universal design in affordable housing development**
- II.4 Help seniors maintain and afford existing homes to age in place**

Seniors have distinct housing needs. While some may have mobility limitations, and many of the very old are frail elderly, others are capable of living independently. Some will prefer communities comprised only of seniors, while others prefer age-integrated areas. Many low-income seniors have affordability issues. Renters living on fixed incomes need the security of safe affordable housing, while owners face rising taxes and maintenance costs. For those owners who choose not to remain in their homes, Rhode Island continues to support the construction of affordable rental housing reserved for seniors in areas where they can thrive.

Due to the projected increase in Rhode Island's elderly population, the State has begun preparing housing options to meet the needs of its growing aging population. In the course of this Consolidated Plan, RI's Statewide Planning Program estimates that the 65-79 year-old age cohort will grow nearly 19%. Programs that help the elderly age in place as well as programs that promote assisted living have become a priority for Rhode Island for the period covered by this Consolidated Plan. Rhode Island will continue to access funding from the Section 202, Supportive Housing for the Elderly program to meet the needs of its aging population. This funding provides very low-income and low-income elderly households with options that allow them to live independently but in an environment that provides supportive activities such as cleaning, cooking and transportation. Successful implementation of the 202 program has led to the development of over 350 units of elderly housing in Rhode Island since 2005. However, recent changes in the federal allocation represent a challenge to matching that performance during the term of this Plan.

As important as the development of affordable units reserved for elders, however, is the design and

nature of those units and the communities they comprise. While aging-in-place remains of primary importance for the senior community and advocates, the evolution of a diversity of lifestyles among the ever-widening age range of elders is anticipated over the next five years. It is the objective of RI's Consolidated Plan to meet these needs as much as possible.

#### *Aging in Place*

A major component of allowing seniors to age-in-place will be the state's implementation of the nation's first use of the Global Waiver. The RI Global Consumer Choice Compact Waiver, or "Global Waiver", was approved by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services on January 16, 2009. The Global Waiver establishes a new five year Federal-State compact that intends to provide the State with greater flexibility to provide services in a more cost effective way that will better meet the needs of Rhode Islanders.

In accordance with legislation passed in 2006 (and updated in years since) entitled the "Long Term Care Reform Act", the Global Waiver will focus on "Re-balancing" the care system for people as they age with a focus on a "Continuum of Care" model. This will involve increasing access to alternatives to institutional care, which includes home care, adult day care, shared living, and assisted living.

There is a growing awareness that housing is the foundation on which an effective and cost-efficient long term care system can be developed and is a critical need for those transitioning out of institutions. Discussions on rate reform for Medicaid Assisted Living and other community based programs are ongoing, signifying an effort to invest in these programs for seniors with low incomes. The Global Waiver also gives permission to the State to allow persons receiving in home services through Medicaid to receive a higher maintenance and personal needs allowance that could offset the cost of housing in the community. However, due to budget constraints the State has not implemented this provision.

This new focus on de-institutionalization has already begun to create an increased need for additional assisted living residences and access to affordable housing in the community. However, there continues to be lack of affordable housing for seniors in the community. Many subsidized housing programs have lengthy waiting lists, which creates a significant barrier to transitioning individuals from institutions to the community. In addition, advocates continue to be concerned about the growing demand by residents in market-rate assisted living residences who have "spent-down" their assets and now need a Medicaid waiver to remain in their unit. State budget constraints are also having a substantial impact on available funding allocated towards the rebalancing effort and increased demand for community based care programs.

To help meet the needs of the growing frail elderly population, Rhode Island Housing continues to coordinate with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) on the Rhode Island Assisted Housing Living Waiver program, which is now part of the "Global Medicaid Waiver:". The 151 units in the three developments in the Rhode Island Assisted Housing Waiver maintain funding under the reorganization of all Medicaid waivers into one single "Global Waiver". Now that Assisted Living has become a service under the Global Waiver, the EOHHS has the authority to confirm an unlimited number of community based services (including Assisted Living, Adult Day Services and Homecare) to people who meet the newly established Level of Care (LOC) as long as the State has budgeted the available funds in the Global Waiver.

In addition, Rhode Island Housing will continue to promote increased affordable housing options for the elderly through its Home Equity Conversion Mortgage, discussed previously, and through the HOME program, which awards HOME funds to rehabilitate substandard units for the elderly. This will help ensure that housing units are in adequate condition for those elderly aging in place.

Rhode Island Housing will also work aggressively to preserve all subsidized elderly developments with expiring affordability restrictions. In communities where there is a demand for subsidized rental units available to the elderly, new construction will be considered.

#### *Accommodate evolving needs and household structures*

The RI Department of Elderly Affairs estimates that nearly 19,000 households in the state are headed by persons over age 65 with minor children. Moreover, there are more than 32,000 frail elderly households, who increasingly require assistance with daily needs. Between the responsibilities of providing a home for their grandchildren or the need for space for a care provider, there is a growing trend for units that are larger than a typical one-bedroom apartment as well as developments that allow for children.

There has been a growth in the number of developments across the state requiring residents to be 55+. Programmatically, this is not a priority for the state's HOME funding. However, in cases where HOME is provided, those units provide for family households without age restriction, enabling more inter-generational developments and choice of housing accommodation for seniors caring for grandchildren.

#### *Universal design*

The recognition of the importance and advantages of universal design have grown tremendously since the last Consolidated Plan. While it continues to be of special significance to the elderly population, its applicability more broadly is being recognized by developers and investors. More features of universal design are becoming mainstream and incorporated into federal and state subsidized housing developments.

### **Proposed Accomplishments**

- Develop 200 rental units reserved for extremely-low and low-income seniors over the next five years. These projects will include a mix of unit types and sizes, including units accessible to persons with disabilities and other special needs populations.
- Increase the number of elderly who are able to remain in their homes or in assisted living or other community-based housing with the assistance of Medicaid and other state and federal supports.

## **III. SUSTAINABLE AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

### **Objective III.1:**

**Promote development of affordable homes in areas where residents will have access to jobs, services, and public transit**

A measure of the long-term success of affordable housing is the positive impact on the lives of its

residents and its footprint on the community. The most successful developments are incorporated into the fabric of the community and provide means for residents to improve their lives. With this in mind, the state of Rhode Island has two strategic planning documents that complement each other and promote the kind of “smart growth” strategies that emphasize the sustainability of affordable housing by developing near jobs, services and public transit.

The State’s *Land Use 2025* and its Strategic Housing Plan both provide blueprints for how the state should develop its scarce land. Already starting out as the smallest state in the country with substantial underground water further limiting land supply, Rhode Island also has limited public infrastructure to support highly dense housing. Its Urban Services Boundary (USB), which defines the boundary of its public infrastructure, provides residence to more than 75% of the state’s population. Outside the USB, the state’s development pattern is one of villages—a vestige of its long history of mills. The state’s objective is to retain this pattern of development whenever possible enabling the maximum financial feasibility for development while providing for the easiest access for residents to jobs, services and public transit.

Key to this effort is a more effective, convenient and financially secure public transportation system. While Rhode Island Housing’s HOME and LIHTC programs and the state’s Building Home RI and Neighborhood Opportunity Program give priority to housing development proposals with access to public transportation, this goal is sometimes difficult to achieve in the rural areas of the state, especially where bus routes sometimes only run once a day often from Park & Ride stations, which require the use of personal transportation. Transportation to employment, shopping and services are necessary features for well-planned affordable housing. Non-profit housing developers and advocates for the homeless and seniors regard the lack of regular public transportation as a major deterrent to developing affordable housing outside the major urban corridor. It also provides an oft-cited reason for rural towns to not accommodate proposed affordable housing development.

To further the objective of promoting a more sustainable development pattern in the state and establishing a new philosophy of collaboration and coordination between the state and local partners that are needed to achieve that goal, in 2007, Rhode Island Housing and an Advisory Committee made up primarily of state agencies and statewide housing, smart growth and environmental organizations, launched KeepSpace. This groundbreaking initiative complements the smart growth focus of *Land Use 2025* while promoting a collaborative approach to achieving those goals. The initiative brings together a wide range of partners at the local, regional and state level to work collaboratively toward the goal of creating communities where neighbors meet, people work and children play. There are 6 key elements to a KeepSpace Community. They are: a Good Home, A Healthy Environment, Strong Commerce, Sensible Infrastructure, Positive Community Impact, and Integrated Arts, Recreation, Culture and Religion. In 2008 the Advisory Committee selected the first four pilot KeepSpace Communities following a competitive application process. Those four communities are Pawtucket/Central Falls, the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, the Cranston Print Works site and surrounding neighborhood in Cranston, and downtown Westerly. These communities and the collaborative approach that is being taken to revitalize them are a model for future community development in Rhode Island.

The importance of combining the provision of affordable housing with community development, neighborhood revitalization and environmental protection is reflected in the priorities of both the HOME program and the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Activities that are part of a neighborhood plan, including those in Enterprise Zones, Growth

Centers and that embody the KeepSpace elements are given priority for funding under both programs and coordination is encouraged between HOME and CDBG funding sources.

**Proposed Accomplishments:**

90% of affordable homes developed will be in the Urban Services Boundary (USB) and/or near villages/growth centers outside the USB or in KeepSpace Communities

**Objective III.2:**

Increase the health and sustainability of affordable homes through improved energy efficiency, use of healthy materials and systems, and low-impact design

Improvements in technology and the growing importance of energy efficiency have brought about an increased use of healthy and sustainable practices not just in the provision of market-rate housing, but also in affordable housing. In fact, it is sometimes the projected savings from these practices over the course of a project's lifetime that may ensure its financial feasibility. The state is committed to maximizing the energy efficiency and healthy housing qualities of the affordable homes it finances while responsibly considering up front development costs as well as long-term potential savings.

**Proposed Accomplishments:**

- All new production of affordable homes will meet Energy Star standards
- 836 existing affordable apartments will be weatherized
- All rehabilitated properties will be lead-free, lead-safe, or lead-mitigated

### **C. Public Housing**

The State of Rhode Island does not directly own or administer Federal public housing. Therefore the requirements of this section do not apply to the State's Consolidated Plan. While Rhode Island Housing acts as the Housing Authority for municipalities without their own Authority, there are an additional 24 housing authorities administering 9,695 units of public housing and 8,468 units of Section 8. Given the importance of public housing and housing authorities in meeting the state's affordable housing needs, three objectives relative to public housing are outlined below.

#### **OBJECTIVE 1:**

##### **Support resident leadership initiatives**

The emergence of resident leadership initiatives in the late 1960s proved a sea change to the management and performance of public housing developments across the country. Though sometimes challenging, the investment of residents in the life of their communities has proven a boon to the quality of life and a benefit to the surrounding community as personal responsibility for the safety and attractiveness of public housing developments improved. The movement has grown and matured tremendously over the last nearly four decades with more formal training available for resident leaders. Even in developments where no formal resident body exists, a culture of participation for other programs—like daycare, healthcare, senior activities—has emerged. Rhode Island fully supports and participates in these initiatives.

The Rhode Island Public Housing Tenants Association, Inc. (RIPHTA) was formed in 1996. The purpose of RIPHTA is to provide public housing residents in Rhode Island with education, technical assistance and support to establish or strengthen public housing resident councils, so public housing residents can participate intelligently with their housing authorities in decisions being made about their housing, including potential economic opportunity. A major activity for the organization was established with passage of the new Public Housing Law in October 1998. RIPHTA is working with Resident Advisory Boards (RAB) to assist the housing authorities and make written recommendations regarding the development of the authorities' Five-Year and Annual Plans.

Beyond such formal activities as the RABs, the attitude of self-sufficiency is promoted further outside the setting of public housing by the Housing Choice Voucher program, which supports the Family Self-Sufficiency program. Rhode Island Housing has a Family Self Sufficiency program, which is discussed further in the Anti-Poverty Strategy, for residents Certificate and Voucher holders throughout the State. Fourteen PHAs, including Rhode Island Housing, have implemented FSS programs. Others offer job training/education and homeownership programs. Housing Authorities with active FSS programs include: Bristol, Central Falls, Coventry, Cumberland, East Greenwich, East Providence, Johnston, Narragansett, North Providence, Pawtucket, Portsmouth, Providence and Warren. Through the FSS program, participants establish contracts that establish education, job training and employment goals that will help them become economically independent. At the same time, housing authorities establish escrow accounts in which residents deposit a portion of their income if it increases due to these activities. While residents are encouraged to use their escrow accounts to purchase houses, they can use their savings for education or other purposes.

## **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Rhode Island will continue its support of resident leadership initiatives and seek opportunities to collaborate and/or sponsor activities of resident boards

### **OBJECTIVE 2:**

#### **Work with PHAs to preserve stock of public housing**

Per Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations, PHAs are now required to submit one year and five year Agency Plans outlining their policies and anticipated future activities. These plans must be consistent with the Consolidated Plan in effect for that community. For PHAs in nonentitlement communities, agency plans must be consistent with the State's Consolidated Plan.

Rhode Island recognizes the need for allowing PHAs flexibility in developing their Agency Plans. To reconcile this need for flexibility with the responsibility of ensuring that statewide affordable housing needs are met for all Rhode Island populations, Rhode Island Housing has developed a general policy for certifying PHA Agency Plans. The underlying premise is that if a PHA is addressing the needs of all Rhode Islanders eligible for its housing, either directly, or by providing alternate housing opportunities, the plan will be consistent with this document.

More and more PHAs in Rhode Island are also creating non-profit subsidiaries to develop affordable housing. Rhode Island Housing works closely with the PHAs to fund housing development through its various financing programs including HOME and LIHTC.

The issue of replacement of the preservation of public housing units receives particular attention in the review of the PHA plans. Currently, public housing represents over a quarter of the state's 36,281 units of affordable housing. If a PHA is planning to decrease its public housing units, through demolition, conversion to Section 8 vouchers, designation of housing for a particular population, or any other action that will result in a net loss of units or a loss in housing opportunities for any specific population, the PHA must provide a clear statement as to how it will address this loss of housing or loss of housing opportunity to meet current and future need with a plan for "one for one" replacement of lost units. As a general rule, PHAs should replace lost units with units of comparable size, amenities, rent levels and tenant protections. Any changes to waiting list, selection and placement criteria must be in accordance with the State's Fair Housing Plan. For example, a plan for income targeting would need to include viable affordable housing opportunities for those households that will lose affordable housing opportunities due to this action. If units are demolished, the plan would need to include provisions for the replacement of such housing. This includes the provision of alternative opportunities for those that may be displaced as well as those on the waiting list. If housing is designated for a particular population, alternative housing options must be identified for those populations excluded from eligibility.

A PHA may still receive support from the State to undertake an activity that may appear to conflict with the Consolidated Plan, if it provides adequate alternatives for the populations that will be affected by such activities. There are several programs available—many through Rhode Island Housing—that PHAs could access to help develop housing alternatives for such activities. Rhode Island Housing will continue to be available to explain the options available to PHAs interested in accessing these alternatives.

### **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Work with PHAs to preserve existing public housing units. Areas within the state’s jurisdiction of the Consolidated Plan must demonstrate one-for-one replacement of any public housing units proposed to be eliminated.

### **OBJECTIVE 3:**

#### **Upgrade energy efficiency and address healthy housing issues in PHA stock**

Although the state has no direct ownership or oversight of public housing, the contribution of these units to the overall provision of affordable housing in the state merits the state’s dedication to the continued upgrade and safety of these units for the residents.

Each year each housing authority receives Capital Fund Program funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for capital improvement projects. Upon passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, each housing authority received a supplemental amount of “stimulus” funds through HUD based on the Capital Fund Program formula. In Rhode Island \$18,812,906 was distributed to twenty-five housing authorities. Projects included interior upgrades as well as more than a dozen authorities using the funds toward energy efficiency efforts, such as replacing windows and heating systems, improving ventilation; and improved safety and accessibility features, including elevators and ADA modifications.

Additionally, several housing authorities applied for and were successful in receiving \$1.78 million of funding through a competitive round. Three housing authorities that received the additional funding are working on projects that include installation of solar panels to provide heat and hot water; building repairs that include new energy efficient windows; and improved accessibility for residents with mobility problems.

Rhode Island Housing and the state’s Housing Resources Commission are both members of the state’s Department of Health (HEALTH) Healthy Housing Collaborative, which has taken on the task of working with PHAs to improve and eliminate health risks at their developments.

One such initiative is between the State’s Department of Health and the Newport Public Housing Authority and its development Newport Heights, where clinicians have worked with residents to improve their environment relative to their asthma needs. In 2005, the *Healthy Residents, Healthy Homes (HRHH)* Coalition was formed to design, oversee, and evaluate an intervention to reduce the burden of asthma among residents of the Newport Housing Authority. The Coalition was formed in response to the Housing Authority Director’s concern about the use of the emergency department (ED) by NHA residents. The *HRHH* intervention began in 2006 and continued through October 2009. Its goal was to reduce asthma ED visits and hospitalizations among the NHA residents with asthma through environmental intervention in the home and increasing access to asthma care and education. A multidisciplinary Response Team implemented the *HRHH* intervention. Team members included a NHA social worker, housing authority maintenance staff and housing managers, and a RI Parent Information Network (RIPIN) Parent Consultant. The RIPIN Consultant served as the Response Team coordinator.

The multifaceted intervention had seven major components. Key overall outcomes among participants of the intervention included the following:

- Reduced environmental asthma triggers and improved health care access
- Improvements in asthma symptoms & quick relief medical usage
- Reductions in composite “asthma out of control”
- Data too limited on ED and hospitalizations to draw conclusion
- Smoke-free housing policy developed and due to go into effect April 1, 2010

Funding for the intervention was provided by the CDC-funded RI Department of Health Asthma Control Program, the Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1 (EPA), the US Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), and the Newport Housing Authority. Key partners included: American Lung Association of New England; Asthma Regional Council of NE; East Bay Community Action Program; Hasbro Children’s Hospital; Neighborhood Health Plan of New England; Newport Chamber of Commerce; Newport Hospital; RI Asthma Control Coalition; RI Department of Health’s Tobacco, Asthma, and Healthy Homes Programs; RI Healthy Housing Collaborative; RI Parent Information Network; and the Southern RI Area Health Education Center.

The *HRHH* intervention contributes to the RI Department of Health’s commitment to eliminate asthma disparities based on income, race/ethnicity, and geographic location. Newport is one of Rhode Island’s core cities. Rhode Island defines a core city as any city where the child poverty rate exceeds 15%. Funded by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the NHA provides affordable housing to eligible low-income families, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. HUD sets the lower income limits at 80% and very low-income limits at 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area where the public housing is located. Most public housing residents have incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty threshold.

**PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

The state’s housing agencies will continue to participate in the Healthy Housing Collaborative and to support and leverage resources, when available, toward the energy efficiency and health of public housing developments.

## **D. Homelessness**

Rhode Island has been addressing homelessness through a cooperative Continuum of Care effort led by the State Housing Resources Commission's (HRC's) Office of Homelessness. The Office of Homelessness coordinates the statewide Continuum of Care planning process, working year round to plan and coordinate an effective response to homelessness. The full Office of Homelessness, with wide representation from public and private organizations and individuals representing the range of service providers and homeless constituencies, meets quarterly to evaluate trends in the needs of the homeless, the effectiveness of current strategies, and progress in implementing the 10 year plan to end homelessness. A Coordinating Committee meets monthly to review and help coordinate the work of the various sub-committees and plan for quarterly meetings of the Office of Homelessness. There are a number of subcommittees, focused on specific issues like data quality, employment and training, and the Continuum of Care application, that meet regularly and whose work informs the Office of Homelessness. Rhode Island Housing, which co-chairs the Office of Homelessness and the Continuum of Care Subcommittee, is responsible for preparing and submitting the annual Continuum of Care Application and overseeing the grants provided by HUD through the Supportive Housing Program and Shelter Plus Care. Rhode Island Housing is also the grantee for the State's HMIS grant and contracts with the system provider to maintain a statewide HMIS system.

Because of its size, Rhode Islanders, including the homeless, move readily between cities and towns to accomplish activities of daily living. Services tend to be centralized and most agencies have statewide or regional service delivery areas. Due to the unique geography and close relationships among service providers in Rhode Island, the Office of Homelessness and community providers continue to promote a coordinated statewide Continuum of Care as the best system for addressing homelessness in the state. The Continuum of Care strategy is an outgrowth of initiatives that have been underway through statewide planning and funding entities such as the HRC, Rhode Island Housing, and the United Way of Rhode Island since the early 1990s.

In 1996, a broad survey of community providers, in conjunction with a series of community meetings, laid the basis for the current gaps analysis and the priorities for the State's Continuum of Care. These priorities were supplemented by an assessment conducted in 1997 and focus groups held for the Consolidated Plan in 1998, 2004 and again in 2009. The priorities and goals continue to be refined each year through the Office of Homelessness as well as through meetings of the shelter and housing providers network and the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless (RICH).

The Office of Homelessness assigned high priorities to the following activities:

- Supporting continued funding to create Permanent Supportive Housing for people with disabilities who are chronically homeless
- Seamless provision of supportive services for chronically homeless persons with addictions and persons with mental illness from shelter to permanent housing
- Increase income of chronically homeless population through SOAR program and other mainstream opportunities
- Provide Permanent Supportive Housing for veterans
- Rapid re-housing and reducing length of shelter stays for families.

The Office of Homelessness assigned medium priorities to: State inter-departmental cooperation with regards to discharge policies; education of social service providers on locating and financing housing; prevention and maintaining current inventory of affordable housing. The Office of Homelessness assigned low priority to increasing knowledge of public benefits and developing new sources of funding.

A group of ten representatives from Rhode Island attended a policy academy in the spring of 2003 to begin planning for the end of chronic homelessness. After a year of work with an expanded group of funders and providers and review by federal agencies, the State's Interagency Council on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, chaired by the Housing Resources Commission, adopted a Nine Point Strategic Plan to End Chronic Homelessness as outlined below which supports the priorities identified above. This action plan is targeted at individuals who are frequent users of homeless services.

1. Establish clear leadership on homelessness in the State.
2. Promote economic benefits to gain state and local support.
3. Identify, outreach, and engage target population.
4. Create a coordinated, seamless system of care.
5. Increase access to mainstream services.
6. Provide 100 targeted individuals and families with permanent housing within two years.
7. Collaborate to develop new permanent supportive housing for 500 individuals or families.
8. Measure outcomes.
9. Enlist Policy Academy Technical Assistance to support the implementation process.

In 2005, ten representatives from Rhode Island attended a policy academy to plan for ending family homelessness. This group determined that a single integrated plan, including the above strategies, would best serve the needs of all homeless Rhode Islanders. This plan was adopted in February 2006 and was updated in December 2009.

Rhode Island will continue to use the programs below to address homeless priorities.

- **Supportive Housing Program:** The SHP program is the primary source of funding that supports the existing network of transitional and permanent supportive housing as well as some services only programs for Rhode Island's homeless. It is also one of the few programs available to support development and operating costs of new transitional and permanent supportive housing.
- **Shelter Plus Care:** Shelter + Care is the primary source of rental assistance for homeless disabled persons in Rhode Island. Because of the flexibility the program offers in where clients can be housed and the speed with which new vouchers can be put into place, this program has become a key tool in implementing the Housing First model.
- **Neighborhood Opportunities Program:** The State's Neighborhood Opportunities Program will continue to be used to support construction and operation of permanent supportive housing for disabled persons who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

- RoadHome: Like Shelter + Care, RoadHome provides flexible rental assistance and supportive services to the homeless. The program offers additional flexibility by giving the homeless a wide variety of service providers from which to choose to complete their individual self sufficiency plan.

In 2005, Rhode Island instituted the Housing First model through ACCESS RI, Riverwood Mental Health Services and House of Hope. The goal was to place 50 chronically homeless individuals in housing using the 'Housing First' model and evaluate the success both in the improved quality of life for the individuals and the cost savings for the State's institutions. An evaluation showed an annual savings of over \$9,000 per placement. This research provided the catalyst to expand the program. As of 2009, there are approximately 180 people participating in HousingFirst RI, with funding coming from SAMSHA, MHRH-PATH, the United Way and the Office of Housing and Community Development to pay for services and Rhode Island Housing for rental assistance through Shelter Plus Care and RoadHome as well as project based Section 8 and supportive housing programs. Housing First is a housing and treatment model, and due to its success is being adopted by Mental Health agencies statewide.

In addition to the overall objectives identified above, the Interagency Council has identified specific objectives in the following HUD required categories:

#### Emergency Shelters

Rhode Island will continue to assess its emergency shelter resources to ensure that an adequate and high quality system of emergency shelter for families and individuals is available throughout the state. To do so, the HRC will continue to monitor current shelters for overtaxed capacity and where possible, resolve problems through mergers or emergency expansion plans. In 2002 Rhode Island Housing provided \$1 million to improve the health and safety of the state's emergency shelter system by addressing code problems in the shelters. In 2008, an emergency operating fund was established to assist emergency shelters that were struggling with operating budget deficits but had a plan in place to balance their budgets moving forward. To increase the capacity of shelter providers, the HRC advocates continued and expanded training and information sharing opportunities.

According to the HRC Office of Homelessness, areas for further development for emergency shelter are:

- Review shelter funding process and increase state support to maintain current shelter capacity;
- Provide increased training and technical assistance to shelter providers;
- Maintain the statewide HMIS to help meet the administrative data requirements of individual providers as well as the policy and planning needs of the state; and
- Outreach to new programs that develop through private and/or faith-based organizations to participate in statewide networking and training activities through RICH.

In addition, in its October 2004 report to the Governor, the Interagency Council recommended that all shelter funding in the state be consolidated within the Housing Resources Commission. The consolidation of the HUD emergency shelter grants, Title XX funding for shelters, and Housing Resources Commission funding for shelters under the Consolidated Homeless Fund was implemented in FY07 creating a more coordinated system of funding with a rational, competitive funding process. The consolidated system has helped to insure that providers do not duplicate

services and has allowed the HRC to target resources to fill gaps in existing services. Shelter providers have benefited from the combined application process which has eliminated the need to prepare numerous separate applications for funding.

Rhode Island will continue to provide funding to its emergency shelters through the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG). Rhode Island will accept applications for ESG funding for conversion, rehabilitation or renovation of buildings as emergency shelters, operating expenses, essential services and homeless prevention in accordance with the priorities identified in the ESG scoring system. Rhode Island will continue to use these funds in conjunction with McKinney Program funds to better complete the strategies of its Continuum of Care.

#### Transitional Housing

For transitional housing, the HRC Office of Homelessness identified priorities for:

- Maintenance of existing units and development of additional units, especially for single, multi-needs individuals;
- Identification of new state and municipal resources to support existing programs;
- Continuation of funding for transitional housing through mainstream programs such as HOME;
- Continued and enhanced technical assistance to transitional housing providers.

#### **OBJECTIVE 1:**

##### **Prioritize development of more permanent supportive housing, including the Housing First model**

According to the Office of Homelessness, affordable, safe and supportive (where needed) permanent housing is the ultimate goal of the Continuum of Care for every homeless person in Rhode Island. For this reason, increasing permanent housing was given high priority by the Office of Homelessness and the Consolidated Plan. The Office of Homelessness has identified the following areas for further development:

- continued identification of new state and municipal resources to increase funding for permanent housing programs;
- continued encouragement of collaborative approaches to serve homeless individuals and families with supportive services needs;
- continued technical assistance to new or potential permanent housing providers through Rhode Island Housing, Corporation for Supportive Housing and RICH;
- expanded technical assistance, including the provision of financial and program models to assist sponsors in initiating or expanding their permanent supportive housing activity;
- continuation and expanded use of mainstream housing programs such as HOME, CDBG and the Low-income Housing Tax Credit to increase permanent supportive housing, and enhanced state and entitlement city funding of permanent supportive housing services;
- enhancing state and entitlement city funding of permanent supportive housing and services.

Rhode Island will continue to seek assistance for the development of new Permanent Supportive Housing through the Continuum of Care application. The Office of Homelessness has prioritized new funding applications that provide permanent supportive housing and consistently ranked such projects as their first priority in the annual funding application, especially those programs that serve the chronically homeless.

In addition, many of the state and federally financed housing development programs administered by Rhode Island Housing and the Housing Resources Commission prioritize projects that serve very low income populations or those with special housing needs. HOME gives high priority to projects serving the lowest income residents. Annually approximately 20 permanent rental housing for homeless and special needs units are financed through the HOME program. The Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP) used to rank applications for Housing Tax Credits also gives priority to developments which provide housing for those with incomes below 40% of AMI and to developments that provide housing for special needs groups and which provide appropriate and needed supportive services for residents in conjunction with housing. Rhode Island Housing's Special Needs Rental Production Program provides additional gap financing for projects targeting tenants who are homeless or earn less than 40% of AMI. The state's Neighborhood Opportunities Program provides operating support to allow apartments financed through traditional development programs reach tenants at very low incomes.

Stimulus programs have provided another important source of funding for the development of permanent supportive housing. The Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and CDBG-R are administered by the State Office of Housing and Community Development and staff of the Office of Homelessness. At least 25% of the housing created by NSP will be targeted to those whose incomes do not exceed 50% of the AMI including 13 units for homeless veterans and 19 units for the re-entry population. Rhode Island Housing received \$36,811,103 through ARRA in Housing Tax Credit Exchange Program (TCEP) funds and \$11,933,403 under the Tax Credit Assistance Program (TCAP). Rhode Island Housing used the criteria in its approved QAP to evaluate proposals. Five developments were awarded funding under TCEP including two which will set aside 22 units for tenants who are homeless, disabled, or earning less than 40% of AMI. Another TCEP funded development will create 19 units of affordable rental housing for formerly incarcerated individuals in Providence. Two developments include a total of 58 section 8 project-based vouchers and will provide housing to the lowest income Rhode Islanders. Four projects were awarded TCAP funding including Kingstown Crossing, which will create 58 units of permanent supportive housing for families.

Rhode Island is also creating new permanent supportive housing opportunities through the use of rental assistance vouchers. To date, 35 HUD VASH vouchers have been used by CoC agencies to move veterans into permanent housing. The Continuum has also in recent years given priority in the Continuum of Care application to new Shelter + Care vouchers which provide permanent supportive housing for homeless, disabled Rhode Islanders. As discussed earlier in this chapter, in 2007 Rhode Island Housing launched the RoadHome Program which provides service enriched rental assistance to homeless individuals and families.

#### **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- 250 units of new Permanent Supportive Housing will be created in 5 years

## **OBJECTIVE 2:**

### **Update 10-year plan to end homelessness**

The 10-year plan to end homelessness guides the vision and strategies of the Office of Homelessness. As such, it is critical, not only that the strategies in the plan be implemented in a timely manner, but also that the plan itself be constantly reviewed and updated to reflect changing conditions, new opportunities and resources, and learning from the effectiveness of programs that have been implemented. The Housing Resources Commission has restructured the Office of Homelessness to allow for more effective oversight of the 10-year plan. The full Office of Homelessness, which meets quarterly, is responsible for reviewing progress in the implementation of the strategies in the plan. A Coordinating Committee, which meets monthly, reviews trends in homelessness and program outcomes which informs the Office of Homelessness meetings.

Goals of the 10-year plan include:

- Establish political will, clear leadership and coordinated effort to promote permanent supportive housing and engage local government and the community in efforts to end homelessness;
- Collect and use data on homelessness in a coordinated, useful way that measures effectiveness;
- Match people in shelters with NOP units and other subsidized projects;
- Identify federal and state funding for production of very low income and supportive housing;
- Create rental assistance programs to subsidize rent in privately owned housing;
- Create a coordinated, effective, accessible service system and link it to housing;
- Prioritize use of mainstream services in health and mental health care;
- Collaborate to provide services for prisoner re-entry;
- Increase healthy housing stock and preserve existing housing stock;
- Identify and intervene with those at risk of becoming homeless and provide financial assistance to prevent homelessness.

The Office of Homelessness has completed the process of updating the 10-year plan which was submitted to HUD in 2009.

## **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Update 10-year plan to end homelessness in 2012, and at least every 3 years thereafter

## **OBJECTIVE 3:**

### **Continue to provide operating support for Permanent Supportive Housing through the state's Neighborhood Opportunities Program**

In 2000, Rhode Island initiated the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP) to support the development of family and permanent supportive housing for very low-income families. An annual appropriation through the Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission provides capital and operating funds to develop housing that is affordable to Rhode Island's lowest income renters, and provides the support they need to live independently. One component of the NOP is the Permanent Supportive Housing Program (PSH). Under the PSH, funds are provided for acquisition,

construction, or rehabilitation of rental housing for individuals/families who have a determination of disability by a qualified professional and who require on-going supportive services. The primary purpose of the PSH is to produce units of permanent affordable rental housing for disabled families and individuals with very low incomes who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. The PSH provides capital, operating, and supportive service funds for sponsors of supportive housing. As of December 1, 2009, 371 units had been financed through the Family Housing Fund, and 125 units had been financed through the Permanent Supportive Housing Fund.

Initially, NOP was funded at an annual appropriation level of \$1.5 million which was increased to \$5 million from FY02-FY05, and again to \$7.5 million from FY06-FY07. Unfortunately, since FY08, as the state has struggled to balance its budget, funding for the program has been slashed to \$2.5 million and limited to providing operating support for permanent supportive housing. However, the program continues to be a critical resource, one of the few available, to provide the deep operating subsidy necessary to develop permanent supportive housing for our most vulnerable residents.

#### **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Restore NOP funding to at least \$7.5 million with allowed use for capital and operating costs

#### **OBJECTIVE 4:**

**Work to connect people in shelters to permanent supportive housing to ensure long-term success**

Given the rising number of homeless that Rhode Island is experiencing, and the continuing shortage of housing affordable to this population, quickly and effectively connecting the homeless to those resources that are available is essential. Some homeless avoid the shelter system and some have multiple issues that need to be addressed which requires more intense outreach and engagement. According to the HRC Office of Homelessness, objectives for outreach, assessment and intake, as referenced in the Continuum of Care goals, include: provide technical assistance to shelters for utilization of the new HomeLocatorRI.net Special Needs tool; support CSH's effort to create partnerships between homeless providers and CDCs; institute a uniform assessment tool to streamline case managers intake; continue to enroll the homeless in the SOAR program; and, through the case management committee of the Office of Homelessness, create wrap around services with a single point of contact for homeless individuals and families.

The Coordinating Committee of the Continuum of Care monitors placements in supportive housing and utilization of shelters to ensure a seamless process. The committee works to match people to beds and has created a pipeline report with new available and under construction units for the homeless. The Coordinating Committee, monitors monthly reports on the status of transitional housing clients and identifies areas that need to be addressed to increase the percentage of homeless in permanent housing. The committee will identify agencies which fall behind and assist with technical support and work with the housing locator committee and other State agencies to identify more housing opportunities. A Medicaid Global Waiver Housing Task Force has also been established by the state to develop housing strategies and programs to allow the elderly and disabled to age in place with financial assistance through Medicaid. The Office of Homelessness will working

with the task force to promote more housing first units so that those in transitional housing programs can transition into Medicaid assisted community based units when appropriate.

In 2007 the United Way of Rhode Island initiated a 2-1-1 system in the State to provide a central location where residents in emergency situations can access information about resources available around the State to assist them, including shelter and housing. Rhode Island also has a new tool available to assist in connecting residents of shelters and transitional housing to permanent housing. In 2008 Rhode Island Housing, in partnership with Rhodes to Independence, the Housing Network and the Rhode Island Public Housing Authorities Association launched HomeLocatorRI.net. This web-based housing locator provides real time information on housing vacancies throughout the state. Managed and updated by SocialServe.com, the website has a special needs housing locator tool which provides registered case managers with access to information on housing units where landlords have indicated they would be willing to lease to those with special needs. The tool has been available since April, 2009.

Outreach teams are another tool used to reach out to homeless persons, evaluate their needs and connect them with resources. In the 2002 Continuum of Care application, HUD funded the ACCESS RI program. The ACCESS program is a national model that serves people with a history of homelessness who are suffering from mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders. The program provides outreach, case management, housing placement, alcohol and drug abuse services, mental health and counseling services and transportation. One of the priorities of the nine point strategy is to identify, outreach to, and engage the long term homeless population through ACCESS, the Providence Center, People to End Homelessness and other existing outreach efforts.

In 2005, the state of Rhode Island and the United Way of Rhode Island created the Housing First program to address chronic homelessness in the state by housing 50 homeless single adults in subsidized apartments and by providing those clients with the services they needed to stay housed. The program was designed according to “Housing First” principles which involve rapid access to permanent housing with voluntary access to a variety of services. Riverwood Mental Health Services provides the case management to program clients. In that role, the agency does extensive outreach to homeless individuals with mental illness in shelters and on the street to link them with housing and supportive services.

Crossroads Rhode Island, the state’s largest provider of housing and services to the homeless, also has staff dedicated to providing outreach to the unsheltered homeless, in addition to the large number of homeless they provide housing counseling to through their main facility in Providence.

Rhode Island is also using Rhode Island Housing’s RoadHome program and stimulus funding through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) to help move the homeless into permanent housing. The RoadHome program’s primary goal is to reduce the time spent in shelters. Participants access the program through shelters and agencies which assist the homeless and receive rental assistance in private apartments where services are also provided. Most placements are straight from shelter. Another component of RoadHome is Emergency Housing Assistance (RHEHA). This program is designed to provide short-term assistance with rent or security deposits for households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and will be able to sustain their housing costs moving forward.

The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) has funds for short and medium term rental assistance, to rapidly re-house people who are in shelter. The state awarded funding under HPRP in September 2009 to housing and service providers across the state. Those agencies are currently in the process of ramping up their programs.

**PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- Case managers will be trained in the use of HomeLocatorRI.net.
- All new subsidized affordable homes in the state will be required to list on the site.
- Coordinating Committee of the Office of Homelessness will create and maintain a pipeline report with new available and under construction units for the homeless and will coordinate with emergency shelter and transitional housing providers to match the homeless to available beds.
- Utilize HPRP to move people from shelter to permanent supportive housing

**OBJECTIVE 5:**

**Continue to expand utilization of HMIS and use data to improve homeless programs and service**

The Rhode Island Continuum of Care was awarded funding in 2001 to implement an Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). On July 1, 2003 the HMIS was implemented in all emergency shelters, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing and agencies that receive Supportive Service only grants. Participation in HMIS is also required of all recipients of Emergency Shelter Grants, HPRP and RoadHome. Rhode Island already has a high participation rate in HMIS with over 80% of emergency shelter and transitional housing beds utilizing the system as of December 2009.

The Office of Homelessness relies on the information provided through the HMIS system and point-in-time count to evaluate trends in homelessness and the effectiveness of the State's current strategies and programs. Therefore it is essential that the system be utilized by as many homeless providers as possible and that the information they enter be accurate and complete. To achieve this goal a Data Quality sub-committee of the Office of Homelessness is being formed which is comprised of sub-grantees and representatives from non-funded agencies which serve the homeless. The responsibilities of the sub-committee will be: to investigate the causes for poor quality and recommend training for the HMIS Steering Committee to conduct; review software generated reports and research any poor data quality issues with pertinent agency staff; assess technical needs of agencies who utilize the system and assist with upgrades; and look for additional funds for the system. The committee will review the skills and education required for successful use of the system and work with agencies to ensure new staff meet the requirements, promote the use of reporting tools to increase data quality and timely inputs of data and will monitor AHAR data by running reports quarterly to identify problems and to resolve those issues that are uncovered.

**PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- New Data Quality Committee will review data on a quarterly basis
- Improve bed coverage to 90%

## **E. Other Special Needs**

### **Objective 1:**

#### **Maintain and expand services for those at risk of becoming homeless**

The current foreclosure crisis and the accompanying economic recession has left many families and individuals without the financial resources to support their housing costs. Since 2007 an increasing number of Rhode Islanders have sought assistance saving their home from foreclosure, seeking alternative housing when the apartment they were living in was foreclosed upon, or finding a more affordable home when their income was reduced as a result of job loss or reduced hours. Rhode Island has relied on a number of existing programs as well as new funding programs and initiatives to help meet this rising level of need.

Since the mid 1980s, Rhode Island has had an Emergency Housing Assistance Program financed by Rhode Island Housing to help persons in temporary crisis make rental or mortgage payments or establish themselves in a housing unit. Assistance is limited to two months rent for those who demonstrate that they are able to continue paying rent once they are in housing. In 2009, Emergency Housing became a component of Rhode Island Housing's RoadHome program and was expanded to allow participation by people who are already homeless or are facing the loss of housing as a result of foreclosure.

As of June 2009, the RoadHome Emergency Housing Assistance Program (RHEHA) and its predecessor, EHAP has assisted 27,205 households. The program has helped 18,916 Rhode Islanders remain in housing and has helped 8,287 homeless Rhode Islanders find permanent housing. Over the past nine years, this program has served approximately 3,000 households per year. Of these households, more than half were single parents with an average of two children and over one third were minorities. Additionally, over 1,100 households assisted over the last four years have been Family Independence Program recipients. RHEHA is available to households below 80% of median income.

The newly created Housing Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), which is administered by the State's Office of Housing and Community Development, provides longer term assistance to those that would be homeless but for that assistance. A three year grant, the program has combined all the State's HPRP funds (State, Providence, Pawtucket and Woonsocket) to prevent homelessness and to rapidly re-house those that are currently homeless. Rental assistance of up to 18 months is available, but participants must be self sufficient after the 18 months. Case management and financial literacy education are required to access the rental and prevention assistance.

The State's Community Action Programs (CAPs) also provide case management, and assistance accessing food, RHEHA funds, health care, employment and training to low-income families. Many CAPs are now also providing HPRP funding and counseling to clients at risk of homelessness.

Rhode Island is one of the states that has been hit hardest by the foreclosure crisis. In response to a rapid increase in homeowners and tenants facing foreclosure, Rhode Island Housing opened its HelpCenter in 2007. The Help Center is staffed by trained housing counselors experienced in loan servicing who work directly with clients to determine the solution that is right for them and negotiate with their loan servicers to restructure their mortgage whenever possible. Since the

HelpCenter opened its doors over 6,000 Rhode Islanders have requested assistance and more than 2,500 have completed counseling or are actively receiving counseling. Of those that have completed counseling, more than 1,100 were able to remain in their home, a success rate much higher than the federal loan restructuring initiatives have achieved. The HelpCenter works closely with HUD approved housing counselors based at the Housing Network of Rhode Island and their member community development corporations which also provide foreclosure prevention counseling in the community to their clients. The work of the HelpCenter has been supported by federal funding through the Neighborworks Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling Program (NFMC) and the United Way of Rhode Island.

Another program that is helping keep homeowners in their homes was established by the Madeline Walker Act in 2006. Under the program, cities, towns, and other taxing authorities are required to notify Rhode Island Housing of delinquent liens prior to tax sale. Rhode Island Housing is then given a right of first refusal to purchase the lien on any owner-occupied 1-4 unit property.

This program allows Rhode Island Housing (and the Department of Elderly Affairs, in the case of elderly homeowners) a greater opportunity to get involved with at risk homeowners early enough in the process to determine the underlying reasons that they have not paid their taxes and to offer counseling and financial assistance where appropriate. Many times these homeowners are also struggling with other financial issues (including foreclosure), and receive assistance or referrals so that they can sustain their housing costs moving forward.

Since the inception of this act, Rhode Island Housing has provided outreach to more than 13,000 homeowners facing tax sale and exercised its right of first refusal by acquiring 1,808 tax liens totaling more than \$5 million in 49 taxing authorities. Through September 30, 2009, 627 homeowners have redeemed their properties statewide.

As foreclosures of multi-family units are increasing, the concern of increased family homelessness is already being realized. The Continuum of Care has established a homeless families subcommittee to insure all resources are working together effectively and efficiently as well as to create linkages for those at risk of homelessness to existing services and resources. The members of the subcommittee will include HPRP agencies, the Department of Children Youth and Families (DCYF), the Department of Education, family shelters, consumers and local LEAs (homeless children liaisons at the Department of Education). The subcommittee will gather data to determine which homeless families are receiving services through programs that they qualify for. With this data the subcommittee will be able to better identify where homeless families are located and what assistance they need. The subcommittee will also work with the Coordinating Committee to ensure that the permanent housing pipe line includes adequate family units with various bedroom sizes to meet identified needs.

## **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Assist 3,000 households per year through RHEHA
- Utilize HPRP to prevent 1,000 Rhode Islanders from becoming homeless over 3 years
- Provide assistance through the HelpCenter to 2,000 households over the next five years

## **OBJECTIVE 2:**

### **Increase housing opportunities for veterans and their families**

For years veterans have been disproportionately represented among the homeless in Rhode Island and nationally. The current economic recession combined with the increasing number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan has only increased ranks of homeless vets. Rhode Island has two non-profit organizations which serve only veterans: Veterans Action Center and Operation Stand Down. These agencies have excellent outreach and engagement programs for homeless veterans, which ensure utilization of vouchers and supportive housing. It is anticipated that as the Veterans Administration provides service grant opportunities for community based organizations these two agencies will be well positioned to assist our returning veterans. Conversations to increase collaborations between these agencies and mental health and substance abuse organizations are already occurring to ensure a full range of services for the veterans.

The Veterans Administration is increasing programs for veteran's services and housing and this increased support is expected to continue. Providence Housing Authority has already applied for and received 35 VASH vouchers for chronically homeless veterans. As additional requests for proposals are released for these vouchers, housing authorities around the state will continue to apply for rental assistance to assist veterans.

Veterans are also a priority population under the state's Continuum of Care. In 2007 Rhode Island was awarded a new Supportive Housing Program grant to develop 14 units of permanent supportive housing for veterans and their families with services to be provided on-site. Operation Stand Down has also recently completed fourteen units of housing for veterans.

## **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Provide housing assistance to an additional 300 veterans in the next five years

## **OBJECTIVE 3:**

### **Work with Department of Corrections to expand housing opportunities for individuals re-entering the community**

Rhode Island is also a national leader in the areas of reentry and discharge planning policy. On March 1, 2004 the Governor of Rhode Island formed a Reentry Steering Committee which is responsible for coordinating reentry initiatives statewide, developing policy and overcoming policies and practices that impede successful reintegration. The Rhode Island Department of Corrections has received a grant from the Department of Justice totaling \$3.5 million to provide housing for people being discharged from the criminal justice system.

The Department of Corrections has created a strong foundation within its discharge planning for those leaving prison to find adequate housing and employment. This includes: allowing community based agencies to assist discharge planners in anticipation of release; developing an assessment tool which follows inmates from initial intake through a successful discharge; having the Department of Labor and Training (DLT) provide green jobs training within the prison – with prisoners receiving requisite certifications prior to discharge; DLT generated tax credits for employers who hire those

discharged; job coaching of ex-offenders paid for by DLT; and a bonding program which insures the ex-offenders, relieving the employer of this burden. This proactive, multi-agency approach is just gearing up and should have measurable outcomes by 2015.

The Department of Corrections continues to advocate for Re-Entry Supportive Housing for those returning to the community, particularly those transitioning out of either foster care or corrections. Emphasis is placed on semi-structured environments where members can learn or re-learn life skills and access support and contact of peers who have faced similar trauma. Coordinated supportive services will help to minimize or mitigate issues involving persistent mental health, substance use and other chronic health challenges, as well as those at risk of homelessness. Such options provide alternatives to being forced to find emergency housing amongst vulnerable populations, cohabitating with others in substandard housing or returning to the prison system.

OPEN DOORS, formerly the Family Life Center, is the only nonprofit organization in the state dedicated to assisting people re-entering the community. The organization has received funding to develop 19 units of permanent supportive housing targeted to this population which should be completed by 2011.

#### **PROPOSED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Continue to support development of affordable housing for re-entry population
- Continue to implement strategies and recommendations of the Governor's Council on Re-entry

## F. Non-Housing Community Development

### Overview

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations at 24 CFR Part 91.315 require that an assessment of non-housing community development needs be completed by recipients as part of its Consolidated Plan process. Rhode Island's needs were determined through the analysis of past application/proposals received, review of locally prepared Comprehensive Plans, completion of past Community Development Focus Groups and examination of comments received through the Citizens Participation Process outlined herein.

### Priorities

The CDBG program is a locally-driven program under which priorities are generally set by units of general local government (UGLG) through completion of their citizens' participation process, which takes into account local conditions and needs. These local priorities are detailed in each community's annual application submitted to the State. However, the State has adopted overarching statewide priorities based on its own research/analysis and consultation process.

The primary purpose of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 is the development of viable "urban" communities by providing decent housing, expanding economic opportunity and creating a suitable living environment principally for persons of low/moderate income. This statement generally defines the State's overall intent of the State CDBG program. The State has adopted certain specific priority activities/concepts under this program to encourage successful efforts, as detailed below.

Within the context of the statutory purpose of the HCDA, the State funds a myriad of eligible activities all designed to address at least one the following national objectives:

- ❑ **Predominate benefit to low/moderate income persons;**
  - ❑ **Prevention/elimination of slums and blight; and**
  - ❑ **Elimination of serious and imminent threats to public health and welfare.**

The primary national objective is predominate benefit to low/moderate income persons. Minimally, 70% of CDBG funds distributed will predominately benefit low/moderate income persons in accordance with federal regulations.

Within the broad categories of eligibility under the CDBG program, the State has adopted the following priority activities relative to its CDBG program:

- ❑ Housing;
- ❑ Economic Development; and
- ❑ Neighborhood Revitalization

### Activities

Consolidated Plan regulations state that non-housing community development needs must be

described by CDBG eligibility categories. State CDBG regulations (24 CFR Part 570) reference the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 (Section 105(a)), as amended, for such a list of eligible activities.

The following generally lists eligible activities as defined by Section 105(a) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974.

- ❑ Acquisition of Real Property
- ❑ Public Facilities and Improvements and Privately-Owned Utilities
- ❑ Code Enforcement
- ❑ Clearance, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Construction of Buildings (including Housing)
- ❑ Architectural Barrier Removal
- ❑ Loss of Rental Income
- ❑ Disposition of Real Property
- ❑ Public Services
- ❑ Payment of the Non-Federal Share
- ❑ Relocation
- ❑ Planning and Capacity Building
- ❑ program Administration Costs
- ❑ Activities Carried Out Through Nonprofit Development Organizations
- ❑ Economic Development Assistance to For-Profit Businesses
- ❑ Technical Assistance
- ❑ Housing Services
- ❑ Assistance to Institutions of Higher Education
- ❑ Microenterprise Assistance
- ❑ In-Rem Housing
- ❑ Homeownership Assistance

### **PRIORITY - Neighborhood Revitalization**

Neighborhood revitalization is defined as a concentrated investment of resources, federal, State and otherwise, for the purpose of making demonstrable improvements in a designated distressed area.

The State's Community Development Block Grant Program defines "designated distressed area" as any area which is predominately, greater than 51%, low/moderate income. The target area boundaries must be consistent with and encompass the entire true "neighborhood". The State does NOT restrict its revitalization areas to those which are consistent with the HUD-defined Community Revitalization Strategy Areas (CRSA). A community may opt for such designation, permitting regulatory flexibilities, at their discretion. Although some target areas could likely qualify as a HUD CRSA/NRSA, none have requested such designation.

Neighborhood Revitalization is a central focus in the State's attempt to foster community development. The impact of activities in such comprehensive "holistic" treatments is dramatically increased.

Comprehensive programs can consist of a multitude of activities, designed to serve the needs of a

predominately low/moderate income area and its residents. These activities may include:

- ❑ Housing Development and/or Rehabilitation
- ❑ Public Facility Improvements
- ❑ Community Infrastructure Improvements
- ❑ Economic Development Activities
- ❑ Human Services
- ❑ Among others...

To effectively prepare for the above projects, it is essential that sufficient planning also be supported to guide local efforts. To this end, the State has made its Community Development Block Grant program Technical Assistance monies available for these purposes.

Predominately low/moderate income areas which do not have an active revitalization program are considered potential opportunities for such efforts. However, often such area census tract/block group boundaries are not consistent with the true neighborhood and therefore ineligible for funds. Also appended to this document are maps showing the general location of CDBG revitalization areas.

There are other efforts throughout the State which target resources to particular areas. These include the following:

- ❑ State Enterprise Zone/Enterprise Communities
- ❑ Brownfields Areas
- ❑ Neighborhood Opportunities Program
  - Building Better Communities Revitalization Areas
- ❑ Rhode Island Housing. Housing Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas
- ❑ Historic Districts
- ❑ Locally designated Redevelopment Areas/Districts
- ❑ Rhode Island Main Street Areas
- ❑ Governor's Growth Centers Initiative
- ❑ The KeepSpace Initiative

The State will attempt to coordinate these efforts with CDBG funded revitalization programs wherever possible. The purpose/goals of these programs may differ from the CDBG program. However, in many cases, coordination of these program efforts can improve the success of both.

### **PRIORITY - Economic Development**

Because of the limited resources available under the CDBG program, the State rarely funds large-scale economic development activities which are designed to create/retain jobs. In meeting its Economic Development priority, the State broadly identifies economic development as activities designed to assist businesses, create jobs and/or improve the job readiness of low/moderate income persons. Therefore, certain activities which are considered "public services" by HUD regulation may qualify as a State priority under this category.

Housing is a clear high priority for community development funds. However, the provision of employment/training assistance is a necessary element to an effective system of support for housing, particularly with regard to the homeless. The provision of permanent housing alone, without assuring assisted individuals have the ability to sustain such housing opportunities, cannot be expected to succeed, transitioning households from dependence to self-sufficiency. The State has therefore designated economic development as a priority activity. Such efforts directly tied to housing opportunities will be particularly competitive.

An analysis of State unemployment data at October, 2009 reveals the State's unemployment rate of 12.2 significantly exceeds the national (9.5) and New England (8.3) unemployment rates. The State CDBG program will promote job creation/retention and development activities throughout the State's non-entitlement areas, particularly in those communities with comparatively high unemployment rates.

Census 2000 information indicates a large percentage of employed persons in Rhode Island are in the "Educational, Health and Social Services" industry (23%). Retail (12.1%) and Manufacturing (16.4%) also account for significant portions of the employment industry. Training opportunities, to the maximum extent practicable, will be directed towards those occupations with the greatest chance of employment, including industries identified by the State's Economic Development Corporation (EDC).

### **PRIORITY - Coordination**

The CDBG program is a primary funding resources available to municipalities in meeting their non-housing community development needs. However, many other programs are also available to meet community development objectives, including, but not limited to:

- ❑ Rhode Island Housing
  - Various housing programs including HOME and Housing Tax Credits
- ❑ Division of Planning, Housing Resource Commission
  - Building Homes Rhode Island
  - Neighborhood Opportunities Program
  - Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program
- ❑ Department of Transportation
  - Transportation Enhancement Funds... among others
- ❑ Department of Environmental Management
  - Trees Program... among others
- ❑ Department of Elderly Affairs
- ❑ Department of Human Services
  - Title XX Funds... among others
- ❑ Economic Development Corporation
  - Mill Redevelopment Program... among others
- ❑ US Department of Housing and Urban Development
  - McKinney Homeless, Section 108... among others
- ❑ Foundations and Non-Profit Organization' Programs
  - Rhode Island Foundation, United Way, etc.

The State emphasizes coordination of resources for communities and for communication amongst providers in the implementation of community development plans. It is a priority of the State to strengthen and expand such partnerships in housing and community development. Vehicles for communication and coordination include:

- ❑ State participation in conferences and trainings for housing and community development sponsored by other State agencies, federal departments and non-profit projects sponsors;
- ❑ Participation of program administrative staff in supplementary program evaluation committees;
- ❑ Fostering direct connections between local code enforcement efforts, landlord tenant counseling and local residential rehabilitation programs.

### **Analysis of Community Development Needs**

Past CDBG applications may be the best gauge of local priority needs available. However, such may not detail those activities that, while a local priority, are able to be funded from other sources. Applications would also not detail those activities which, although local priorities, are not eligible under CDBG guidelines.

An analysis of past CDBG application received revealed the following general local priorities:

- ❑ Housing Rehabilitation/Operating
- ❑ Streets-Streetscapes
- ❑ Parks/Recreation Facilities
- ❑ Public Services (various)  
especially senior, youth/child, housing and transportation related
- ❑ Public Facilities (various)  
especially health, senior, homeless, neighborhood
- ❑ Water/Sewer Projects
- ❑ Planning and Administration

Locally prepared Comprehensive Plans detail the need for additional housing opportunities; orderly growth/development taking into account natural resources/historic character; economic development; and park/recreation facilities/programs.

An analysis of applications received and awards made under the CDBG program over the past five program years has revealed the following general priorities:

Housing	High Priority
Economic Development	High Priority
Public Improvements	Medium-High Priority
Public Facilities	Medium Priority
Public Services	Medium Priority
Planning	Medium-Low Priority

In development of previous plans, communities were surveyed to detail activities which although

they are not fundable under the Community Development Block Grant program are a local non-housing community development priority. The following items were consistently mentioned:

- ❑ Improvements to Unit of General Local Government (UGLG) buildings (non-handicap access);
- ❑ School Renovations (non-handicap access/non-LMI)
- ❑ Tourism Activities (non-planning)
- ❑ Local signage, community pride (non-LMI)
- ❑ Expansion of local GIS systems
- ❑ Interior fire compliance rehabilitation for local businesses (not LMI)

It should be noted that although the above activities are local priorities, they can not and will not be supported with State CDBG funds due to regulatory restrictions.

### **Conclusion (Specific High/Low Priority Items)**

After analysis of all materials reviewed, including the chart shown above, the following can generally be determined to be HIGH-priority activities:

- ❑ Rehabilitation Programs
  - (Private residences including multi-family rental)
  - Lead Paint Abatement
  - Mobile Home Park - Unit Rehabilitation/Replacement
  - Individual septic rehabilitation
- ❑ Housing Services
  - Rehabilitation Program Administration/Operating
  - Landlord-Tenant Counseling
  - Code Enforcement
  - Fair Housing
- ❑ Infrastructure
  - Potable Water Improvements
  - Wastewater Management
  - Streetscapes/Streets
- ❑ Services/Service Facilities for:
  - Transportation
  - Child Care
  - Health Care
  - Seniors
  - Homeless/Housing
- ❑ New Housing Development/Substantial Rehabilitation
- ❑ Planning, particularly in neighborhoods

### **Past Applications Funded**

An analysis of past applications funded by the State during the FY'05 through FY'09 funding cycles, includes the funds that were awarded to the following activity classifications in the noted proportions.

It is difficult to project the need for the various activities over the next five years as local conditions may change. The below projections are based on past applications funded.

	<i>5-Year Estimated Need</i>
Neighborhood Revitalization*	\$16,081,584
Housing Rehabilitation Programs	9,500,000
Housing Development/Projects	4,500,000
Economic Development	2,500,000
Community Facilities	9,500,000
Public Services	3,000,000
Planning	500,000
Demolition	500,000

### ***Long and Short Term Objectives***

- The State is now implementing a Performance Measures assessment tool in IDIS. Communities are required to report on specific performance measures that will be tracked to evaluate the effectiveness of the funded program(s). 100% of funded revitalization areas will identify and track performance measures relative to activities funded and will report the status of such annually to the State CDBG program.
- The State will encourage comprehensive programs. The State's objective is to have active/implemented programs in a minimum of 75% of the predominately low/moderate income neighborhood (based upon HUD's LMISD and the true neighborhood boundaries concept) at some point during the next five years. This objective may be achieved by promoting planning efforts in these areas tied to future applications.
- The State will encourage coordination of resources with other funding sources through various mechanisms. A minimum of 10% of each year's allocation will be expended on activities for which other State/federal funds are committed.
- The State will continue to support and promote local housing rehabilitation programs. The State will rehabilitate a minimum of 100 units per year (500 units over the next five years) through CDBG-funded local rehabilitation programs. Although this unit goal is less than current annual accomplishments, the State is now promoting more comprehensive rehabilitation of units addressed. It is estimated the total costs of rehabilitation of these units will be in excess of \$1 million annually/\$5 million over the next five years.

### **Objectives:**

- Increase economic opportunities
  - Focus on job training in specialized industries and for special populations, such as the disabled/homeless;
  - Provide for microenterprise assistance in CDBG non-entitlement communities;
  - Prioritize economic development activities that create or retain jobs for local residents.

- Create suitable living environments
  - Consistent with the concept of promoting comprehensive programs, invest in infrastructure and public facilities which enable or improve access to basic needs;
  - Support essential services, particularly those services associated with the State priorities of housing and economic development. Examples might include job-readiness training, housing counseling, education services or day care supports.

**Accomplishments:**

- Annually support a minimum of four activities/projects which promote the strategy of increasing economic opportunities. These may include microenterprise programs, job training-readiness services and/or direct assistance to for-profit businesses.
- Encourage the concept of comprehensive programs by supporting the development, stabilization or continuation of revitalization initiatives in a minimum of 50% of low/moderate income neighborhoods in non-entitlement jurisdictions.
- Support a minimum of four activities/projects annually which provide essential services to priority populations and/or consistent with State program priorities.

## **PART II: OTHER OBJECTIVES**

In the following sections, the state of Rhode Island examines those categories within the Strategic Plan that regard:

- Community Revitalization (g);
- Barriers to affordable housing (h);
- Lead-based paint (i);
- Anti-poverty strategy (j);
- Institutional structure (k);
- Coordination (l); and
- Low-income housing tax credit (m).

While these categories do not specify numeric achievements and timeframes, they set out objectives, which complement to a large extent the work set out in the first half of the state's plan as detailed in this chapter.

## G. Community Revitalization

During the 1980s and 1990s Rhode Island, like other states across the country, experienced a redistribution of population, investment and wealth across the state from the cities to the suburbs. However, over the past decade, through a combination of concentrated investment of state and federal housing and community development resources, and a hot housing market, Rhode Island's urban core communities began to recover. The number of vacant and abandoned properties in many low-income neighborhoods declined significantly. A generous state historic tax credit program stimulated the redevelopment of many vacant or underutilized urban mills into apartments and commercial spaces. Median prices of single family homes increased faster in the five urban core communities than in the state as a whole and gentrification, rather than disinvestment, became a serious concern.

Unfortunately, significant ground has been lost in the last few years as these same neighborhoods have been hit the hardest by the meltdown of the financial markets. Foreclosed properties are now threatening the stability of low-income urban communities that only three or four years ago were on the rise. In 2008, Rhode Island applied for funding under the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) to address the foreclosure crisis in those areas of the state that were hardest hit. The program targeted census tracts in 11 communities with a HUD-predicted foreclosure rate of at least 6.5% and which contained at least 1.4% of the State's subprime mortgage loans. Based on the state's analysis, almost 90% of the foreclosures in Rhode Island from January-September 2008 took place in the 11 targeted communities focused in largely low income census tracts of urban or urban ring communities. The State of Rhode Island received \$19.6 million in NSP funding which has been used to help homebuyers purchase foreclosed homes, land bank foreclosed properties, and rehabilitate those properties as affordable homes. Developers seeking to use NSP funding to land bank or rehabilitate foreclosed properties must identify the target area(s) in which they plan to invest and how that investment is part of an overall strategy to stabilize the neighborhood. This funding is being leveraged by other resources as well including HOME and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits and the State's Neighborhood Opportunity Program and housing bond funding. In our FY2010 Low-Income Housing Tax Credit funding round, proposals that focused on rehabilitation, and foreclosed properties in particular were given priority.

Because of the state's small size and limited land development opportunities, the issue of neighborhood revitalization in Rhode Island is inextricably linked to smart growth. In 2002, the Governor's Growth Planning Council recommended that Rhode Island communities identify their "Growth Centers", areas where they would like future development to occur. These Growth Centers are envisioned as areas with a mix of commercial and residential development with access to services, transportation and adequate water and wastewater infrastructure. To date, two Rhode Island Communities, Burrillville and East Providence, have approved Growth Centers.

In 2005, the state finalized and adopted *Land Use 2025*, as the major connective State Guide Plan element in Rhode Island's planning and development system. The Plan articulates the State's overarching goals, objectives, and strategies to guide and coordinate the land use plans and regulations of municipalities and State agencies and to direct good, strategic projects at both the State and municipal level. *Land Use 2025* identifies an Urban Services Boundary, based upon a detailed land capability and suitability analysis that demonstrates the capacity of this area to accommodate future growth. The Plan directs the State and communities to concentrate growth inside the Urban Services Boundary and within locally designated centers in rural areas, and to pursue significantly different

land use and development approaches for urban and rural areas. The plan promotes a regional approach through stronger, interconnected, statewide systems of greenspace and natural resources, public highways, and utility infrastructure. It advocates for a network of well-designed communities composed of centers of various sizes and types, neighborhoods, and special places. The plan establishes 25 objectives and over 90 strategies, under goals for Sustainability, Greenspace, Community Design, Infrastructure, and Implementation. Among the priority objectives:

- Sustain Rhode Island's unique character through use of the Urban Services Boundary, rural centers, and holistic approaches to planning.
- Permanent Greenspace throughout the rural, urban, and waterfront areas.
- Development concentrated in well-designed centers, neighborhoods, and special places.
- A diverse and affordable housing stock.
- Public infrastructure maximized and coordinated with development.
- Reform of the property tax system in a manner that supports this plan.
- Excellent land use information and technology systems.

The Office of Statewide Planning is now working with municipalities to help them bring their own comprehensive plans into consistency with the goals and objectives of Land Use 2025. The State is also exploring opportunities to more clearly tie state funding decisions to consistency with the Plan.

In 2007, Rhode Island Housing and an Advisory Committee made up primarily of state agencies and statewide housing, smart growth and environmental organizations, launched KeepSpace. This groundbreaking initiative complements the smart growth focus of *Land Use 2025* while promoting a collaborative approach to achieving those goals. The initiative brings together a wide range of partners at the local, regional and state level to work collaboratively toward the goal of creating communities where neighbors meet, people work and children play. There are 6 key elements to a KeepSpace Community. They are: a Good Home, A Healthy Environment, Strong Commerce, Sensible Infrastructure, Positive Community Impact, and Integrated Arts, Recreation, Culture and Religion. In 2008 the Advisory Committee selected the first four pilot KeepSpace Communities following a competitive application process. Those four communities are Pawtucket/Central Falls, the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence, the Cranston Print Works site and surrounding neighborhood in Cranston, and downtown Westerly. Working Groups have been formed in these communities that are currently in varying stages of developing comprehensive community designs that reflect the input of key stakeholder groups at the state and local level. These communities and the collaborative approach that is being taken to revitalize them, are a model for future community development in Rhode Island.

The importance of combining the provision of affordable housing with community development, neighborhood revitalization and environmental protection is reflected in the priorities of both the HOME program and the Small Cities Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Activities that are part of a neighborhood plan, including those in Enterprise Zones, Growth Centers and that embody the KeepSpace elements are given priority for funding under both programs and coordination is encouraged between HOME and CDBG funding sources.

Not only can neighborhood revitalization efforts help preserve and improve a community's existing housing stock but they can also lead to new opportunities for the creation of affordable housing. Neighborhood revitalization requires a combination of homeownership and rental rehabilitation. It is important to promote owner occupancy where feasible. However, to stimulate investment in hard

hit urban neighborhoods and meet the needs of lower income residents, it is often necessary to complete major rehabilitation of rental housing first to establish new markets for homeowners. Older urban areas contain existing units that can be rehabilitated to provide both homeownership and rental housing opportunities for lower income households. In suburban and rural areas, neighborhood villages often contain the only existing structures appropriate to be renovated for rental housing. Rehabilitation of these units for extremely low-income households, especially families, will continue to be a priority.

Rhode Island will continue to combine state and federal funds for the development of scattered site housing in neighborhoods undergoing revitalization and in Growth Centers and KeepSpace Communities. The State will continue to link the development of affordable homes with social services as part of its neighborhood revitalization strategy. Rehabilitating foreclosed and abandoned properties is critical to neighborhood revitalization because it is often the initial major investment in run down neighborhoods and can help prevent a slide into disinvestment in communities being hit hard by the foreclosure crisis. Rehabilitating foreclosed properties will remain a focus for the State. Many vacant or abandoned properties in urban areas are difficult to develop because of environmental contamination or other constraints. Continued investment in these “Brownfield” sites will be needed if they are to be returned to productive use.

As the KeepSpace initiative illustrates, physical improvements alone will not ameliorate the deterioration of many Rhode Island communities. Residents need improved economic opportunities to help neighborhoods prosper. The creation of jobs through financing neighborhood businesses, training opportunities, and education will significantly contribute to the long-term viability and stability of Rhode Island’s neighborhoods. In addition to jobs, improved transportation, child care opportunities, recreation facilities, social services, and health facilities are essential to thriving neighborhoods. The State will continue to pursue opportunities through KeepSpace and other initiatives to strategically coordinate resources for homes, jobs, transportation, infrastructure, recreation and other essential services. These strategies are discussed in the Nonhousing Community Development Plan and under the Coordination Section.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Promote development of Growth Centers and KeepSpace Communities throughout the State to diversify and improve economic development opportunities
- Prioritize state funding decisions for projects that align with *Land Use 2025*; e.g., smart growth and KeepSpace principles
- Coordinate resources to revitalize areas significantly impacted by foreclosures

## H. Barriers to Affordable Housing

Since the passage of the Housing Act of 2004 and its mandate to achieve a goal of 10% long-term affordable housing in each municipality, there has been an increased awareness of the barriers to the provision of affordable housing. The barriers represent a variety of issues from local municipalities and regulation to market and public perception causes. This section puts forth objectives to address two broad categories of barriers—cost and regulatory barriers, and fair housing—in order to ameliorate their negative effects on the provision of affordable housing.

### I. COST AND REGULATORY BARRIERS

#### Objectives:

- I.1. **Streamline regulatory process for development of affordable homes, particularly in areas that are consistent with *Land Use 2025*, smart growth and KeepSpace principles**
- I.2. **Improve collaboration at state and local agencies in the review and approval for the development of affordable homes**

Although the state has little to no control over some of the barriers discussed in Chapter V, the state is committed through its relationships with municipalities and other stakeholders to remove or ameliorate the negative effects of the policies, such as prohibitive zoning and growth caps, excessive fees and charges, and land-use control issues.

The state of Rhode Island has a Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Law that provides direction for municipalities in achieving their communities' planning goals, including the provision of affordable housing. The law works in concert with the state's Low and Moderate Income Housing Act and the State Guide Plan, *Land Use 2025*, in order to ensure that development across the state happens in the most responsible way to support economic and environmental benefits at all levels—municipal, regional and state. For example, the Statewide Planning Program has issued guidelines on Growth Centers, which encourages municipalities to either build on or establish new denser village areas for housing and economic growth.

Additionally, the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, which provides for a streamlined permitting process for developments that reserve at least 25% of the units as affordable housing, has recently been joined by a new statute that describes an expedited regulatory review process across state agencies for housing developments that meet the 25% threshold but also fill a "critical housing need." These developments also have other threshold requirements to assure the law's use in the most appropriate areas without overburdening the regulatory agencies' that must provide the expedited review.

Since the passage of the Low and Moderate Income Housing Act, ten municipalities have created 109 units of affordable housing through the use of municipal subsidies, especially in municipalities where there is little to no affordable housing. While some communities have consistently opposed projects submitted through the comprehensive permitting process, others have embraced the process as a tool to expedite the approval of proposed developments that the community supports. Even in municipalities where the law has not been embraced, the process provides for an opportunity, along with the affordable housing plans, for the state to encourage communication between developers and municipalities on how to achieve their affordable housing goals.

As has been discussed earlier, the cost of land in Rhode Island is a significant impediment to the development of affordable homes. The current downturn in the housing market, while difficult for homeowners who bought at the peak of the market, presents a real opportunity for the development of affordable homes. Community-based development corporations (CDCs), which are responsible for the majority of affordable homes produced in the state, can now acquire properties to rehabilitate as affordable homes for significantly less than was the case even two years ago, particularly in areas hard hit by foreclosures. In addition, focusing on rehabilitation and infill development makes the most effective use of the remaining open space and natural resources in the state. Rhode Island Housing's Land Bank Program and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program Land Bank can help CDCs acquire these properties and hold them while financing is secured for their rehabilitation as safe, healthy, affordable homes.

Finally, there is growing recognition at the state and federal level that our shared goals of creating vibrant, healthy and sustainable communities where people can live, work and play can best be achieved by working together. Traditionally, regulatory and funding agencies have focused specifically on their mission whether that is protecting the environment, creating jobs, or building affordable homes. This narrowly focused approach has often led to a confrontational, time-consuming and expensive development process. The goal of the KeepSpace Initiative, described earlier, is to create a more coordinated and collaborative approach to land use in Rhode Island. The initiative brings together a wide range of partners at the local, regional and state level to work collaboratively toward the goal of creating communities where neighbors meet, people work and children play. In 2008 the Advisory Committee selected the first four pilot KeepSpace Communities following a competitive application process. Working Groups have been formed in these communities that are currently in varying stages of developing comprehensive community designs that reflect the input of key stakeholder groups at the state and local level. These communities and the collaborative approach that is being taken to revitalize them are a model for future community development in Rhode Island.

## **II. FAIR HOUSING**

### **Objectives:**

- II.1 Promote affirmative marketing strategies**
- II.2 Provide training, resources and information to elected officials, PHAs, developers, and the public about fair housing**

Among the most insidious and pervasive barriers regarding fair housing is the prevalent negative public attitude toward the development of affordable housing commonly referred to NIMBY-ism, for "Not in My Backyard." The social phenomenon describes the attitude that while many people are supportive of affordable housing in theory; they do not want developments located near them in practice. This is a major barrier to the development of affordable homes as many active "concerned citizens" groups have formed over the years and provide a major force at local public hearings for affordable housing developments, proposed zoning or other land management changes, and affordable housing plans. Public officials representing community residents have also raised objections in many Rhode Island communities to the development of affordable rental and homeownership opportunities.

As a state with a large immigrant population, residents whose English language skills are limited, or who are unfamiliar with formal financial transactions may be vulnerable to predatory lending practices or victims of fraud when purchasing property. They also may not understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants and/or landlords. If programs do not reach out to them where they live and provide information in the language in which they are fluent, ethnic households also can miss out on opportunities to become homeowners or to identify resources to meet their housing needs.

Over the course of the last five years, Rhode Island has engaged in a number of proactive activities to promote Fair Housing:

- Fair Housing Initiative Program grants: Both Rhode Island Housing and the Housing Network of Rhode Island engaged in education and outreach to a variety of stakeholders including developers and municipalities. Rhode Island Housing's grant resulted in the production of a Technical Assistance Kit, which was distributed statewide and remains available on the website at FairHousingRI.org, which was also established with the help of the grant.
- Fair Housing stakeholders meetings: To celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fair Housing Law, Rhode Island Housing, in collaboration with the state's Office of Housing and Community Development and the Housing Resources Commission, held public- and private-stakeholders' meetings to analyze the impediments to fair housing. The combined notes from the two meetings are included along with the documentation of the Consolidated Plan public process in Appendix C.
- State policy on Affirmative Marketing of Low- and Moderate-Income Housing: In June 2009, Rhode Island Housing and the state's Office of Housing and Community Development issued a policy statement asserting the requirement that all housing that meets the state's definition of Low- and Moderate-Income Housing must be affirmatively marketed, including listing on the statewide housing locator website and listings in minority newspapers as well as one of general circulation.
- HomeLocator RI: In 2008, Rhode Island Housing and a number of its public and non-profit partners launched a housing search website both to provide easier access to housing that is affordable to all Rhode Islanders as well as enhance the ability to affirmatively market affordable homes in the state.

In preparing for the Consolidated Plan the focus group session on Fair Housing provided feedback which is reflected in the plan's proposed objectives. In addition, next spring, the state will use the input from the efforts identified above as well as that of the Focus Group to revise and update the State's Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing.

The State of Rhode Island is committed to combating all forms of discrimination. Funding for fair housing education and outreach activities is provided through the State's CDBG program. However, as the focus group meetings clearly accentuated, more needs to be done to educate the public about their rights and responsibilities under state and national fair housing laws, and to enforce these laws. The focus groups also urged adoption of State legislation to ban discrimination on the basis of source of income and discussed the need to remove barriers to accessing affordable housing for ex-offenders.

## **I. Healthy Homes and Lead-based Paint**

Enormous gains continue to be made in reducing the incidence of lead poisoning and addressing existing lead hazards in Rhode Island homes. In the period covered by this Consolidated Plan, it is the state's intention to expand its objectives regarding the health aspects of its housing. There are numerous health and quality of life issues that are affected by where one lives. Issues like asthma, mold and carbon monoxide in addition to lead paint hazards, are all "healthy homes" related concerns. This section expands the Consolidated Plan's traditional focus on lead to put forth more holistic objectives that look at the broader category of healthy homes, including Lead-based Paint issues.

### **I. EVALUATION AND REDUCTION OF LEAD-BASED PAINT HAZARDS**

#### **Objectives:**

- I.1 Eliminate lead hazards in 210 existing home in the next five years**
- I.2 Increase landlord and homeowner awareness of lead mitigation programs through multi-lingual pamphlets, lead centers, and training sessions**
- I.3 Continue to promote training for property owners, and certification for contractors to mitigate lead hazards**
- I.4 Continue implementation of lead mitigation plan and update**

According to the Census, Rhode Island has 163,274 renter-occupied units of which 135,654 were built before 1978 when lead-based paint was banned. Rhode Island has the 4<sup>th</sup> oldest housing stock in the nation and this stock requires proper maintenance and rehabilitation, to mitigate the hazards posed by the wide spread use of lead based paint.

During the 1998 legislative session, Rhode Island appropriated \$1.75 million through the Housing Resources Commission for a State lead abatement program. This funding was allocated to establish a Lead Abatement Revolving Loan Fund. Since the inception of the fund, the State has appropriate an average of \$1.5 million per year to finance lead hazard reduction activities.

Because of Rhode Island's older housing stock, lead poisoning has been problematic throughout the state. The greatest obstacle to addressing Rhode Island's lead-based paint hazards is the sheer number of homes affected. In response to this challenge, the legislature adopted the Lead Hazard Mitigation Act of 2002, landmark lead mitigation legislation that, for the first time in Rhode Island, takes a preventative approach to lead poisoning. This legislation required property owners to properly maintain their units rather than relying on an enforcement response once a child is lead poisoned. One of the provisions of the Act was to task the HRC with the development and implementation of a four year strategic plan for addressing the state's lead paint hazards. In May 2003, after a nine-month participatory process, the Comprehensive Strategic Plan Committee (the Committee) of the Housing Resources Commission (HRC) completed the strategic plan. The Committee proposed a plan which included the following key elements:

- lead education/lead hazard reduction programs
- coordination of enforcement action, and
- coordination of efforts

The HRC is responsible for informing landlords and tenants of their rights and responsibilities under the law. It is illegal in Rhode Island for a property owner to retaliate against families who report lead hazards. The State has developed fact sheets for property owners and tenants describing their rights and responsibilities. In 2004, HRC received a 3-year Lead Outreach Grant which supported the establishment of a Technical Assistance Center that supported the distribution of these fact sheets to landlords and tenants, answered questions, and investigated tenant complaints about the failure of property owners to address lead hazards in their units. Since the Lead Hazard Mitigation Act was adopted, 23,500 rental units have received Certificates of Conformance with the lead mitigation standard and approximately 5,000 have received Presumptive Compliance status. It is projected that in the timeframe covered by this Consolidated Plan another 20,000 units will be brought into conformance as well.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has funded a number of lead hazard reduction programs in Rhode Island. The State and the cities of Providence, East Providence, Woonsocket, Pawtucket and Warwick have been awarded funding in the past. There are currently four active lead programs in Rhode Island including the State program and those operated in the cities of Providence, Woonsocket and Warwick, however all but the Providence program and the portion of the statewide program funded by the state will end by June 2010. It is the intent of Rhode Island Housing to re-apply for federal Lead Hazard Reduction Program funds in the coming year for statewide lead hazard reduction activities.

The LHRP provides deferred loans to finance lead hazard reduction for low and moderate-income borrowers as well as owners of investment properties occupied by low-income tenants with children under the age of six. Nonprofit agencies rehabilitating older housing as affordable housing for families are also eligible. Eligible work includes cleaning, exterior and interior painting and window and door replacement. Priority is given to households with children with elevated blood levels. Universal screenings coupled with relocation of families during the mitigation phase are core components of LHRPs. From 2005-2008 the State LHRP invested over \$4.5 million to make 765 units lead safe.

Property owners participating in one of the state or local lead programs are encouraged to access other funding sources such as local CDBG housing rehabilitation programs and the Rhode Island Housing Home Repair program to address code violations. In 2004, Rhode Island Housing established a program to assist participants in the LHRP to correct minimum code violations and address health and safety issues.

As the administrator of the State's Section 8 program, Rhode Island Housing has used its relationships with landlords to enroll Section 8 units in the lead hazard reduction program. Activities are coordinated directly through the Section 8 department, making outreach easier and participation more attractive to landlords. The population living in family Section 8 units has been targeted because many are occupied by lower income families with children living in older housing.

Over the past ten years Rhode Island Housing has partnered with five organizations in different areas of the state to conduct community-based lead hazard education. This outreach, coupled with the opening of new lead centers in Providence, Pawtucket and Warwick, has increased awareness on lead issues throughout the state. These lead centers provide temporary housing referrals, counseling, medical referrals, resource referrals and housing search assistance to families with lead poisoned children. This activity has been financed by the federal funding the state has received in the past for

lead hazard reduction and will be continued if federal funds are received to support the state program in the future.

Given the age of Rhode Island's housing stock, increasing lead education and promoting lead safe work practices and proper maintenance can reduce the chances of lead exposure. The HRC continues to distribute mitigation literature and conduct education and outreach efforts to property owners, realtors, housing agencies, the insurance industry and the general public on the Law.

In June 2005, the Attorney General reached an agreement with the Dupont Corporation to settle its case in the state's lawsuit against the manufacturers of lead-based paints. As a result, with funds funneled from the Children's Health Forum and administered by the Healthy Kids Collaborative, there is \$6.6 million to abate lead hazards in 600 homes. CLEARCorps, a national non-profit working on children's environmental health issues, was chosen to abate the 600 units in six block groups in Providence, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and Central Falls. Rhode Island Housing is partnering with CLEARCorps and the City of Providence to make the most effective use of these funds in conjunction with the state lead funding it administers.

## II. SUPPORTING HEALTHY HOMES

### Objectives:

- II.1 Institute a healthy homes checklist for use by organizations that perform home visits (e.g., VNA, Head Start, weatherization) to provide families with additional information and to provide feedback on the Department of Health's "7 Steps" Model: Keep it dry, Keep it clean, Keep it pest-free, Keep it well-ventilated, Avoid contaminants, Keep it safe, Keep it well-maintained**
- II.2 Support Healthy Homes Collaborative implementation of workplan for affordable homes**
- II.3 Educate property owners and municipalities on healthy homes resources, including weatherization and home repair funding**

In 2005, under the leadership of the Rhode Island Department of HEALTH and the Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission, the Healthy Housing Collaborative was established to provide a statewide forum for discussing and promoting healthy housing goals. The Collaborative brought together parallel efforts of HEALTH and the HRC to take a more holistic approach to health hazards in the home rather than focusing on lead paint hazards separately from other housing based health and safety issues. Through their independent efforts, HEALTH had developed a healthy housing vision and the HRC restructured its Committee that had been focused almost exclusively on the lead program under the new title, the Office of Healthy Housing. This re-named Committee adopted the following mission:

"To work in promoting safe and healthy homes for all Rhode Islanders with a primary focus on lead hazard mitigation. In partnership with stakeholders, the Office will promote and develop programs that seek to prevent health hazards in homes throughout the state."

Initially involving about a dozen partners, the group has grown to 24 representing a broad range of interests including state health, housing and environmental protection agencies, hospitals and other

health care providers, higher education, and non-profits involved in lead hazard reduction and weatherization. The Collaborative meets quarterly and has developed a workplan.

Current efforts underway include:

- developing a standardized system/procedures and testing for first responders when dealing with carbon dioxide incidences;
- addressing housing issues affecting refugees;
- developing a statewide healthy housing database;
- forming a committee to address the problem of bedbugs, particularly in shelters;

Other issues the Collaborative is focusing on include better coordinating lead and weatherization funds, carbon monoxide detection, addressing mold, contaminated water supplies, and health and safety issues in foreclosed properties.

Energy efficiency is an important healthy housing feature. In addition to the cost of shelter, the cost of utilities, particularly energy, represents an increasing burden to low-income families in Rhode Island. To help address increasing utility costs, Rhode Island Housing has worked with its housing development partners to produce homes that meet Energy Star standards. Rebates received for energy-efficient appliances and systems have helped defray development costs. Rhode Island Housing also offers funding through its home repair and Purchase Plus mortgage program to finance home repairs which may include energy efficiency improvements. The State's weatherization program is also a key partner in making energy efficiency improvement for low-income households.

In 2009 the State received federal stimulus funding to supplement its existing weatherization program, including \$6 million which was dedicated to improving the energy efficiency of existing affordable apartments. Rhode Island Housing is currently in the process of working with the State Energy Office to allocate these funds. Priority will be given to projects that leverage other funding sources and will result in the most significant improvement in energy efficiency.

## **J. Anti-poverty Strategy**

According to the 2000 Census, 11.5 percent of Rhode Island's total population is below the poverty level. According to the 2008 American Community Survey, this number has since risen slightly to 11.7 percent.

In 2000, there were 40,117 children living in poverty in Rhode Island, accounting for 17 percent of all Rhode Island children. This is an increase from the 1990 Census figure when 14 percent of children lived in poverty. Rhode Island has a higher rate of child poverty than any other New England state. As of 2007, 17.5% of children under the age of 18 were below the poverty level, ranking 21<sup>st</sup> in the nation, and just under the national rate of 18.0%. Tied with Maine at 17.1%, the child poverty rate in Rhode Island has increased by 0.2 percentage points since 2000. Three quarters of these children are concentrated in Rhode Island's six core cities.

The State is committed to reducing the number of families living in poverty. Housing advocates and social service providers are collaborating to produce affordable housing as well as provide the social and economic support that is necessary to keep individuals and families out of poverty. While many of the factors that impact poverty are out of the State's control, Rhode Island has initiated or supported a number of initiatives designed to reduce the number of households in poverty.

Rhode Island's minimum wage increased on January 1, 2007 to \$7.40 per hour. Despite this increase, minimum wage workers still have a very difficult time renting apartments or purchasing homes in the State. According to data compiled by HousingWorks RI, a worker would need to earn more than \$21/hour in order to keep the average rent of a 2-bedroom apartment in the state's capital of Providence at 30% of the household's gross monthly income.

Through the objectives described below, Rhode Island hopes to reduce poverty significantly over the five-year period covered by this Consolidated Plan.

### **Objective 1:**

- Evaluate outcomes of current anti-poverty efforts and build on successful programs and strategies

As the State of Rhode Island's poverty rate increases and the state's budget deficit grows anti-poverty strategies have focused on moving families to work opportunities and self sufficiency.

The Department of Human Services renamed the Family Independence Program (FIP) to the Rhode Island Works Program in 2008. The program still offers temporary cash assistance, health coverage, child care assistance, and help finding job training or a job. The lifetime time limit for assistance was reduced from 60 to 48 months, and a 24-month limit in any 60-month period was imposed.

The program enacted a Work First strategy which required participants to first engage in an intensive job search. If a job could not be found with current skills, job training/education plan would be created. Those that fall into a certain income bracket may still qualify for some cash assistance and other important benefits including health care coverage, child care subsidies and food assistance.

This program is available for pregnant women and adults with children under age 18 (or under age 19 if child is a full-time student). Services are available statewide. Linkages between the Community College, Department of Labor and Training and the recipients are coordinated to ensure that maximum assistance is provided to achieve self-sufficiency.

The plans for this strategy have been challenged by the dramatic increase in unemployment from below 5% as recently as September 2007 to a current 12.9%. In March 2009, the Department of Labor and Training received \$17.2 million in federal stimulus money, which will allow the state to expand some programs, do some things differently and help 3,500 Rhode Islanders enter the job market with new skills. These programs are just beginning to be implemented.

In 2007, the City of Providence released *Pathways to Opportunity*, an extensive research and analysis performed by a group of community and business leaders. Their recommendations focus on providing targeted opportunities for the poor to get ahead, including adult education, job skills training, exposure and access to jobs with career paths, and work supports to help low-wage earners meet their basic needs.

Picking up on a national strategy to Reduce the High Cost of Being Poor, the document recommends efforts to help Providence residents receive health insurance, child care subsidies, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

Additional strategies are targeted around connecting youth to jobs and college, and providing resources to help youth complete high school with the necessary skills to succeed, enroll in and graduate from college, and gain access to career exploration and development services. It also outlined a number of steps the state could take to further the strategies. These included: raising the minimum wage to a living wage, increasing the amount of assistance the Rhode Island Works program provides, increasing the EITC percentage to 5%, maintaining health insurance for children and increasing child care subsidies to name a few.

It is well recognized that Rhode Island requires a better educated work force to shift from the previous manufacturing economy to a knowledge based economy. Efforts to address this include: increasing the number of charter schools; increasing adult education opportunities through community based agencies and CCRI; researching a more equitable method of funding schools and a suggestion to use the Food Stamp Employment Training (FSET) funds for implementing workforce development and career pathways programs for low-income individuals receiving food stamp benefits.

The Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS) continues to incent HCVP participants to meet personal financial goals. This program deposits tenant payment increases due to increased income into an escrow account. After five years of no state cash assistance and the meeting of pre-established personal and financial goals, the participant is able to withdraw the money. This program has been successful in making savings possible for these very low income households.

**Objective 2:**

- Maintain emphasis on mitigation of foreclosures through loan modifications, including the Making Home Affordable program, and mediation with lenders

Starting in the fall of 2006, Rhode Island Housing began tracking the state's foreclosure initiations. By the time of the market crash in the fall of 2008 Rhode Island had already climbed to the top ten in the nation with regard to mortgage defaults, and has held that position consistently since that time.

The causes and impacts of the foreclosure crisis are discussed in detail in Chapters IV and V. In November 2007, Rhode Island Housing opened its HelpCenter to help with the wave of literally thousands of homeowners who were seeking assistance in avoiding foreclosure and overwhelming our network of non-profit partners.

Since then over 6,000 Rhode Islanders have contacted the HelpCenter and nearly 3,300 have met face-to-face with counseling staff. Of the nearly 2,500 who have completed the process over 45% have maintained ownership of their homes through a loan modification or other financial resolution, and only 7% ended in foreclosure.

The HelpCenter is partially funded through the NeighborWorks America National Foreclosure Mitigation Counseling program. It is the state's intention to continue in this program for as long as funding is available and necessary. Given the volume experienced in the last couple of years, but with the expectation that there will be a very gradual recovery. The state anticipates serving another 2,000 clients through the HelpCenter in the term of this Consolidated Plan.

## **K. Institutional Structure**

Rhode Island delivers its housing programs through an array of public agencies, not-for-profit organizations and the private sector. Public agencies consist of State offices, quasi-public corporations, housing authorities and local governments. The private sector includes banks and other investors, and residential construction contractors both large and small. Non-profit organizations help to develop affordable housing, counsel homebuyers and provide services to residents. As described in the assessment of the existing institutional structure, this comprehensive network of organizations is critical to the effective implementation of the state's housing policies and programs.

### **State Agencies, Quasi-Public Corporations and Public Authorities**

#### **RI State Department of Administration, Division of Planning**

In the Housing Act of 2004, the state reorganized its planning and housing programs to be centrally managed and located within its Department of Administration. As such the State's Division of Planning is now home to the Office of Housing and Community Development, which includes the state's Housing Resources Commission, and the Statewide Planning Program. Most of the state's housing development programs are funded through the Housing Resources Commission and administered by Rhode Island Housing through a Memoranda of Understanding.

#### ***Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD)***

The Rhode Island Office of Housing and Community Development (including the Housing Resources Commission) has been organized to be the housing planning, standards, policy and programs agency of the State. The primary purpose of the office is the development of communities by providing decent, safe, affordable housing opportunities; creating a suitable living environment; and expanding economic opportunities principally for low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders. This mission is accomplished, in part, by coordinating housing functions and selected community development activities of agencies and subdivisions of the State. OHCD has responsibility for administering the Community Development Block Grant for 33 non-entitlement municipalities, the Emergency Shelter Grant and Title XX funding through the Consolidated Homeless Fund. It is also the grantee for the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program and the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program.

#### ***Housing Resources Commission (HRC)***

The Rhode Island Housing Resources Commission is the planning and policy, standards, and programs division of the Rhode Island Housing Resources Agency. Established in 1988, by Chapter 128 of Title 42 of the Rhode Island General Laws, the HRC was created to provide a coherent policy direction to Rhode Island's housing programs within various departments, agencies, commissions and corporations. Its mission is to provide housing opportunities for all Rhode Islanders, to maintain the quality of housing in Rhode Island, and to coordinate and make effective the housing opportunities of the agencies and subdivisions of the state. The HRC is a 27 member board, representing a wide range of constituents, including government agencies, housing advocates and the private sector.

The HRC oversees the State's Building Homes RI, Neighborhood Opportunities Program

and Lead Hazard Reduction Program. The HRC also leads the state's Continuum of Care and underwrites 85 emergency family units, and provides funding for the operation of emergency winter shelters. The Chair of the Housing Resources Commission leads the Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness and has seats on various housing policy boards and commissions including the State Planning Council. Rhode Island Housing administers the housing programs of the HRC through a Memoranda of Understanding.

The HRC also plays a key role in promoting achievement of the state's affordable housing goals and produces an annual report on the implementation of municipal affordable housing plans. It also is the state agency responsible for the recently enacted expedited permitting for "Projects of Critical Concern to Meet Emergency Need," which allows affordable housing developments to receive priority regulatory review at state agencies.

### ***Statewide Planning Program (SPP)***

The Statewide Planning Program is charged with preparing and maintaining plans for the physical, economic, and social development of the state; encouraging their implementation; and coordinating the actions of state, local and federal agencies and private individuals within the framework of the state's development goals and policies. As such, SPP also addresses housing and land-use issues by assisting cities and towns with compliance with the Comprehensive Plan legislation, zoning and other issues critical to the development of affordable housing. SPP is responsible for approving local Comprehensive Plans, which contain the Housing Element describing a municipality's affordable housing goals. SPP also houses the Rhode Island Geographic Information System which is a useful tool for neighborhood and regional planning.

## **Rhode Island Housing**

Rhode Island Housing is a self-sustaining quasi-public agency established by the General Assembly in 1973. Rhode Island Housing works to ensure that all people who live or work in Rhode Island can afford a safe, healthy home that meets their needs. As the state's Housing Finance Agency, Rhode Island Housing provides low-interest loans, grants, education, advocacy and consumer counseling to help Rhode Islanders buy and retain their homes. They also offer special programs to ensure that these homes are safe and healthy.

Rhode Island Housing was designated the State Principal Housing Agency in 1991. It is responsible for administering most state and federal funds for the development of affordable homes. These include federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME funds and Lead Hazard Reduction Program funds as well as stimulus funding through the Tax Credit Assistance Program (TCAP) and the Tax Credit Exchange Program (TCEP). Through Memoranda of Understanding, Rhode Island Housing also administers the state's portion of the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program as well as the state's affordable housing programs, including Building Homes RI, the Neighborhood Opportunity Program, and the state Lead Hazard Reduction Program. Rhode Island Housing also acts as the lead agency in the application for the state's Continuum of Care application to HUD as well as the reporting agency for HUD's Consolidated Plan and its related annual reports. Rhode Island Housing also acts as the state's Housing Authority, administering the Section 8 voucher program for 15 municipalities.

Rhode Island Housing has also been assigned certain statutory and regulatory roles by the General Assembly, including various responsibilities under the state's Low- and Moderate-Income Housing Act, and responsibility for the implementation of the Madeline Walker Act.

### ***Other State Agencies and Commissions***

Other state agencies play key roles related to housing via their oversight of issues like health, transportation and the environment as well as those that serve vulnerable populations like the elderly, disabled and veterans.

Below is a list of those state agencies most often engaged in housing related issues. It is a key element of this Consolidated Plan, as described in the next section, that Rhode Island continue to improve coordination among agencies to better serve its housing needs and the population it serves.

**Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS):** DHS seeks to provide opportunities, working hand-in-hand with other resources in Rhode Island, to offer a full continuum of services for families, adults, children, elders, individuals with disabilities and veterans. DHS offers medical and financial aid, food stamps and social services to Rhode Islanders in need. DHS also works in partnership with Rhode Island Housing to administer the Assisted Living Medicaid waiver program which supports the operation of three affordable assisted living facilities in the state.

**Rhode Island Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals (MHRH):** MHRH is committed to assuring access to quality services and supports for Rhode Islanders with developmental disabilities, mental health and substance abuse issues, and chronic long term medical and psychiatric conditions. Its mission includes addressing the stigma attached to these disabilities as well as planning for the development of new services and prevention activities. MHRH operates group homes across the state for disabled Rhode Islanders and funds the Thresholds Program, which is administered by Rhode Island Housing and provides capital for the development of affordable homes for Rhode Islanders with mental and physical disabilities.

**Rhode Island Department of Health (HEALTH):** HEALTH seeks to prevent disease and to protect and promote the health and safety of the people of Rhode Island so that all people in Rhode Island will have the opportunity to live a safe and healthy life in a safe and healthy community. The Department of Health co-chairs the Healthy Housing Collaborative and is responsible for enforcing the rules and regulations for Lead Poisoning Prevention, the lead real estate disclosure rule, and the lead pre-renovation education rule.

**Rhode Island Department of Elderly Affairs (DEA):** DEA seeks to ensure excellence in service, advocacy and public policy dedicated to the needs of older Rhode Islanders and their caregivers through a single, visible and responsive agency. DEA is the state's primary agency devoted to the development, implementation and monitoring of a comprehensive system of community-based programs and services for seniors. The DEA is also designated as the state's single planning and services area agency on aging under the provisions of the Older Americans Act. DEA works with Rhode Island Housing to reach out to seniors who are facing the potential loss of their home due to delinquent property taxes under the state's

Madeline Walker Act. Rhode Island Housing and DEA also work closely together to help seniors remain in their homes through reverse mortgages and other assistance.

**Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC):** The mission of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections (RIDOC) is to contribute to public safety by maintaining a balanced correctional system of institutional and community programs that provide a range of control and rehabilitative options for criminal offenders. RIDOC leads the Governor's Reentry Council and supports programs to prepare those leaving the Corrections system for reentry into the community.

**Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF):** The Department was established by the state legislature in 1980 by merging children's programs previously administered by 4 different state agencies. The Director of DCYF is also a member of the RI Children's Cabinet, which addresses cross-departmental issues relating to children's needs and services. DCYF is one of a small group of states that integrate the 3 major public responsibilities for troubled children, youth and families in one agency: Child Welfare, Children's Behavioral Health, and Juvenile Corrections.

**Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (DLT):** DLT is responsible for administering state unemployment funds and offers a variety of job training and employee assistance programs and services.

**Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA):** RIPTA is a quasi-public, independent authority. Established in 1966 RIPTA is authorized to operate public transit services throughout the state of Rhode Island.

Other state agencies such as the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, the Economic Development Corporation and the Department of Business Regulation also play important roles in developing the infrastructure that supports homes and communities, ensuring that the state's environmental resources and the health of its residents are protected, supporting job growth, and providing for consumer protections and the regulation of residential and financial transactions.

The **RI Commission for Human Rights (RICHR)** is one of the oldest state antidiscrimination law enforcement agencies in the country. The Rhode Island General Assembly established the Commission in 1949 with the understanding that “[t]he practice or policy of discrimination against individuals ... is a matter of state concern”, and that “discrimination foments public strife and unrest, threatens the rights and privileges of the inhabitants of the state, and undermines the foundations of a free democratic state”. R.I.G.L. § 28-5-2. The Commission's major program activities include: outreach and education; intake, investigation and settlement of discrimination charges; administrative hearings. The Commission is not empowered as an advocacy organization. Rather, the Commission's role is to educate the public on discrimination laws/issues and to conduct objective investigations of charges filed.

### **Public Housing Authorities**

The State of Rhode Island has 24 additional housing authorities that maintain nearly 9,700 units of public housing, in addition to nearly 8,500 Section 8 vouchers. Of these 24, six are in Entitlement Communities subject to their own local Consolidated Plans and represent nearly 70% of the state's public housing stock. The remaining 18, however, are subject to review and consistency with this Consolidated Plan. While it is beyond the scope of this plan to mandate activities with housing authorities beyond the state's jurisdiction, it is crucial to the state's affordable housing goals that this critical housing stock continues to provide safe, decent and affordable housing to Rhode Island's neediest populations.

### **Local Entities**

#### **Municipal Governments**

Local governments play an extremely important role in the State's housing delivery system. They administer local housing programs, as well as State-funded programs and projects. They are responsible for local planning, are knowledgeable about their local housing markets, and are acutely aware of housing issues and needs in their communities.

The size and capacity of local governments in Rhode Island vary greatly, from Providence's capital city government, which operates the largest municipal housing programs in the state, to the smaller municipalities which do not operate housing programs. As mentioned earlier, of Rhode Island's 39 municipalities, there are six Entitlement Communities and four Participating Jurisdictions (including the state). The largest cities directly administer CDBG, HOME, ESG and HOPWA programs, along with other Federal programs, and have staff capable of administering local programs and projects. Smaller communities participate through the State's programs, and may apply for funding under the Small Cities Program. They combine local staff administrative capability with consultants and local non-profits to administer community development and housing program activities when grants are received.

Of particular importance at the municipal level, are the local affordable housing committees, which have recently emerged with the passage of the affordable housing plans. While these groups are new and relatively inexperienced, they represent an important opportunity at the local level to foster local support and education on the need for affordable homes.

The Consolidated Plan, and the CDBG, HOME and ESG Programs are built on the premise that local officials are most knowledgeable and capable of determining the activities that best serve local needs. The State recognizes that premise by operating its CDBG, HOME, and ESG Programs through competitive procurement in which local governments and community-based organizations may propose projects and programs that are best suited to local needs.

#### **Participating Jurisdictions**

According to HUD, a "Participating Jurisdiction" (PJ) is any State or unit of general local government that has been designated by HUD to receive and administer funds directly in accordance with the HOME Program Allocation Formulas. In Rhode Island, there are currently 4 Participating Jurisdictions: State of Rhode Island; Providence; Woonsocket; and Pawtucket.

### **Entitlement Communities**

In addition to its four PJs' receipt of HOME funding, the State of Rhode Island receives local CDBG funding through six Entitlement Communities: Cranston; East Providence; Pawtucket; Providence; Warwick; and Woonsocket.

### **Non-Profit Organizations**

The small state of Rhode Island is very rich in its non-profit community, though state budget cuts and overall reduced charitable giving during the current economic crisis threaten many organizations' viability. Among this sector, affordable housing is served by a significant array of organizations that meet various needs from homeless advocacy, to affordable housing development, to providing housing and services to special needs populations.

Below is a roster and brief description of some the principal nonprofit organizations with affordable housing as part of their primary mission:

#### **Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDOs)**

Under the Federal HOME Program, Rhode Island is required to reserve a minimum of fifteen percent of each year's allocation of HOME funds for projects developed, owned, or sponsored by community housing development organizations (CHDOs). Federal program regulations set forth the requirements that an organization must meet to qualify as a CHDO. A CHDO is a community-based not-for-profit organization that has or intends to retain staff with the capacity to develop affordable housing for the community it serves.

A CHDO must maintain at least one-third of its governing board's membership for residents of low-income neighborhoods, other low-income neighborhoods, other low-income community residents, or elected representatives of low-income neighborhood organizations. It also must provide a formal process for low-income program beneficiaries to advise the organization in all of its decisions regarding the design, development, and management of all HOME assisted affordable housing projects.

Currently, Rhode Island has 19 organizations certified as CHDOs. While they primarily represent a mix of Community Development Corporations (CDCs) who serve as non-profit housing developers; they have also evolved from homeless providers as well non-profit organizations that have been developed from local housing authorities and Community Action (CAP) agencies.

**GrowSmart RI** is a statewide public interest group representing a broad coalition of partners fighting sprawl and leading the charge for better-managed growth through innovative policies and programs to revitalize city, town and village centers; preserve cultural and natural resources; expand economic opportunity for all Rhode Islanders. Its Advisory Council represents 55 offices and organizations from the federal, state and municipal government as well as the interests of corporate, community development, environmental, historical preservation, higher education and non-profit organizations. It serves on the KeepSpace Advisory Committee and has been a long-standing partner with the state's governmental and non-profit communities in the advocacy for affordable homes and a key partner in the provision of technical assistance to municipalities.

**Housing Action Coalition** is a group of 70 organizational members dedicated to promoting, preserving and increasing affordable homes throughout Rhode Island. They advocate on the state and national level on behalf of tenants and homeowners.

**Housing Network of RI** is the state association of 20 non-profit community development corporations. Its members have developed and built thousands of affordable homes throughout the state and initiated numerous revitalization efforts in neighborhoods across Rhode Island. The Housing Network exists to support the work of its members, and to promote public awareness and policies that address Rhode Island's housing and community economic needs.

**HousingWorksRI** is a coalition of over 100 members/organizations and campaign intended to end the state's severe shortage of quality, affordable homes. HousingWorks RI's vision is a state with communities that embrace a variety of housing choices so Rhode Islanders, regardless of income, can live in quality, affordable homes in vibrant and thriving neighborhoods. To this end, HousingWorks RI publishes research and informational briefs, convenes public education sessions and offers presentations to municipalities and Chambers of Commerce on the importance of affordable homes to Rhode Island's economy.

**Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless (RICH)** is organized to promote and preserved the dignity and quality of life for men, women and children by pursuing comprehensive and cooperative solutions to the problems of housing and homelessness. This is accomplished through advocacy, education, collaboration, technical assistance, and selected direct services provided to homeless individuals and families, coalition members, elected officials and the community at large. It is comprised of 49 members representing 32 service agencies that provide direct support and services to the homeless, and 17 supporting agencies, whose missions and work support services to the homeless of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island is fortunate to house local offices for two national non-profit organizations that have a profoundly important impact on the institutional structure of our affordable housing delivery for Rhode Islanders:

The **Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)** is a national nonprofit organization and community development financial institution that helps communities create permanent housing with services to prevent and end homelessness.

The **Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)** is dedicated to helping community residents transform distressed neighborhoods into healthy and sustainable communities of choice and opportunity — good places to work, do business and raise children. LISC mobilizes corporate, government and philanthropic support to provide local community development organizations with: loans, grants and equity investments; local, statewide and national policy support; technical and management assistance. LISC is a national organization with a community focus.

Beyond local and national non-profit organizations, two very important philanthropic organizations serve as cornerstones to the funding of a number of housing efforts in the state:

The **Rhode Island Foundation** works to build a better Rhode Island as a philanthropic resource for people, communities, organizations, and programs. The Foundation provides evaluation of community issues and makes strategic grants; promotes and builds effective philanthropy; stewards permanent endowments, honoring donor intent and current needs; builds the strengths and capacity of the nonprofit sector; provides leadership to and a forum for civil dialogue on important issues; and grows its endowment through disciplined and quality investments. Its local impact is felt throughout the non-profit community among CDCs and social service organizations. It also plays a vital role in serving as a founding partner and home to HousingWorks RI.

The **United Way of Rhode Island (UWRI)** is the local affiliate of the international United Way organization, which was founded in the late 1800s, and advances the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all, by focusing on education, income and health through its network of nearly 1,800 community-based United Ways in 45 countries and territories. In Rhode Island, beyond its critical funding role, UWRI has served as the leader and convener in a number of efforts to combat homelessness, poverty and provision of social services through its roles in the Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board; 2-1-1; Earned Income Tax Credit Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA). UWRI was also a founding partner and is a continuing supporter of HousingWorks RI.

### **Private Sector**

Last but not least in the examination of Rhode Island's institutional structure of housing are the private sector entities that tie the entire network of state and quasi-public agencies and non-profit organizations to the broader economy of the state and its residents.

The private sector in Rhode Island includes the stakeholders throughout the housing process from construction and financing of housing development to mortgage financing and cooperation with realtors, attorneys, appraisers, etc. Many private professionals also participate by sitting on boards of directors of non-profit organizations.

Private construction companies are utilized to construct affordable housing, and are responsible for completion time lines, quality of construction and completion of the housing within a prescribed budget. As a result, private industry influences the cost of housing construction. As more efficient ways to manufacture goods for the housing industry are developed, construction time frames are reduced, and better ways to manage the construction process are developed by the private sector, the cost of housing will be affected.

Private corporations outside the construction industry have become major investors in low income housing through the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program. The developer of housing benefits through the infusion of equity funds to a project while the investor benefits from the use of the credits. The credit is a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the investor's federal tax liability.

The private sector as well as government and non-profit organizations are important components in the institutional structure through which the State will carry out its housing plan. Clearly, without any one of these components the entire structure would be weakened.

### **Assessment of Present Institutional Structure**

The institutional structure of public, private, and non-profit agencies that presently implements Rhode Island's housing strategy is comprehensive. While many organizations are involved and the delivery of housing is targeted toward many specific populations, a multitude of organizations must work together to appropriately implement this Consolidated Plan.

#### **Strengths**

- Rhode Island's small size makes it possible and beneficial for organizations serving similar populations and/or housing needs to work together collaboratively to leverage resources and share best practices. There are several task forces and collaborative efforts among agencies serving similar populations. These meetings are used to discuss strategies to improve and better coordinate programs and projects.
- State agency staff are committed to their organizational missions and to efficiently and effectively delivering programs and services to the clients they serve.
- Rhode Island's partnership with local governments and organizations is an important part of the State's efforts to expand affordable housing opportunities. This partnership provides the State with excellent information on the housing needs of the communities.
- The extensive network of private and non-profit organizations that are involved in housing activities in the State helps to ensure that a wide variety of housing needs are being examined and served. These groups work closely with the state to develop affordable housing.

#### **Weaknesses**

- While a diverse and comprehensive structure is generally a strength, it can also be a challenge when providers must apply to many different agencies and programs, all with their own rules, requirements and applications to undertake a project.
- The lack of staff and adequate funding at the state's Housing Resources Commission is a hindrance to effective implementation of the state's affordable housing goals.
- While a number of formal collaborations exist among state agencies and non-profit organizations working on similar issues, more communication across population types and service lines would provide for more innovation and effective delivery systems.
- Public/private partnerships in the development of affordable housing need to be expanded. The maximum participation by both sectors is the key to successfully building housing at the lowest possible cost that is affordable to low and moderate income people.
- Significant retirements and a hiring freeze necessitated by the state's budget woes have resulted in many state agencies losing a great deal of institutional knowledge and hard-pressed to effectively deliver required programs and services.
- The current economic downturn has put great pressure on Rhode Island's extensive non-profit network which has always operated on a very small margin.

### **Closing Gaps in the Institutional Structure**

The coordination of State, Federal, and private resources will improve access to housing and community development resources and the targeting of these resources to high priority areas and initiatives.

Rhode Island will continue to analyze the delivery system of affordable housing to identify areas of problem and issues. Recommendations will be made on how to improve the administration of programs by State agencies. Closer communication ties among agencies with housing programs will be pursued to improve program coordination. Periodic meetings of the State agencies would improve the coordination of current funding programs as well as implementation of new housing policies and programs. The goal is to operate the most efficient and effective programs possible.

The private sector will be encouraged to continue to participate in the development of affordable housing. Local housing providers will be encouraged to solicit participation by the private business community whether it be financial, expert advice or sitting on boards of non-profit organizations. These public/private partnerships must be strengthened.

The efficiency of the government approval process, local, state or federal, should be examined. Coordination of these approval processes could shorten the time needed to review a project. Technical assistance to housing providers could help ease their frustration, help them design better projects, and improve relations with community leaders. Similarly, technical assistance to municipalities should be addressed by assistance from public and private entities.

## **L. Coordination and Engagement**

Rhode Island emphasizes coordination with public and assisted housing providers and private and governmental health, mental health, and service agencies. It is a priority of the state to strengthen and expand partnerships in housing and community development. These partnerships include all public and assisted housing providers as well as private and governmental health, mental health and service agencies that do business with the State's housing programs. It is also a priority for the state to assure that residents and other public stakeholders participate in the implementation of the Consolidated Plan. To that end, Rhode Island Housing and its partners will actively seek the engagement of the interested public and those most affected by the state's affordable housing programs.

As described in Section (d), Rhode Island addresses its homelessness through a cooperative Continuum of Care effort led by the State Housing Resources Commission's (HRC's) Office of Homelessness. The Office of Homelessness coordinates the statewide Continuum of Care planning process, working year round to plan and coordinate an effective response to homelessness. The full Office of Homelessness, with wide representation from public and private organizations and individuals representing the range of service providers and homeless constituencies, meets quarterly to evaluate trends in the needs of the homeless, the effectiveness of current strategies, and progress in implementing the 10 year plan to end homelessness. A Coordinating Committee meets monthly to review and help coordinate the work of the various sub-committees and plan for quarterly meetings of the Office of Homelessness. There are a number of subcommittees, focused on specific issues like data quality, employment and training, and the Continuum of Care application, that meet regularly and whose work informs the Office of Homelessness.

Because of its size, Rhode Islanders, including the homeless, move readily between cities and towns to accomplish activities of daily living. Services tend to be centralized and most agencies have statewide or regional service delivery areas. Due to the unique geography and close relationships among service providers in Rhode Island, the Office of Homelessness and community providers continue to promote a coordinated statewide Continuum of Care as the best system for addressing homelessness in the state.

Relative to the implementation of the Consolidated Plan through coordination with local governments, the state's size is a tremendous benefit. Having only 39 municipalities allows a level of familiarity statewide with planning and community development offices as well as administrative managers and elected officials. The state has made it a priority to involve municipalities on many of its committees that oversee land-use and housing, and municipalities feel comfortable calling on a number of state and housing officials in seeking advice and technical assistance. Ultimately, housing is a very local issue, and interaction and coordination with municipalities is critical to the plan's success.

Because of the limited resources available under the CDBG program, the State rarely funds large-scale economic development activities which are designed to create or retain jobs. In meeting its Economic Development priority, the State broadly identifies economic development as activities designed to assist businesses, create jobs and/or improve the job readiness of low/moderate income persons. Therefore, certain activities which are considered "public services" by HUD regulation may qualify as a State priority under this category.

In accomplishing these activities, the state relies on its relationship with RI Economic Development Corporation, the quasi-public agency charged with the state's economic development, as well as seeking input from a variety of private-sector partners at the local level.

The state is committed growing this goal in this Consolidated Plan. With the advent of initiatives such as KeepSpace and partners like GrowSmart RI and HousingWorks RI, Rhode Island is making a concerted effort to cement the relationship between housing and economic development. The state's financial and employment situations dictate an improvement of economic development in order to enhance the lives and well-being of all low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders.

Beyond the efforts above, the theme of "coordination" emerged across each of the seven Focus Groups convened through the Citizen Participation process as a means of enhancing all of the objectives to produce more affordable housing and to serving its residents.

Most broadly the **two objectives** sought by the focus groups were:

- **Build inter-organizational communication**
- **Allow for broad-based information sharing**

Both of these objectives fit within the intentions of what the state seeks to accomplish in the next five years and will be promoted throughout all of the plan's activities.

However, several other coordination objectives emerged relative to the specific topics as well. These were:

#### **OBJECTIVE 1:**

**Improve coordination between state agencies to align priorities and coordinate resources for the preservation or creation of affordable homes**

As mentioned in previous sections, a key opportunity to improve coordination at the state, regional and local level is the KeepSpace Initiative. By bringing together a range of state agencies involved in housing and community development, the initiative provides an opportunity to think beyond individual agency silos and consider the needs of the community as a whole. By working together, this collaboration could result in reduced cost and development delays for housing and community projects, and improved planning and design for the community. Improved state agency coordination also provides the opportunity to better leverage resources and target efforts by focusing on areas and initiatives that are high priorities for the community and the state.

Other inter-agency collaborative efforts should also be continued and expanded including agency participation in the Housing Resources Commission and its various committees, the Inter-Agency Council to End Homelessness, the Healthy Housing Collaborative and the Governor's Reentry Council.

#### **OBJECTIVE 2:**

- **Build collaboration between housing and service providers to develop empowerment programs for low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders**

Social service and housing providers have increasingly been collaborating to ensure that low and

moderate income individuals and families find stable, affordable housing. This collaboration is essential to the success of efforts to increase the supply of permanent supportive housing in the state. The RoadHome and HousingFirst programs required these linkages between housing providers and service agencies. Nearly 350 people are currently being assisted through these programs.

HPRP funds have been awarded to 10 social service agencies which will provide services to families at risk of homelessness, working with landlords and assisting with finding more affordable housing. The requirements to link the services and housing will expand the collaborations beyond the program.

The Family Self Sufficiency program works with HCVP participants. In the program, the coordinator works with participants to establish goals for improving their finances and increasing income. The coordinator collaborates with many social service agencies to help the participant get the supportive services needed to meet the goals. These linkages will continue to strengthen through this program.

Empowerment of low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders relies heavily on the enhancement of their knowledge and skills. Through the coordination of services between housing and social service providers, programs serving this population can achieve greater results. The state will continue to seek opportunities to improve and grow coordination between housing and social service providers.

### **OBJECTIVE 3:**

#### **Coordination of housing resources with other supports through CAPs**

The Community Action Programs (CAP) in the state represent an important network of information and services for many Rhode Islanders. CAP agencies provide access to heating assistance, emergency housing funds, weatherization as well as numerous other programs that help improve the lives of residents in the communities they serve. By coordinating these resources with programs and services provided by other agencies and organizations, such as lead hazard reduction programs, housing counseling and access to affordable homes, we can all better serve the needs of low and moderate-income Rhode Islanders.

### **OBJECTIVE 4:**

#### **Improve coordination between lead mitigation program with other healthy housing resources, such as weatherization and CDBG rehabilitation**

The involvement of the State's Department of Health has truly enriched the quality of the affordable housing efforts in Rhode Island, especially its lead mitigation program. Through this model it is the state's intention to expand the programs that utilize this beneficial relationship to include weatherization and CDBG rehabilitation, in order to bring a fuller complement of health improvements to the state's housing stock.

### **M. Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Use**

The Low-income Housing Tax Credit Program (LIHTC) is administered by Rhode Island Housing and is closely coordinated with the allocation of HOME funds as well as other federal and state resources. Rhode Island receives just over two million dollars in competitive Low Income Housing Tax Credits annually. Applications are accepted each year and staff responsible for a wide variety of funding sources jointly evaluate and rank development proposals. The LIHTC program has several identified priorities including the revitalization of distressed urban areas and the creation of affordable housing in areas of the State with a very limited supply.

The State's strategy will continue to focus on combining the LIHTC with available public subsidies on the Federal, state and local levels. It is through this combination that most of the low-income rental housing developed attains financial feasibility and viability. A predictable flow of LIHTC allows the state to forecast the amounts and types of government subsidies that can be leveraged through use of the LIHTC. This predictability also permits the state to forecast by way of its goals and priorities, the types of subsidies that will be most effective in meeting the housing needs of the State over the next five years.