

VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD
Policy Position
GUIDELINES FOR NEW CONSTRUCTION HOUSING PROJECTS
As amended, 11/20/98

Whenever possible, VHCB encourages the rehabilitation of existing structures for the provision of affordable housing. Nevertheless, there are circumstances where construction of new buildings is both appropriate and necessary. The Board adopts these guidelines to clarify the conditions under which a new construction project will be favorably received and the factors that the Board will consider when evaluating a proposal for such a project. These guidelines assume that a new construction project will also meet whatever standards are imposed by local zoning or subdivision regulations, the Act 250 process, or other state agencies, departments, or boards.

Conditions Under Which the VHCB Would Support a New Construction Project

- A. A very low vacancy rate exists in the area either in general or for a specific type or price of housing, and/or;
- B. There is a lack of housing opportunities of the type or quality that the project aims to address within the market area and there are limited opportunities for rehabilitation of existing properties where such rehab. will result in a "quality" end product, and/or;
- C. Additional jobs place demands on existing housing stock and create the need for additional housing stock, and/or;
- D. Cost effectiveness of new construction vs. rehab. has been demonstrated, assuming that the rehab. meets conditions A-C. As a general rule new construction should not be significantly more expensive than rehab.. If it is more expensive it should provide amenities that could not be obtained with rehab. opportunities within the community or within nearby communities, and/or;
- E. Rental assistance or substantial leverage is available for a new construction project and would not be available for a project involving acquisition and rehabilitation, and/or;
- F. In the case of non-significant¹ buildings in established neighborhoods where the cost of adequate rehab. exceeds the cost of demolition and reconstruction.

Goals of New Construction Projects

¹"non-significant" is defined as buildings that are not on or eligible for the State or National Register of Historic Places or do not otherwise make a major contribution to the character or function of the neighborhood or community in which they are located.

New construction projects that receive VHCB funding should meet the following goals:

- A. Promote cost efficiency both over the short and long term with design, construction, and materials of high quality that will be maintained over time
- B. Promote efficient use of land and open space that encourages cluster development and maximizes open space
- C. Produce residential development that through design and layout encourages or contributes to a sense of community
- D. Encourage new development in areas (1) in proximity to services and jobs or where affordable transportation is available, (2) to be served by municipal infrastructure, and (3) that are either incorporated into or are an extension of existing residential neighborhoods or community centers
- E. Promote economic integration through the creation of mixed income communities
- F. Produces a product that is marketable and appeals to consumers, assuming this goal does not conflict with other goals above

Factors to Be Evaluated

In deciding whether or not to provide funding to a new construction project the Board will evaluate the following factors:

- A. Location
 - 1. Easy access to jobs and services, transportation, grocery stores, convenience shops, schools, health services, etc.
 - 2. Compatible neighborhood (residential or mixed use neighborhood with uses that don't detract from the use of property as residential development - i.e. not in an industrial zone)
 - 3. Integrated into or logical extension to existing residential neighborhood or community center. Does not promote "sprawl". Infill housing is encouraged.
- B. Site Considerations
 - 1. Negative factors would include building on prime agricultural land or in floodplain, disturbance of rare or endangered species, negative impact on wetlands, archeological sites, historic properties, natural areas, wildlife habitat, or neighboring uses
 - 2. Availability of public infrastructure either on site or within close proximity is a positive factor

C. Site Design

1. Creates efficient use of site and economies in construction. Costly low density development is discouraged when alternatives are available. Efficiencies should be created by:
 - a. Minimizing amount of road and parking area
 - b. Clustering buildings, where appropriate for setting
 - c. Maximizing greenspace as needed for recreation, amenities
2. Provides play areas in family developments and other amenities in suitable and convenient locations
3. Creates pedestrian and other connections to neighborhood and services and/or is part of connected public street network
4. Allows for logical traffic circulation for vehicles and pedestrians within the site

D. Building Location and Design

1. Residential structures are sited for maximum solar gain
2. Development is compatible with scale, size, and character of surrounding structures
3. Energy and water saving materials and construction techniques are used in conformance with VHC Energy Policy
4. Accessibility and adaptability to persons with physical disabilities is provided in conformance with state and federal regulations. Applicants are strongly encouraged to make additional units adaptable where appropriate for future potential conversion. Projects that provide more than the required number of accessible units will be more favorably received than those that only meet requirements.

E. Other Project Considerations

1. Mixed income communities, possibly through a combination of rental and homeownership, are encouraged
2. The Board strongly encourages municipal support as expressed by reduction of fees such as sewer and water, impact, permit, application for CDBG, municipal takeover of roads

Applicability

These guidelines apply to both multi and single family developments, including those developed by the project sponsor, turnkey developments, self-help housing, housing developed by a Habitat for Humanity chapter, vocational education, YouthBuild or similar programs, as well as new mobile home parks.

Projects to Be Constructed on a Site to Be Purchased with Permits

In cases where application is made for a project to be constructed on a site where permits were previously obtained by the seller, the Board may choose to weigh the benefits of having a permitted site against tradeoffs in meeting the guidelines outlined above.

References

In developing new construction projects VHCB applicants should refer to the following references or guides:

Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs, Planning for Affordable Housing, Feb. 1990

Chittenden Affordable Housing Committee and Greater Burlington Industrial Corp., A Planning Guide, Housing the Workforce

Burlington Community Land Trust and Vermont Land Trust, A Citizens Guide to Conserving Land and Creating Affordable Housing

Julie Campolli, Elizabeth Humstone, and Rolf Keilman, "Vermont Villages Project" (available in slide form from the Dept. of Housing & Community Affairs)

Yaro, Arendt, Dodson, and Babec, Center for Rural Massachusetts, Dealing with Change in the Connecticut River Valley: A Design Manual for Conservation and Development