

October 17, 2019

## Discussion: Should we create an Upper Valley Landlord and Service Provider Network?

### Bottom Line

YES, creating a network is worthwhile. Unanimous agreement among those in the room.

### Existing Networks

#### **Networks we already have access to:**

- VT and NH Apartment Owner Associations (active in urban areas; no service providers)
- Upper Valley Continuum of Care (comprised of social service providers)
- Existing personal relationships with other landlords
- Vital Communities' Housing Breakfast (twice annual networking event)
- Realtor Associations at the state and local level
- Upper Valley Co-Housing email list
- Town Energy Committees (coordinated in the Upper Valley by Vital Communities)
- Vermont Energy Action Network

#### **Other ways landlords currently get information**

- Fire/safety updates from the town/city
- Info included in utility/tax bills

#### **Examples of other landlord networks**

- Brattleboro Landlord Network: one person volunteers to manage a contact list and send an email once per month inviting all to lunch. Of ~50 on the list, 10-30 might show up. There may or may not be an "agenda." Occasional guest speakers. They keep adding people to the list – mostly by word of mouth. Hosted at a different local restaurants. Everyone pays for their own lunch. No notes are taken.
- ~40 years ago, there was an Upper Valley group that reviewed tenants; later disbanded
- Investors group in Bedford (landlord/owner/etc.)

### Topics/Opportunities to Explore as a Network

#### **Service Providers engaging with Landlords**

- Build relationships between landlords and service providers
- Awareness of programs/funding, including program qualifications and updates
- How to help struggling tenants (e.g. avoid eviction, connect with services)
- How to help people find housing (e.g. match tenants and landlords)
- Referrals between landlords and service providers
- VT vs. NH differences (e.g. energy efficiency programs, tax assessments)

## **Municipal Topics**

- Local regulations
- Emergency supports (e.g. fire in the middle of the night)
- Hearing from town health officers
- Smoke / CO detectors

## **Building Upgrades**

- Energy efficiency, even in difficult situations, and how to justify/afford the investment
- Funding/loans to support emergency changes / required updates

## **Landlord Best Practices**

- How to maintain a viable business / benchmarking the property rental business
- Hearing from and networking with other landlords (problems/solutions, successes/failures)
- Landlord advocacy
- Leases (share language and learn from each other)
- Credit and background checks
- Landlord 101 for new/interested landlords

## **Working with Tenants**

- Fair housing
- Affordable housing
- Getting information that can be passed on to tenants (e.g. lead, affordability)
- Ways to encourage prior communication if tenant is not able to pay rent
- Strategies for avoiding eviction
- Tenant stability and sustainability
- Transparent, concrete, objective criteria for equal treatment of tenants
- Support animals

## **Opportunities for economies of scale**

- Fuel purchasing and other bulk deals by working together

## **Networking**

- Communication with others facing similar situations
- Cooperation around difficult situations to find a solution

## **Shared Contact Lists and Resources**

- Shared list of network members (landlords and service providers)
- Shared lists and reviews of private vendors/providers (e.g. contractors, lawyers, insurance companies)
- Shared resources (it can be hard for landlords to find resources on their own – a network could save time/money by having relevant info in one place)

## Next Steps for Creating and Sustaining a Network

### **WHO** should be part of the network?

- Anyone who wants to be on the contact list can be – no restrictions for now
- Valuable to network with more than just landlords, especially since VT and NH apartment owner associations, it makes sense to tie in service providers to this network to make it unique
- Continue expanding to include landlords not in the room today
- Clarify what “Service providers” means – nonprofit and for profit?
- Maybe consider “affiliate” members (e.g. private sector services/contractors)

### **WHEN** should the network meet?

- Not more than quarterly to start, and at least annually.

### **WHAT** should meetings focus on?

- Guest speakers and focus topics
- Perhaps alternate bi-state meetings with VT or NH specific meetings
- Perhaps tabling-type events to share/talk/learn from other organizations/businesses

### **GENERAL RULES:**

- Keep the network structure simple and easy to maintain
- Meetings must be valuable (time is money)
- Clarify expectations around confidentiality (e.g. landlords discussing their experiences)

### **Questions about Governance/Leadership**

- A committee of service providers and landlords should be involved in ongoing coordination (need to clarify expectations and time commitment for this group)
- Can this network be run by an informal, volunteer committee? Do we need funding to sustain?
  - Is it necessary to find a single organization to serve as primary convener?
  - Can we reach out to housing associations for startup assistance?
  - Landlords may be open to reasonable dues if needed to sustain a valuable network
- The group wished for the October meeting conveners to continue in that role for now, with the addition of any willing landlords

### **What should happen BETWEEN MEETINGS? Ideas suggested:**

- Maintain and share a contact list of all network members
- A way for new contacts to be added between meetings
- Email newsletter of some kind with links and updates
  - Email is not enough – landlords need to learn about the programs/providers, they need some background context before email updates are helpful
- Perhaps create work groups around specific topics where interest is high
- Some kind of discussion forum (e.g. Facebook Group or List Serv)
- A website with a library of resources from and for the network