

Housing report to County

Fred Sinclair, Vicki Grant, Lynne Faecke, and Charles Kalthoff met to discuss and develop some potential program designs that can address housing conditions, affordability, and availability in the County. Based on the housing data for the County there are a few key factors that define our area and many of the rural areas of the state. Generally much of the housing stock is 50 years or older which implies that environmental issues may be present (lead, asbestos, mold) and may be inefficient by today's energy and insulation standards. Older homes may also present building code violations that increase the cost of bringing housing up to housing quality standards (HQS). One area of concern is the potential impact on affordable housing if hydrofracking begins in the county. Stories from Pennsylvania indicate that housing is increasingly occupied by employees related to the drilling interests. Any large influx of workers would likely put pressure on available housing and assuredly raise rents. Making affordable housing more difficult for low income families in the county and likely causing spot shortages of housing in towns and villages near drilling areas.

ACCORD has been providing rehabilitation programs to the community since 1972. There is clearly an ongoing need to assist homeowners and renters in improving the conditions, availability, and affordability of housing. The generally lower value in housing makes it difficult to secure bank financing for improvements, particularly for lower income families. Landlords, due to lower incomes, keep rents lower than they might want simply to maintain occupancy, leaving fewer dollars for maintenance and improvements. Most of the housing improvement resources available to assist owners or renters is based on the income of the occupant of the housing. Funds for rehabilitation must first address environmental hazards, building code issues, and energy efficiency items. If the available funds cannot completely address all of these areas we cannot provide any funding. Further, specific funding sources restrict the amount of rehab dollars by the final value of the unit. If rehab costs more than half of the assessed value nothing can be done, unless we can identify other resources to fill the gap. ACCORD has worked with the county for years as their county-wide housing program provider, preparing and administering programs through Community Development Block Grant and the Federal HOME program. We suggest that we revive this relationship and look at the upcoming round of funding to develop a county-wide rehab program to systematically address housing needs around the county. One area that we feel we need to focus on is the need for water and sewer upgrades or replacement. These targeted improvements could use the same funding sources.

Allegany County has the highest percentage of mobile home housing in the State. Much of this is old and cannot be brought up to code or housing quality standards. The solution is to remove the mobile home and replace it with a double wide. New York State has several housing designs that they have approved for this type of program. A county-wide effort to systematically seek funding to replace 5-6 units a year could dramatically improve the quality and safety of housing. ACCORD could assist in preparing and delivering this type of program design.

Counties throughout the State are a major payer of housing costs for their clients eligible for DSS services, i.e. rents and utilities. Vicki raised concerns about available housing for singles, the quality and cost of housing for families, and special needs housing. Many of the current clients would fall under and benefit from the above mentioned rehab and replacement programs. Specifically, single room occupancy housing appears to be a need. As many of these persons are recently released from jail or other treatment programs they can be considered homeless and a facility might be able to be developed that provided housing for these persons. We would need to find a building or site that could be

accessible to community services and transportation. ACCORD has used the Homeless Housing Assistance Program several times and could assist in developing and managing this type of facility. We will be researching models from around the state for housing these special populations.

There will likely be some upcoming opportunities for grant funding to address some of these needs. We anticipate disaster funding being available in March and may address some limited issues in select areas of the county. The Consolidated Funding Application making available all State housing resources is likely, pending approval of the state budget, in May or June of this year. The above approaches are generally all potential projects for submittal. When new funding rounds arise, ACCORD housing staff will research grant opportunities to improve and increase the housing stock in Allegany County as they become available. We look forward to working with the County in this endeavor.