Hunger Council of Washington County Meeting Minutes
Meeting Date: December 15, 2016

Present: Beth Burgess (Vermont 2-1-1), Don Carrigan (U.S. Department of Agriculture – retired), Rita Copeland (Twin Valley Senior Center), Susan Kuegel (Vermont State Housing Authority), Jennifer LaPan (Downstreet Housing and Community Development - SASH), Karen Nelson (Vermont Department of Health), Shane Oakes (Family Center of Washington County), Marisa Parent (Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living), Beth Stern (Central Vermont Council on Aging)

Co-Chairs: Tawnya Kristen (Green Mountain United Way) and Eileen Peltier (Downstreet Housing and Community Development)

Hunger Free Vermont Staff Present: Faye Conte, Drake Turner, and Jenna Banning

Welcome & Introductions
Brief introductions from attendees.

Updates & Announcements
Attendees shared upcoming events, opportunities, and related events.

Eileen Peltier – Eileen notified the Council that the next meeting in March will be at Downstreet Housing and Community Development’s offices at 22 Keith Street, Suite 100, Barre. More reminders will be sent out as the date approaches.

Faye Conte - The Vermont Farm to School Network is gearing up for the coming legislative session and gathering grassroots support for expanding the Farm to School grants. Katy passed around cards and asked Council members to sign on in support of expanding the Farm to School grant. These cards were collected and will be sent to local state legislators in January.

The Council discussed potential impacts of the incoming federal administration on anti-hunger and anti-poverty work. Faye Conte shared that there will be a number of programs coming up in the new Congressional session, including the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR) and the Farm Bill, which was supposed to come up in 2018, but there’s talk of starting reauthorization next year. The Farm Bill authorizes funding and regulations for SNAP (3SquaresVT) and anti-hunger advocates are worried potential efforts to change the program from an entitlement (which can expand or contract to meet need) to a block grant (wherein states receive a set amount of money that inhibits their capacity to serve food insecure citizens, and which would cause many Americans to lose benefits). Faye expressed her appreciation of Vermont’s Congressional Delegation, who are strong partners and advocates at the federal level.

At the state level, anti-hunger and anti-poverty advocates are waiting to see what’s likely to arise with the new Scott administration. More will be known once he releases the budget plans, but

Action Steps & Handouts:
Action: Go to http://vermontfarmtoschool.org/2017-farm-school-campaign to sign on in support of expanding the Farm to School grant in Vermont.
Faye anticipates being able to work on great advancements like expanding Farm to School, even though she cautions work will be challenged by the large budget deficit.

Eileen Peltier shared a discussion from earlier in the year between all of the Co-Chairs of the Hunger Councils of Vermont that focused on the social determinants of health and the upstream effect of preventative care. Eileen is enthusiastic about bringing the healthcare community into anti-hunger work, especially given the changes to the healthcare system through the Affordable Care Act.

### Hunger Council Advocacy

Faye Conte, Hunger Free Vermont’s Advocacy and Education Director, shared an update on plans discussed in the last meeting for the Hunger Councils to support important anti-hunger policy with legislators and the new administration.

As was discussed in the September Council meeting, the Hunger Councils of Vermont will be sending letters of introduction to the incoming Scott Administration and State Senators and Representatives. These letters will be drafted by Hunger Free Vermont and the Co-Chairs of each Hunger Council, and then will be sent to all Council members, at which point Council members will have the opportunity to raise any major concerns or opt-out if they or their organization have advocacy restrictions. The letters will be generalized (not asking for specific actions or issues), and focus on inviting the legislature and administration to work with the Hunger Council network.

*Council members expressed interest in inviting local state legislators to the next Council meeting.*

### Hunger and Nutrition Challenges for Seniors: Addressing Needs Now and in the Future

Access to adequate and nutritious food is one of many issues facing seniors in Washington County. Representatives from local and state organizations shared an overview of the need they are seeing among seniors, and how that is shifting as the senior population grows and expands to include new generations.

*Eileen introduced the speakers and thanked them for sharing their perspectives and knowledge. Since the Hunger Council is both an educational and advocacy group, Eileen encouraged the Council to think about what can be done to help the situation in Vermont, where both the senior population and rates of food insecurity among seniors are rising.*

**Drake Turner (Hunger Free Vermont)** – Drake shared an overview of the presentation prepared by Kelly Stoddard-Poor from AARP Vermont. (Kelly was unable to attend today’s meeting.) Drake highlighted two slides showing the population change across the United States from 2010 to 2020, which illustrates the rapidly increasing senior population. Drake reminded the Council that states are shifting the ways they deliver services to meet this changing demographic, but there is not a similar change in how funding is provided. Drake shared that there is a tri-state collaborative between Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, which have similar demographics and concerns, and are working together to find solutions.

Drake also highlighted the rate of food insecurity affecting people who are nearing the senior
category – this group is experiencing higher rates of food insecurity, which is worrying for the future.

The Council discussed how seniors and other vulnerable populations are much harder hit by challenges like the Great Recession and much less able to recover or change their situation than the general population. Beth Burgess from Vermont 2-1-1 shared that a 2-1-1 is getting a lot of calls from aging Vermonters.

Beth Stern (Central Vermont Council on Aging) – Beth is the Executive Director of the Central Vermont Council on Aging (CVCOA).

Beth shared that although seniors are increasingly facing food insecurity, it continues to be hard to convince them to sign up for 3SquaresVT for a variety of reasons, including stigma, pride, lack of understanding of eligibility, and the challenging bureaucracy to apply and maintain benefits. As a result, only one-third of eligible seniors are participating in the program, which is the lowest rate of all demographics in the state.

Angela Smith-Dieng (Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living) – Angela is part of the State Unit on Aging, and focuses a lot on the Older Americans Act’s (OAA) funding, which are primarily implemented by the five Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) across the state and mostly supports funding for food programs.

There is a growing need for Meals on Wheels but limited funding through the OAA. Thankfully, the OAA was passed in 2016, but it is still subject to appropriations, which haven’t happened. The AAAs are trying to cover the gap in funding through fundraising and grants, but it’s often not enough. DAIL is trying to work closely with the AAAs to help support them, but many are having to cut back in how many days they can provide foods, and potentially implement waiting lists. While no one wants to have a waiting list, DAIL and the AAAs are starting to use a food security screening tool for their clients to identify who is at highest risk of food insecurity. Angela hopes that gathering this information will help make the case for increased funding.

Angela also hopes that making the connection between nutrition and health will be effective in working with the healthcare system to support senior nutrition. From the State’s perspective, Angela would like to see nutrition and other services provided in a more coordinated package.

Angela Smith-Dieng, Beth Stern, and Council members discussed how the State helps fund the OAA through a required state match. Beth shared that the AAAs are working with the legislature to help pay for home-delivered meals through MedicAid with the Choices for Care program. If MedicAid was able to cover the cost of these meals, that would reduce pressure on OAA funding and allow the AAAs to cover more. This concept was introduced in the last legislative session, and while it wasn’t passed, the Legislature has requested more information, and the AAAs will be advocating for it again this year. While the State would need to increase the amount of money it contributes (to avoid just reallocating money from some other program), Beth Stern felt that it wouldn’t be a large increase.

The Council reviewed statistics shared by Beth Stern on CVCOA’s work in the region. (See attached) The Council agreed that this data and presentation shows the growth in need and the
impact of being able to provide senior meals. The Council also applauded Beth Stern for the op-ed she and Kathy Paquet authored (attached) that was published in the Times Argus.

Council members discussed some of the statistics and information that would be useful to collect and use, including the healthcare cost of not having access to food.

Beth Stern - Beth shared that the cost of 1 year of Meals on Wheels is less than the cost of 1 day in the hospital. In addition, Beth emphasized that “you can’t quantify compassion.” Meals on Wheels drivers play an important role in combating social isolation.

Rita Copeland (Twin Valley Senior Center) – Rita is the director of the Senior Center, and shared an overview of how its community meals and home-delivered meals are operated. Twin Valley serves over 1,000 meals per month, all cooked from scratch and overseen by a registered dietician. Rita expressed her appreciation from the Vermont Foodbank and local gleaning operations for helping provide food for the meals, but shared that it can be very time- and energy-intensive to prepare all of the food. Rita is thankful for all of the volunteers who help prepare and deliver the meals.

The Council discussed the challenge of delivering meals in rural areas. Faye Conte described her experience of delivering Meals on Wheels with one of Twin Valley Senior Center’s volunteer drivers and seeing the social impact of this program.

Angela Smith-Dieng – Angela encouraged the Council to find ways to get local legislators involved in anti-hunger work. Legislators are often inundated with numbers and statistics, so finding personal experiences can be very impactful. For example, a local representative who rode along on a Meals on Wheels delivery shift spoke up last year during discussions on the Choices for Care program to say how much that experience impacted him.

Eileen Peltier – Eileen proposed coordinating a tour of legislators and the Vermont Care Organization and taking them to some of the local services in the area, such as to the Twin Valley Senior Center. Eileen emphasized the potential power of connecting the link between health and nutrition with the State’s 3-4-50 campaign, which highlights the need to focus on improving nutrition.

Faye Conte – Faye shared that Hunger Free Vermont is working on implementing a screen for food insecurity at healthcare settings. Collecting this information will not only help the patient (because they’ll be connected with supports and resources), but will also help hospitals and the healthcare system to understand the presence and role of food security. (See attached)

The Council discussed the changing senior demographic as more baby-boomers are entering what’s traditionally considered to be the “senior category.” More of these individuals are caring for grandchildren and/or retiring later, so the way that “seniors” are defined and considered is changing. Beth Stern and Rita Copeland agreed that providing services for a widening range of ages (and corresponding needs and interests) is a serious challenge.
**Wrap Up and Adjourn**

Eileen and Tawnya thanked the speakers, and encouraged them to reach out to the Hunger Council and its network for support and help.

Beth Stern invited the Council to the Area Agency on Aging’s day at the Statehouse on January 4th.

Tawnya and Eileen thanked the Council for meeting. The next meeting will be on March 30th, 2017.

**Meeting Adjourned**

| Next Meeting: March 30, 2017 |  |