Welcome and Introductions
Katherine welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that Council meetings will be taking a slightly different new format following the suggestions made by Council members in the survey: we will be taking more time to discuss how the Council can be involved in each meeting’s topic focus, as well as allowing more time at the end of meetings for announcements and networking.

Action Steps & Handouts:

Hunger & Other Challenges Facing Windham Region Seniors
In response to the Hunger Council member Survey, in which Council members requested additional information on the issue of food security for seniors, representatives from local organizations shared an overview of the services available to seniors in the Windham Region, as well as what they see in terms of food insecurity and the strength of the safety net.
Lisa Pitcher introduced the panelists - Alicia Moyer, a SASH Coordinator based out of Grace Cottage Hospital / Valley Cares in Townshend, Kathryn Turnas II, Board President of Brattleboro Senior Meals, Lorelei Morrissette, Resident Care Coordinator for Brattleboro Housing Partnership, and Teagan Kosut, Director of Bellows Falls Senior Center. Each were asked to explain what they do, what trends they are seeing in terms of food insecurity for their senior clients, what challenges they are facing, and how the Council can help.

Lorelei Morrissette (Brattleboro Housing Partnership) - Lorelei agreed with Lisa’s opening statement that there are a lot of people struggling financially, but reminded the Council that there’s also a lot of shame for asking for help, which is preventing many from getting food, even if they may need it.
Lorelei described some of the programs operating at the Housing Partnership’s 3 senior housing sites, including food drops by the Vermont Foodbank, gardens on site, and commodity boxes.
The Council discussed some of the logistical challenges of having seniors pick up foods from food drops, as well as the problem of seniors hoarding foods that are not nutritious or that they don’t know how to cook. Lorelei described the monthly luncheon being coordinated by SASH at each of the senior sites that teaches how to prepare a lunch from the items available at the food drop - this program is just starting, and word needs to spread.

Genna Williams described the Vermont Foodbank’s “Veggie Van Go” program that she runs at a number of different sites across the region, including at the Putney Food Shelf. It focuses on creating a simplistic meal using staples (salt, pepper, and olive oil) and the food being donated. While the program is currently limited to what Genna is able to cover (she’s the only person available for the 60 food drop sites in southern Vermont), Genna would like to see this program expanded and would like to connect more with the SASH program. The Foodbank is also considering having “cutting stations” available at food drops so that produce could be processed a little bit, but this would require a lot of volunteer help. The Council agreed that more volunteer help at many organizations would be very useful in making foods easier to take and use for seniors.

Teagan Kosut (Bellows Falls Senior Center) - Bellows Falls Senior Center runs both senior activities and meals. Meals are offered both through their congregate meal site, which offers about 25 - 35 meals / day, and through the Meals on Wheels program, which covers a large delivery area and serves about 46 people / day. (See attached newsletter for the month’s menu.) Teagan echoed the fact that many seniors do not want to apply for benefits and/or do not understand how the benefits work. The Senior Center advertises 3SquaresVT and offers help with getting seniors signed up, but hasn’t seen much success, even though Teagan feels that at least 75% of her clients would easily qualify. Teagan is interested in learning about “senior-friendly” ways to convince people to apply. Much of the food donated to seniors that are homebound goes unused, mostly because many of them are physically unable to make something with it. Teagan would love to be able to provide 2 prepared meals / day for her clients (which she knows they would eat), but this isn’t financially possible. Meals are partially funding by federal nutrition programs, but the Senior Center still needs to pay for part of the cost. Because of the federal funding, the meals need to follow nutritional guidelines, which Teagan and others agreed can be difficult to coordinate. Bellows Falls Senior Center’s meals are prepared by Fitzvogt in Rutland. The Council discussed whether other, more local, sites could provide the meals instead.

The Council discussed senior commodity boxes, a federal commodities program coordinated by the Vermont Foodbank and distributed at SASH sites (including the Brattleboro Housing Partnership’s senior sites). The Council discussed the transportation challenges for seniors to get to the drop off sites for these boxes and other programs.
Teagan Kosut and Kathryn Turnas II described the “winter emergency package” that they send out to their seniors for use in a snow emergency. Both are finding, however, that their clients are eating the food immediately instead of storing it for a storm.

Alicia Moyer (Valley Cares / Grace Cottage) - Alicia is newer to Valley Cares, but has been working to help increase access to food for her clients, especially for the people who are living further away from the population centers. She agreed with much of what had already been discussed, and reminded Council members of the challenge (and boredom) of continually having to cook for yourself as you get older, which she feels is a struggle for many seniors in the area.

Alicia agrees that the congregate meal sites provide both social and nutritional benefits. She described some of the congregate meal sites in the area, including in Newfane (vibrant and lots of volunteers), Jamaica (great, and excited to develop programming), Townshend, and Williamsville (although it’s closed in the winter).

She also agrees that many seniors resist applying for 3SquaresVT because of the stigma, and would like to see discussions of this program separated from the idea of “welfare.”

The Council discussed opportunities to get local food stores and markets more involved in connecting with seniors through food deliveries and other services. Some of the local food shelves and Cares Groups are already doing food deliveries. Steve Ovenden described how RSVP helps coordinate volunteers to prepare and deliver food from the Dover food drop site.

Senior Solutions helps to coordinate many congregate meals in the region, and publishes them in a “Dining Trail” guide (see attached). Rosemary Gardner shared that Groundworks Collaborative is considering creating a meal site.

Kathryn Turnas II (Brattleboro Senior Meals) - Kathryn has been the Board Chair for Brattleboro Senior Meals for 3 terms. Brattleboro Senior Meals is a separate entity from the Brattleboro Senior Center (although they’re in the same building), and offers both congregate meals (30 - 60 people daily) and Meals on Wheels (80 daily for 5 days / week). Participation in both programs has been increasing. Kathryn feels that the increase, especially for Meals on Wheels, is due to a number of factors, such as an increasing number of seniors unable to shop or prepare food, or unable to meet their medical nutritional requirements. In addition to following the nutritional guidelines set by the Older Americans Act (which can be challenging), Brattleboro Senior Meals offers gluten free, vegan, and diabetic-friendly meals and can fit the meals to what the clients need.

Kathryn explained that there is a cap in the amount of federal government reimbursements, and with the increase in meals served, Brattleboro Senior Meals has come close to this cap. If they exceed it, they’ll have to either restrict the number of meals served or cover the gap in reimbursements themselves. The cap, which is set by the Older Americans Act, is being revised now at the federal level. Kathryn advised Council members to pay attention to this, as well as other ways in which legislation can affect practices.

Brattleboro Senior Meals receives funding from the federal government (through the Older Americans Act), the town of Brattleboro, individuals, and Senior Solutions. There is a

Handout: Senior Solution’s “Dining Trail” flyer (attached).
“suggested donation” for meals but not everyone pays, so Brattleboro Senior Meals has to cover that gap through fundraising.

Kathryn shared that participation in the meals, especially Meals on Wheels, can be for as long as someone wants, which is a great option for people who are recuperating from illness or surgery and unable to leave their homes. Brattleboro Senior Meals tries to connect with the hospital to see who might need delivered meals once released. However, Kathryn feels that the program isn’t reaching everyone it needs to, and stated that the program could easily be doubled in just the Brattleboro area. She emphasized the importance of the program’s social contact for homebound clients - the delivery drivers may be the only contact some clients see in a day.

To address the outreach challenge, Brattleboro Senior Meals is putting together a poster to help advertise the Meals on Wheels program. Other challenges include difficulties in getting drivers, volunteers, funding, and setting the monthly menu.

Kathryn recommended “My Senior Center,” software that allows the meal site to collect numbers and share reports / coordinate with other groups. Brattleboro Senior Meals was able to get a grant to cover the cost and has found it very helpful.

**Talking Points & Next Actions**

Discussion of how Hunger Council members can help to spread the word about the needs of seniors and of the organizations that serve them.

Katherine summarized some of the action points discussed:

- sharing information / promoting the senior programs
- pulling together a group of all senior meal sites and centers in the region
- creating a resource packet for senior sites to share and use
- encouraging use of 2-1-1 as a resource for individuals and organizations
- contact school guidance counselors for volunteers from students who need to fulfill their community service requirement

The Council and presenters discussed the need for greater communication between organizations serving seniors, so that seniors can be connected with all of the resources available. (Potential action - create a group of the region’s senior centers / meal sites / service providers to share tools, best practices, and menus.) Alicia Moyer recommended using delivery drivers to help share information with clients, which she does to help promote SASH resources. The Council also recommended encouraging seniors to use the 2-1-1 system to connect with local resources.

The Council also discussed the need to coordinate and organize volunteers. Sue Graff recommended using the already-existing systems, such as the United Way of Windham’s volunteer site (http://unitedwaywindham.galaxydigital.com/), which can be used to both advertise and find volunteering service, and the Green Mountain RSVP site (http://rsypvt.org/), which coordinates retired seniors who want to volunteer. Steve Ovenden recommended organizations cross-post with both the United Way and RSVP’s sites in addition to maintaining
their own volunteer site. Organizations can still screen, select, and train the volunteers themselves.

The Council thanked the presenters, and invited each to return to future Council meetings, as well as to invite other senior organizations.

### Sub-Committee Reports

**Summer Meals Sub-Committee (Sue Graff):** The subcommittee meets next on March 31st at 9:30 at the United Way office. All are welcome - contact Sue if interested. The group will be planning for the Summer Kickoff, which has been scheduled for Friday, June 3rd. The New England Dairy van will be in next to the Boys and Girls Club again, and there will be a free Friday night dinner.

The Summer Camp Fair will be on April from 5:30 - 7:30. The Summer Meals subcommittee will be sharing information there for both camp providers and parents.

**Food Pantries Subcommittee (Lisa Pitcher)** - The group is gearing up for coming farm season, and talking about outreach to farms in a number of different ways, including food from CSAs for food pantries and food shelves. The group is focusing on procuring produce and protein, which they've identified as very important foods that are often missing or lacking in people with low-incomes' diets.

### Announcements & Wrap-up

*Council members shared information on senior discounted CSA shares being offered by NOFA-VT. These shares are very popular, so it was recommended that anyone interested sign up as soon as possible.*

*Jenna shared information on “the Cornell Project,” also known as the Co-Cost CSA pilot. UVM is partnering with Cornell to see how nutrition education and a subsidized CSA share can impact children’s nutrition. UVM is currently recruiting for families with children to participate in this multi-year study - for more information, contact Weiwei Wang, the UVM researcher, and see the attached flyers.*

*Vicky Senni (Let’s Grow Kids) - The Brattleboro Food Coop has been holding community forums over the past year to discuss how to make the coop more inclusive of the community. On Sunday, March 20th, from 5:00 - 7:00, Vicky and others will be discussion issues of food justice for a number of populations. See attached flyer for more information and please attend.*

*Let’s Grow Kids will be running a workshop (with professional development credit) on how to advocate using storytelling. The workshop is open to everyone, and will be held at the Putney Community Center on March 24th from 5-7 with childcare and dinner.*

*Genna Williams (Vermont Foodbank) - Genna is recruiting organizations for teams volunteers (between 5-20 people) to glean for 2 hours, for one day or more.*

Handouts:
- Recruitment Flyer
- Participant Information Sheet (attached)
The Vermont Foodbank is hosting their annual Hunger Action Conference on Friday, May 6th. For more information and to register, visit www.vtfoodbank.org/HAC.

Tarina Cozza (Vermont Department of Health, Brattleboro Office) - One of our longstanding nursing staff is retiring. That position is being redesigned, and the office will be looking to hire someone with a dietetics / nutrition background and bachelors’ degree in early May.

Katherine Jandernoa (Food Connects) - On Town Meeting Day, Putney approved implementing Universal School Meals for next school year. The Council expressed great excitement and positivity. Food Connects, Hunger Free Vermont, and other partners are continuing to work with the Brattleboro Town Schools to get them to adopt Universal School Meals next year, and are currently working on their finances now.

Katherine is meeting with a number of different people to create a unified front of messages and advocates to approach administrations in towns across the region. There has been great progress in Guilford and Putney, and Brattleboro is moving in the right direction. Hannah Jenkins at Food Connects has worked out a deal with Franklin Farm, a local dairy farm, to procure organic beef for the school next year, which is being looked at as potential model for other schools in the coming year as well.

On March 23rd, Food Connects is hosting a School Garden Planning Retreat. Katherine encouraged anyone connected with school gardens or community gardens to attend and learn how to engage youth and make connections with schools and other organizations. Jenna and Katherine shared that the Vermont Community Garden Network (VCGN) is also hosting a gardening workshop in Westminster on May 11th.

Pat Haine (Guilford Cares Food Pantry) - Guilford Cares Food Pantry is opening a food pantry at the school next month.

Kathryn Turnas II (Brattleboro Senior Meals) - The Brattleboro Senior Center has partnered with 6 local stylists to give free haircuts for homeless people at Loaves and Fishes. Contact Jessy Cudworth (the director of the Senior Center) for more information at jcudworth@brattleboro.org.

David Schoales (Brattleboro School Board) - David has been working to increase collaboration in services focusing on kids and poverty for years with the School Board and the State Senate Education Committee. He has decided to run as an independent candidate for State Senator to further pursue this work, and invited Windham County residents to sign his petition to get on the ballot. Contact David at schoalesd@gmail.com for more info.

Sue Graff (United Way of Windham County) - There are a number of free tax preparation and filing resources available in the area, including Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), who can meet with people by appointment, and myfreetaxes.com, a free tax filing site for anyone with incomes under $62,000. Contact 2-1-1 to find resources available in different areas.

Jenna Banning (Hunger Free Vermont) - Jenna shared information on the connection between the Earned Income Tax Credit, 3SquaresVT, and free school meals. If someone is receiving EITC, they may be eligible to receive 3SquaresVT, and any amount of 3SquaresVT benefits automatically qualifies their children for free school meals (even if the family’s income is
higher than the Free and Reduced Price meal eligibility limit.) This is a great way to connect more families with free school meals.

Hunger Free Vermont is launching two more Hunger Councils by the end of this month in Rutland County (Marcy 22nd) and Bennington County (March 29th). This will end our expansion to 10 Councils covering the entire state.

As part of this new statewide coverage, Hunger Free Vermont will be investigating how to best connect the Councils and use this statewide network to leverage change. One opportunity is already in the works - on May 17th, there will be an all-Council meeting to meet with the candidates for governor and ask them how they plan to address hunger and poverty if elected. Hunger Free Vermont will be soliciting questions from Council members, and all Council members are invited to attend. Capacity is limited, so if interested, please RSVP as soon as possible - there will be more information coming soon.

Lisa Pitcher (Our Place) - This gubernatorial forum is good first step for us. But when looking at poverty, we need to do more. Hunger is a symptom of poverty, and we need to keep this on mind when advocating.

Sue Graff and Lisa Pitcher - The Office of Economic Opportunity will be hosting their 3rd annual poverty conference on April 14th at Lake Morey. Registration is open to current OEO partners now, and will be opening up to the broader community soon. This is a great all day conference, focusing on creating collaborations in communities to reduce poverty.

Meeting Adjourned

Next Meeting: May 18, 2016 9:30 – 11:30am at Marlboro College in Brattleboro