



LOCATION:
Burlington, VT

SIZE:
25 Shelters

POPULATION SERVED:

- Local unhoused neighbors
- Low barrier to entry
- Those with medical and mental health concerns, substance use disorder, or other challenges accessing traditional shelter options

OPENING DATE:
February 7, 2023

FUNDING:
A combination of American Rescue Plan Act funding and grants from the Vermont Office of Opportunity



Gaining Community Support to Help Local Unsheltered People

Burlington demonstrates how community outreach allays concerns by involving local citizens throughout the process.

Burlington is small and livable—home to just under 45,000 at last count. It boasts a lively arts scene, museums, universities, and easy access to the outdoors. But the city has recently faced a disproportionately high rate of homelessness, and the state of Vermont has the second highest per-capita homelessness rate in the US, behind only California.

Burlington's Assistant Director for Community Works, Samantha Dunn, reached out to Pallet in October 2021 seeking 25 rapidly deployable shelters to support the 60-70 people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the city every day. Dunn hoped a Pallet shelter village could cut that number by at least half. The Elmwood Community Shelter (ECS) project broke ground 12 months later in a leafy residential area near downtown.

Anticipating concerns from citizens invested in their community, the city sought full transparency, giving neighbors all the information they needed to feel informed, included, and comfortable with the project. The successful outreach incorporated community meetings, FAQ and planning documents, and residential surveys to help neighbors air concerns and ultimately come together in support of the project.

ECS welcomed its first residents on February 7, 2023, providing specialized support to those with medical and mental health concerns, substance use disorder, or other challenges accessing traditional shelter options. The community features 25 Pallet shelters, all outfitted for extreme cold with thick insulation and powerful heaters to protect against northern Vermont's coldest nights.

The Champlain Housing Trust operates the site with a low barrier to entry—people are not turned away even if actively struggling with substance use disorder. Stays are limited to 180 days, with the potential to extend by up to 60 days if no alternative housing is available.

ECS also offers other wraparound services onsite, including case management, health care, job-search assistance, drug and alcohol dependency support, and help securing permanent housing. As part of its continued community outreach, ECS keeps the surrounding residents actively involved, inviting neighbors to join in planting gardens, painting murals, and other ways to make the shelter community feel like home.

Within weeks of opening, ECS showed how transitional housing can help—one resident was already able to move out of the shelters and into more permanent housing.

“We really want to make sure that the outcomes for the folks staying at the shelter are really successful, but the other measurement of success is that it be an asset to the community and that it not have unintended consequences on the neighbors.”

BRIAN PINE, DIRECTOR, BURLINGTON COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Site Features:

- 25 Pallet Shelters
- Resource center and bathroom
- Onsite meals
- Onsite medical care and mental health services
- Onsite substance use and treatment services

