



ST. JOHNSBURY RENTAL HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM 2021

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I. Background and Need

St. Johnsbury's Housing

Housing priorities that emerged from the 2017 St. Johnsbury Housing Study and Needs Assessment included the creation of moderately-priced rental housing for seniors and workforce households, the need for housing inventory that allows seniors to transition into housing to meet their changing needs, the need for programming that supports the improvement/renovation of the existing housing stock. Excerpts of this study which illustrate the need for good quality rental housing are included below:

Page II-3: *The Inventory of All Housing Segments in St. Johnsbury Indicates there is Limited Availability - There are very few available housing alternatives within St. Johnsbury... This lack of available housing forces residents to choose from housing that is not affordable to them or does not meet their specific needs. This leads to residents living in cost burdened housing situations and residing in substandard housing, or choosing to move out of St. Johnsbury. This lack of housing is also making it difficult for St. Johnsbury to attract people to the town.*

Page II-4: *The Inventory of All Housing Segments in St. Johnsbury Indicates that much of the Existing Housing Stock Consists of Low-Quality Product...onsite evaluation of multifamily rentals revealed that more than half of such rentals were considered to be "C" quality or lower, reflective of fair to poor housing.*

Page II-7: *The St. Johnsbury and Caledonia County area is expected to experience continued and significant increases in the number of senior (age 55+) households over the next few years. Meanwhile, there are few available senior-oriented housing alternatives available to seniors, including housing for independent seniors and those requiring senior care housing (e.g. residential care/assisted living and nursing care). Housing that meets the needs of the growing senior population in St. Johnsbury should be developed, with pricing at a variety of levels. Product should consist of studio to two-bedroom units with accessibility design elements.*

Page II-8: *Affordable Workforce Housing – St. Johnsbury lacks available and good quality rental housing that is affordable to low-income and moderate-income households (earning up to 120% of the state's median household income level) that serves a large portion of the area's workforce. Given the large number of workers commuting into St. Johnsbury on a daily basis, there is an opportunity for the Town to attract and retain such workers.*

Page II-8: *There are very few modern market-rate rental alternatives within St. Johnsbury. As a result, higher-income households seeking modern rental housing that includes the features, amenities and design characteristics of modern rental housing must look outside of St. Johnsbury to find such housing. The development of a well-designed market-rate product would enable St. Johnsbury to attract and retain such groups as young professionals and independent seniors. This would include product priced above \$1,000 per month and include one- and two-bedroom units in mixed-use product.*

Page II-10: *Based on a survey of housing alternatives in the market, an assessment of area demographic characteristics and trends, and input from both area stakeholders and residents, it is evident that senior-oriented housing is and will be an important component to the overall housing market. New housing product for seniors that should be considered include independent living rentals, senior care housing (residential care/assisted living facilities and nursing homes), and for-sale condominiums that include accessibility design elements.*

While the above recommendations are focused on new housing product, it is difficult to attract developers to St. Johnsbury when market rents are so low in the area compared with other parts of the State. Median family income alone does not explain this disparity in rents. As evidenced by the 2017 housing study noted above, rents in St. Johnsbury are low primarily because the majority of rental housing stock is old and in poor condition.

Improvements to the existing rental housing stock will result in more appropriately-priced rents, and may give housing developers more confidence to invest in the St. Johnsbury housing market.

II. Rental Housing Improvement Program Description

Purpose

- To encourage landlords to invest in *Universal Design modifications to rental housing property located in St. Johnsbury. The program will result in a more livable, marketable environment for everyone.

**Universal Design refers to designs and features that make housing usable by persons with a broad range of needs (<https://www.huduser.gov/portal//Publications/PDF/remodel.pdf>).*

Features

- A reimbursement grant is provided to landlords that complete projects that bring the rental property into closer compliance with Universal Design Guidelines. Improvements should follow as closely as possible the guidelines published in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s *Residential Remodeling and Universal Design* (link below).
<https://www.huduser.gov/portal//Publications/PDF/remodel.pdf>
- The maximum grant amount is \$3,000 per unit, and a budget with supporting estimates must be submitted at the time of grant application.
- A 1:1 cash match is required (e.g., a grant of \$3,000 requires at least a \$3,000 cash match from the property owner), and the grant is a reimbursement for funds spent.
- Grant funds must be used for capital improvements to real property. **Please NOTE:** Personal property, such as appliances, may be used as matching funds provided that the personal property purchased supports Universal Design Modifications. Please include a detailed explanation if you are using personal property as a match.
- Program is managed by the Town.
- A list of examples of modifications supported by this program is attached.

Program Requirements

- Property must be an existing residential rental housing unit in St. Johnsbury.
- Property owner must have an up-to-date rental housing registration for all rental properties owned in St. Johnsbury; the property owner must not have any outstanding health or safety violations; and the property for which a grant is sought must have been inspected by the Town Code Compliance Officer. A volunteer inspection request can be submitted by property owners that have not yet had their rental property inspected. Please contact Andrew Buckley, Fire Marshal, Town of St. Johnsbury, to schedule an inspection at (802) 535-5697 or e-mail abuckley@stjvt.com.
- Property owner must be current on all property taxes (and/or agreements), water-sewer bills, civic fees and fines, and parking fees & fines.

- The Town of St. Johnsbury Finance Department must review all cost estimates and approve the budget for the project. Finished work must be inspected and approved by the Code Compliance Officer before grant money is released.
- One grant award per rental housing unit.
- A single property owner is eligible for a maximum of three awards per award year. In the event that all funding has not been utilized, this requirement can be waived.
- Grant program will be formally announced by the Town through a posting on the Town website, a press release to local news outlets, and outreach will be made to those participating in the Landlord Exchange meetings.

Application Scoring

The Rental Housing Improvement Program Grant Review Committee shall be nominated by the St. Johnsbury Housing Committee members and appointed by the Select Board. The Review Committee will review and score grant applications, making final recommendations to the Select Board for approval. The Committee will consider how closely aligned the proposed work is with Universal Design Principles.

Scoring will be based on the following:

1. Amount of the grant request:
 - Up to \$1,000 receives 1 Point
 - \$1,001 to \$2,000 receives 2 Points
 - \$2,001 to \$2,500 receives 3 points
 - \$2,501 to \$3,000 receives 4 points
2. Total Project Cost:
 - \$6,000 - \$10,000 1 Point
 - \$10,001- \$19,999 2 Points
 - \$20,000+ 3 Points
3. Property is located within the Design Control District 2 Points
4. Property is owned by a person whose primary residence is in St. Johnsbury. 2 Points
5. Property is in a building with four units or less 2 Points
6. Property owner did not receive an award last year 2 Points
7. Discretionary points awarded for alignment with Universal Design Principles Up to: 4 Points

Proposed Funding Structure

\$30,000 available per year

- \$20,000 per year funded through the Town of St. Johnsbury rental registry fees.
- \$10,000 per year funded through the Town of St. Johnsbury Economic Development Reserves
- Funds will be held by the Town in a reserve fund, and the program will be subject to the Town's annual audit.

Note: This list is not meant to represent all housing partners and programming in the area.

APPENDIX A: Examples of eligible improvements

The following list is not exhaustive*:

1. Installing ramps;
2. Making curb cuts in sidewalks and entrances;
3. Repositioning shelves;
4. Repositioning telephones;
5. Adding raised markings on elevator control buttons;
6. Installing flashing alarm lights;
7. Widening doors;
8. Installing offset hinges to widen doorways;
9. Installing accessible door hardware;
10. Installing grab bars in toilet stalls;
11. moving toilets and other plumbing fixtures to increase maneuvering space;
12. Insulating lavatory pipes under sinks to prevent burns;
13. Installing a raised toilet seat;
14. Installing a full-length bathroom mirror;
15. Creating designated accessible parking spaces;
16. Removing high pile, low density carpeting;
17. Installing wheelchair-accessible sinks;
18. Lowering counter heights;
19. Installing roll-in or step-in showers.

**See HUD's Residential Remodeling and Universal Design for dimensions for additional qualifying projects at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal//Publications/PDF/remodel.pdf>.*