

SPRINGFIELD HOUSING AUTHORITY

CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE PLAN

MARCH 2020

Introduction:

The Springfield Housing Authority is monitoring the current viral outbreak formally known as the Coronavirus or CoVid 19. This is a constantly changing situation, we are taking this very seriously and have developed a Response Plan should this health crisis impact our delivery of services to our residents and participants of our housing programs. There are many sources of factual information concerning the virus and can be found at these websites:

The Center for Disease Control:

www.cdc.gov

The Vermont Department of Health:

www.healthvermont.gov

The World Health Organization:

www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus

The National Institutes of Health:

www.nih.gov/health-information/coronavirus

It is human nature during times like this to want to be overly cautious and react in a manner we feel is justified to protect ourselves and our families. We should be cautious and take prudent measures to protect ourselves, our residents and those we work with every day. This plan provides guidance as to how the SHA can continue our work while be cautious and respectful of this serious health issue facing our community. Our goal will be to limit the exposure of the virus to our employees and residents and to prevent the further spread of the virus. **Effective March 20, 2020 at 8:00 AM the office will be closed to the public. Business will continue to be conducted via phone, fax and e-mail.**

Section 1

Chain of Command:

In the event the Executive Director is incapacitated or unavailable to perform their duties, the Deputy Director is hereby designated to act in their capacity during their absence. Should the Deputy Director be unable to perform these duties, the Property Manager of the Maples is hereby designated to serve in this capacity. The person designated to act in the capacity during the absence of the Executive Director shall immediately contact the Chair and or Vice-Chair of the agency to inform them of the circumstances necessitating this change and maintain communication with the Board.

Section 2

Communication:

The best efforts to combat a serious health issue like CoVid19 is to communicate clearly and effectively with employees, residents, government officials, vendors and the public. Accurate and timely communication will be critical in order to provide a proactive response rather than reactive. Use of multiple forms of communication will be important to spread the message as widely as possible to those who will rely on us now and in the future. This will include letters, emails, the SHA website, flyers, meetings and when possible, text messaging.

A. Employees:

When it is necessary to communicate with staff the preferred method will be to call for a mandatory staff meeting to go over information and any course of action that may be required. If the situation calls for immediate notification, use of texting and emails will be used to get information to employees quickly. In the event there are changes in policies and procedures or there are work stoppages, this information shall be done in writing to remove any confusion or to limit misinterpretations.

Areas that may need to be addressed:

- Protocols for completing work orders in resident's homes
- Responding to emergency calls;
- Inspections;
- New lease ups;
- Use of outside vendors;

Employees are advised to monitor their health and report any symptoms to the health care provider and local public health officials as necessary. If an employee believes they may have been exposed or are experiencing symptoms, they are asked to stay home and monitor their situation while keeping the SHA informed of their status. Employees must not be concerned with the status of their Earned Benefit Time account as we will work with the employees to ensure that they are paid while we manage this epidemic.

B. Residents/Participants:

The SHA currently serves over 300 households and therefore communication with them may be limited to letters, use of the website and those participating in our text messaging service. It will be important to provide our residents with helpful information that is reliable and effective. Written communication will include basic information about the virus, how to protect themselves, prevent the viruses spread and where they can find more information. They will be encouraged to contact health officials if they believe they have contracted the virus or are showing signs of the symptoms. Residents will be asked to self-quarantine themselves to protect their neighbors and others for as long as may be required due to governmental action. We ask all of our residents and participants to continue to live their lives in a manner as normal as possible and to stay alert as the conditions change. We must all be prepared to respond in an appropriate manner and not panic or act in a frenzied manner that will not protect ourselves or others.

C. Vendors:

For our partners who work with us to provide goods and services, we will keep them informed via emails and/or phone calls in any changes to our work environment. If buildings or neighborhoods are quarantined, we will make them aware of the situation so that they may determine if they can or will provide services if needed. Emergency work items requiring immediate attention in an area of concern will be disclosed and a plan to deal with the emergency will be developed in a timely fashion subject to the nature of the emergency. For emergencies dealing with fire or police services, residents shall continue to use 911 services.

D. Government Officials:

The SHA will work closely with state and local officials to monitor the situation and report any known instances of the virus that have affected our staff or residents. We will cooperate fully with any request for information as health

officials determine the status of the virus in our communities. If and when government decrees are issued, we will work to communicate these directives to our residents and staff. The Executive Director or his/her designee of the SHA shall be the point of contact for all communication with public officials.

Section 3

Incident Response:

In the event an employee or resident has contracted the virus, the Executive Director and Deputy Director shall immediately convene to develop a response. If contact with public health officials has not yet occurred, such contact will be made immediately. We will coordinate our response with them and ensure that our efforts do not duplicate or in anyway impede in their ability to respond to the incident. The safety committee working with public officials, will help to determine the source of the virus, take steps to ensure that the spread of the virus is halted or limited and make recommendations on how to proceed with our daily operations. The committee shall familiarize themselves with the current issues, identify resources to assist and recommend next steps. The Executive Director shall keep the Board of Commissioners informed at all times. Decisions as to cease operations or limit operations shall be at the direction of the Board of Commissioners. If it is recommended that the office be closed, the Executive Director shall provide a plan as to how we will continue to provide services under such conditions.

If it is necessary to cease operations of the SHA, we will communicate this via our website, emails and the media. Our phone lines will continue to operate and messages can be left which will be forwarded to staff who will monitor these messages.

Section 4

Prevention Efforts:

The SHA will make reasonable efforts to control the spread of the virus through commonly known personal practices and work practices. Information will be disseminated to staff and residents about coughing/sneezing etiquette, washing of hands and staying home if you are sick. As a part of our normal janitorial services, we will make additional efforts to sanitize those areas frequented by staff and residents such as the lobbies, bathrooms, waiting room, meeting space and elevators. An emphasis will be made on those areas which come into frequent contact with hands. We will utilize appropriate disinfectants as identified by health

officials and whenever possible use green cleaning products which serve as a qualified disinfectant.

The success of any prevention effort must rely upon the good judgement of individuals in our sphere of living. If an individual is sick, has symptoms or is known to have the virus, they must stay home and prevent the spread to others. Employees will be asked to stay at home, residents are asked to remain in their apartments and seek assistance from family members or others to provide for their basic necessities. If a State of Emergency is declared by an act of the government, we must all follow the instructions provided regardless of any inconveniences it may cause in our lives.

Section 5

Operational Protocols:

Leasing/Voucher Issuance: In the event that service delivery is curtailed due to community health concerns, SHA shall endeavor to assist our clients to the extent feasible through electronic or written means (mail). Applications can be downloaded from the SHA website: www.springfieldhousingauthorityvt.org and emailed to lrsha@vermontel.net.

- A. **Property Management.** Leases will be sent electronically or by mail followed up with phone conversations to review the lease and other pertinent documents. Showing of units will be done in person if possible. In the event a lock down is ordered by the government, if possible, pictures will be taken and sent electronically to potential renters. Move in/move outs inspections will be waived during any lock down or if staff is unavailable. If a move out inspection cannot occur, security deposits shall be returned minus any unpaid rent. Lease enforcement will continue to the extent complaints can be followed up via emails, texts or phone calls. SHA shall continue to comply with state and federal regulations as it relates to the enforcement of lease provisions.
- B. **HCV.** Voucher lease ups shall continue to the extent possible. Paperwork shall continue to be processed, subject to staff availability, via email or regular mail. Phone conversations shall be documented. Lease up inspections shall continue to the extent possible subject to additional regulatory guidance from the U.S. Dept. of Housing & Urban

Development and availability of staff. Voucher issuance may be suspended if a quarantine or lock down is ordered, if staffing is limited or unavailable and is subject to governmental action.

- C. **Occupancy Issues:** Program eligibility; Annual/interim Recertifications: SHA shall continue to process program eligibility and recerts subject to staffing and further regulatory guidance. Whereas income verifications are subject to third party review, processing of eligibility/recertifications may be delayed and or suspended until such time conditions will allow.
- D. **Inspections:** In order to comply with virus containment protocols, inspections may continue if conditions allow. SHA will adopt a Biennial Inspection protocol for all HCV units during this crisis. Conditions which may affect inspections include but are not limited to availability of staff; additional regulatory guidance; known conditions of occupants of the units to be inspected (SHA will not allow inspection of units where a known CoVid19 case exists.) and government restrictions. SHA will use outside inspectors if they are available.
- E. **Maintenance:** SHA will use extreme caution when required to perform work in common areas and individual units. If sick, personnel will be asked to remain home and refrain from performing any work on behalf of SHA. If residents are infected by the virus, work will be limited to emergency work orders only and will take additional measures to protect themselves from exposure. This includes use of proper protective clothing, respirators, gloves, face masks and other protective gear as needed.

Increased attention will be made to cleaning and disinfecting areas with heavy pedestrian traffic and surfaces which come into frequent contact of humans. Doors, handrails, elevator buttons, intercom panels for example such be clean at least once per day, subject to staffing availability. Properties requiring attention shall be The Huber & Whitcomb Buildings and The Maples. This does not include properties with private access/ single entry ingress. The office will be covered by office staff at the end of each business day.

Maintenance shall take stock of inventory to ensure adequate supplies are in place should there be a disruption of the supply chain. This should include adequate cleaning supplies as well as any material or equipment necessary for the safe operation of our facilities.

- F. **Financial:** Our objective during this crisis shall be to continue to receive and make payments for good and services provided and or delivered. Residents are expected to continue to make rent payments in a timely fashion. We request that during this crisis, payments be made via the mail with checks. We will continue to accept payments in person at the office until such time as the SHA is required to cease operations or determines that it is best to discontinue direct payments. Residents at all properties are encouraged to continue their direct deposits for rent and those not yet signed up for direct deposits are encouraged to do so. Under no circumstances should cash be mailed to make payments. SHA will work with our software vendor and our bank to determine if we can expand direct deposit payments.

Revenue: Staff, to the extent possible, shall make every effort to record revenues received and process deposits as needed. Should the SHA be hampered in its ability to collect and record payments, no action will be made upon any household for non-payment of rent. Until such time as mail delivery is suspended, we will regularly check our mailbox to receive and record payments. Staff will continue to verify direct deposits through online banking systems.

Accounts Payables will be processed if staff is available and proceeds are on hand to cover expenses. Every effort will be made to reach out to vendors and keep them informed of when payments can be expected if we are unable to process them when they are due. Payments to landlords shall be processed provided funds are made available from the federal government. Priority will be given to direct deposits. Those requiring a check to be processed shall be completed subject to availability of staff and funds. If the SHA's ability to process payments to its landlord and vendors is impeded due to government action or the lack of staff due to this crisis, it is understood that all accrued payments shall be made upon the earliest possible ability to process said payments. SHA is requesting patience and understanding during this difficult time.

G. **Landlords:** Communication will be made with all our landlords to keep them informed of our situation and to ask that they not take any adverse action against participants in the Housing Choice Voucher should payments be delayed. This shall be done through written communication and our web site.

H. **Congregate services** shall remain available until such time as it is impossible to provide services on site. In the event that services are disrupted, we will work with state and local officials to make every effort to provide meals and services. All residents are encouraged to take appropriate measures to have sufficient food and supplies on hand in the event that a quarantine is instituted. SHA will work with the Family Center to coordinate delivery of food to those residents who regularly use their services. We will use a door to door service approach: The Family Center will deliver goods to our building entrances and we will have persons inside the buildings deliver to individual residents.

Section 6

Telework:

Working from home shall be encouraged for those employees who are sick or have been in contact with someone who has the virus. Whereas not all tasks required to perform the duties can be done at home, every effort will be made between employer and employee to identify work that can be done electronically from home. SHA shall provide computer access through a VPN connection and accordance with prescribed protocols established by our IT partners. In the event proper access cannot be granted due to security concerns or connectivity issues, other means such as emails and phones shall be utilized to the greatest extent feasible.

Maintenance obviously cannot be performed at home therefore maintenance staff shall be designated as standby if it is necessary to close the office for any period of time. Residents will continue to be asked to call into our emergency call line to report any issues requiring immediate attention. If it does not require immediate attention (such as a water leak or dangerous electrical malfunction), a work order will be created as the item addressed as soon as staff is able. Any staff required to perform work at any of our properties shall wear proper protection provided by SHA and utilize safe work practices at all times. We will communicate to

our residents the need for patience as we work to continue to provide safe housing while protecting our employees and their families.

Section 7

Travel & Training:

The SHA shall rely upon the decisions made by government officials and or sponsors of the training to determine whether or not travel will continue. Should a ban be enacted that restricts travel and gatherings of large groups, we shall follow these bans accordingly. In the event that trainings are not canceled but staff have decided it is in their best interest to forgo travel, the SHA shall respect their wishes and seek reimbursement of any fees paid. If travel and training has been scheduled in an area which is quarantined or restricted, SHA shall prohibit travel to these areas.

Section 8

Social Gatherings:

If the incident of cases involving CoVid19 expand causing concern for public health, all SHA social functions shall be suspended and or canceled. This would include all resident meetings and social activities on SHA properties. It is our intent to cooperate with containment efforts and not expose our residents and their guests.