



VETERANS OUTREACH OF PENNSYLVANIA

Our Mission

We stand to combat homelessness among Veterans by providing support and services needed to promote an empowered life filled with strength and purpose.

Our Vision

Restoring trust and creating opportunity, one Veteran at a time.



VETERANS OUTREACH OF PENNSYLVANIA (VOPA)

Case for Support

Summary:

On an average day, there are 30 or more homeless Veterans in Dauphin County, according to the Capital Area Coalition on Homelessness.

Veterans Outreach of Pennsylvania (VOPA) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) devoted to combatting homelessness among Veterans in the Commonwealth's capital city region through a proven national model that will involve the construction of a village of 15 "tiny homes" overlooking the Susquehanna River. This site is above the 100-year flood plain, and within the 500-year flood plain. Adjacent to this heart-shaped ring of homes, is a community center designed to encourage the Veterans to step out of their tiny homes and into a setting where they can interact with one another to help with their transition from homelessness. More importantly, the project aims to provide sanctuary and the emotional space needed for each Veteran and VOPA's Therapeutic Support Services team to thoroughly address the underlying causes of his or her homelessness.

The vision for a Veterans' Village has been a labor of love for VOPA, a group of patriotic business, military and community leaders, all united in the belief that every Veteran should have a healthy life and access to the help needed to restore their basic needs. Each has volunteered to defend our



country and protect our freedoms and should have the support of the nation they have preserved with their sacrifice and service. A home is one of the most basic necessities a community can provide as they transition from the Armed Forces to civilian and from combat to career.

The "tiny home" neighborhood model has taken hold in exemplar communities across the country, including in Racine, Wisconsin; St. Louis, Missouri; and Spokane, Washington. Veterans who have endured trauma or struggled with the abrupt loss of the military lifestyle's strict regimen find a space they can call their own to be vital to their future success, in contrast to emergency shelters and conventional housing.

The Veterans' Village will provide everything a Veteran needs to live with dignity, safety and basic amenities, all free of charge. More importantly, the community model will provide the sanctuary and emotional space needed for the Veteran and VOPA's Veteran Therapeutic Support Services team to thoroughly address the underlying causes of his or her homelessness.

By building trust and relationships in an environment that recognizes the unique needs of each Veteran, connections that support their goals will be established, along with the skills they will need to achieve self-sufficiency and long-term success.

The Need for Veterans Housing in Harrisburg

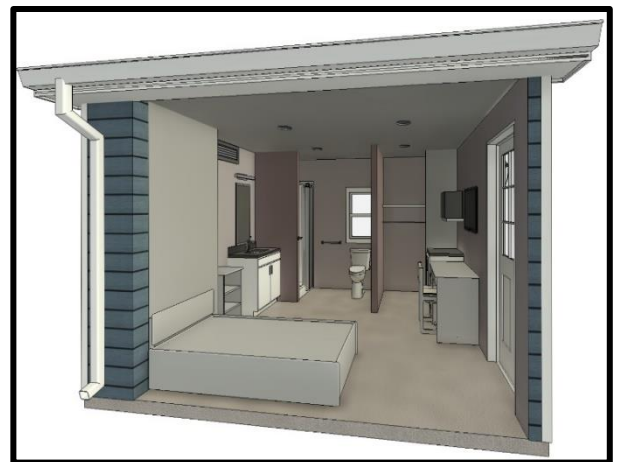
The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) estimates that, on any given night, nearly 40,000 Veterans who are experiencing homelessness are living on the street, and about 12,700 of those are younger Veterans from recent conflicts. In all, Veterans make up 8.8 percent of the homeless population in the U.S.

Regrettably, Veteran homelessness persists, despite significant ongoing investments by federal, state, and local government agencies and the dedication of government, faith-based and community service providers. This problem's persistence is primarily due to the varied and often complex challenges facing Veterans and the continuing need for a broad range of systems of care and housing options that can address their specific needs.

In addition, the stress of service in the Armed Forces, followed by homelessness, can lead to the devastating impact of low self-esteem, while the circumstances that often lead to homelessness can make it difficult to "fit in" or relate to others.

Permanent supportive housing provides many resources to address the complex barriers often associated with Veteran homelessness. Moreover, the limited availability of vouchers, more stringent eligibility prerequisites, the need to find suitable housing sites, and restrictions due to prior challenges can delay or reduce access to housing options. Veterans may also avoid this option to avoid being labeled or required to give up their freedom of choice in making decisions.

Under the VOPA plan, each Veteran will have his or her own ADA compliant, 210-square-foot home, with a bed, sofa, closet, desk area and bathroom. Unlike other forms of housing, the Tiny Home Community provides a personal environment for the Veteran to feel independent. VOPA's Veteran Therapeutic Support Services team will work with each resident to achieve incremental, lasting results in the areas of health and wellness, education, employment, financial literacy, and the development of a personal support network.



The on-site 6,600 square-foot Community Center will help provide each Veteran with an important sense of structure, easy access to much-needed support services, and continuity of care outside of an institutional setting. The Center will also afford them the



opportunity to build socialization skills at the Veteran's own pace. Of added value is that residents have all served in the Armed Forces, sharing similar backgrounds, cultures, experiences, and challenges. In an environment free of judgment and with unlimited opportunities to grow, The Tiny Home model community can help Veterans experiencing homelessness start to feel at home.

Why the "Tiny House" Concept?

According to Ken Falke, author of Struggle Well: Thriving in the Aftermath of Trauma, "We've learned in working with veterans that their problems have a lot more to do with what they are coming home to, rather than what they are coming back from. The military teaches men and women to be soldiers, but no one teaches them how to live a meaningful and productive life out of uniform."

As the Central Pennsylvania region aims to transform those struggles into strength and heal the invisible wounds of military service, VOPA embraced the "tiny home" concept.

The "tiny home" movement took root and gained popularity in the aftermath of the housing crisis of 2008. A "tiny home" typically has between 100 to 400 square feet, is fully furnished, and satisfies many of the safety and privacy concerns that haunt Veterans experiencing homelessness.

In contrast to the advantages of "tiny homes," conventional emergency, or temporary, housing is not a viable option for many Veterans who are experiencing homelessness. For Veterans experiencing PTSD, housing that has factors beyond a resident's control can be particularly challenging because unknown people, places and sounds can trigger flashbacks. Moreover, the need is even more acute in post-pandemic Pennsylvania. COVID-19 has underscored the risks of congregate housing.

Flourishing tiny home communities for Veterans have been established in cities that include:

- **Veterans Outreach of Wisconsin**, Racine, Wisconsin
- **Veterans Community Project Village**, Kansas City, Missouri
- **Veterans Community Project Village**, St. Louis, Missouri
- **The Cove at Dundee**, Savannah, Georgia

Who are Veterans experiencing homelessness?

No two Veterans are exactly alike, but many have commonalities that arise from their shared life experiences.



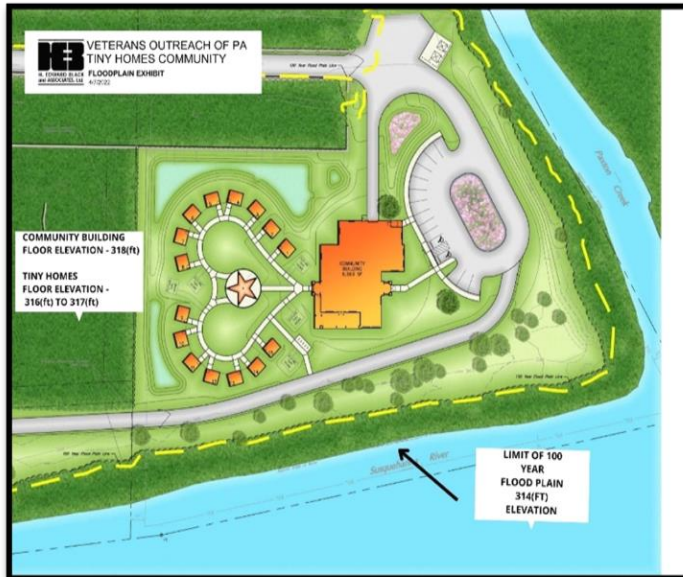
- A large percentage of Veterans experiencing homelessness are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other behavioral health issues.
- Minorities make up a disproportionate share of the homeless, and especially of Veterans with homelessness.
- Many Veterans facing homelessness also are struggling with substance abuse and addiction disorders and behavioral health challenges.

Project Timeline:

Progress to Date:

- In June of 2019, a generous benefactor offered to donate 12 forested acres of land along the Susquehanna River in south Harrisburg below the PennDOT building as a site for this project. The site is situated above the 100-year flood plane.
- A binding Memorandum of Understanding between VOPA and the landowner was executed.
- In June of 2021, having met all requirements necessary to transfer the title of the land to VOPA, Harrisburg City Council voted to approve the subdivision of the property as well as the land development plan needed to move forward.
- Meanwhile, VOPA has forged partnerships with local service organizations to meet each Veteran's individual needs. These organizations include JFT Recovery and Veterans Support Services, Capital Area Coalition on Homelessness (CACH), Central PA Food Bank, Dauphin County Veterans Court, and YWCA of Harrisburg's Homeless Veterans Housing program.

- A capital campaign was launched in the spring of 2022. The 201st RED HORSE SQUADRON (Rapid Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers), PA Air National Guard, based at Ft. Indiantown Gap, assisted with clearing the site, which has resulted in significant savings to the overall project costs.



The project has been developed to progress in four phases:

Phase I: Project development: Legal and civil engineering services necessary to site the project and obtain all necessary environmental and zoning approvals required to transfer the land to VOPA. Estimated costs: \$267,125 **COMPLETED**

Phase II: Demolition and site preparation and construction of road access and installation of utilities. Estimated costs: \$1,816,000 (subject to change)

- **Phase III:** Construction of the community center, the tiny home village, and the surrounding area. Estimated cost: \$1,824,062 (subject to change based on local and current economic conditions)
- **Phase IV** staff acquisition and program implementation. Estimated annual cost: \$500,000.

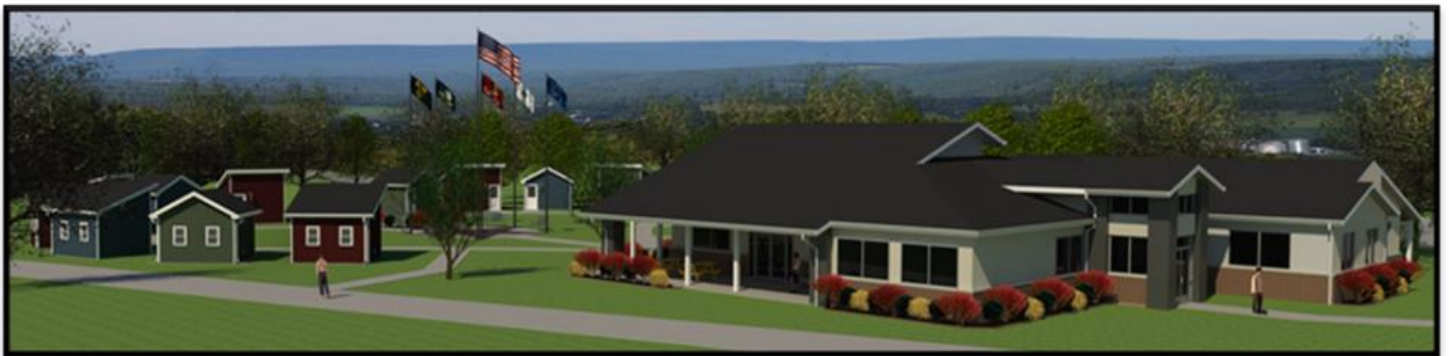
Plan Evaluation

Through the fulfillment of VOPA's mission, Veterans experiencing homelessness in the City of Harrisburg and throughout Dauphin County will have a choice of options to best meet their unique physical, behavioral, and social needs. These options will include access to direct services from VOPA Case Managers and staff, visiting service providers, mainstream agencies, grassroots and Veterans' organizations, and other collaborative community partners. This team approach and client-centric focus will promote the delivery of services tailored to the unique needs of each Veteran.

The community structure will lead to reintegration into society by housing most activities for the residents in the Community Center building, where they will prepare meals, eat, do laundry, and attend educational programs. Community service providers will be able to meet with the residents at the community center, providing for one centralized point of service.

The process of building trust and relationships at the pace and in the place that best fits each Veteran's comfort level will help establish linkages that support their goals and develop skills needed to achieve self-sufficient lives.

A complete Service Delivery Plan has been developed that assures VOPA's commitment to respecting each and every participant and offering the best possible services, in keeping with VOPA policies and procedures, highlighted in the VOPA Veteran's Bill of Rights.



We thank everyone who lives here and gives here to our hometown heroes.



VOPA Veteran's Bill of Rights

1. You will be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion as an individual.
2. You will not be discriminated against for any reason to include: age, race, gender identity, religion, cultural identity, political affiliation, or other beliefs.
3. Your privacy will be respected within the parameters required to maintain a safe environment and community.
4. Your confidentiality and personal information will be respected to include restricting access without your consent.
5. You will never be required to make a written or other form of testimonial as part of a requirement to participate in VOPA services.
6. You have the right to keep personal property at your residence so long as they do not pose a threat to safety, are not illegal, are not a weapon, meet hygiene and cleanliness standards, and meet residence capacity standards.
7. You have the right to have a certified service animal at your residence so long as you have approved documentation and you are able to ensure that the service animal's welfare and care needs are met.
8. You have the right to have guests at your residence within the approved visitation guidelines provided by the VOPA.
9. You have the right to expect quality and compassionate provision of supportive services.
10. You are encouraged to express your comments, concerns, and complaints through the established feedback process to include the grievance procedure.
11. You have the right to expect expeditious, written responses to any filed request for information or grievance.
12. You have a right to receive a copy of your Individual Service Plan and associated case management documentation.
13. You have the right to and are also responsible for the development of your Individual Service Plan that shall serve as the basis for service delivery, goals to obtain permanent housing, and strategies to achieve self-sufficiency.
14. You have the right to and are also responsible to assist in the development of a service delivery team whose goal is to provide the services and resources that will support the obtainment of permanent housing and achievement of your self-sufficiency goals.
15. You have the right to seek additional services outside of the VOPA program.

