

**VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
25 January 2023**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**1. Roll Call**

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Vermont State Housing Authority, held via Zoom was called to order at 11:02 a.m. by Chair Alex Farrell; and upon roll call, the following Commissioners answered present: Cory Richardson, Vice Chair; Caryn Feinberg, Mary Miller (left the meeting at 11:15am), Linda Joy Sullivan, Christopher Trombly, and Jo Ann Troiano (arrived at 11:18). Absent: Aaron Jones

Staff present: Kathleen Berk, Executive Director/Secretary; Kelly Pembroke, Director of Finance & Information Systems; Susan Kuegel, Director of Property & Asset Management; Ellen Danahy Liptak, Director of HR & Administration; Kelli Robinson, Director of Housing Program Administration; Daniel Blankenship, Homeless Services Coordinator and Policy Director; Barb Beyor, Union Representative; Tyson Leno, Director of Maintenance; Tyler Maas, Director of Programs & Housing Development; and Robert Abbott, Office Services Coordinator.

During this time, the Board and staff introduced themselves by name and title, and welcomed Linda Joy Sullivan as it was her first meeting with the VSHA Board.

Farrell then read the resolution for Miller's retirement which is attached to these minutes.

➤ On a motion by Richardson, seconded by Feinberg, the Board unanimously accepted the resolution for Miller's retirement from the board after 25 years.

Miller expressed her gratitude and that it was nice to be part of this organization. She has been impressed by its stability and ability to develop and execute relevant programming. She then left the meeting.

**2. Meeting Agenda**

The agenda was changed by Farrell to move the Executive Session to the end to ease the burden of some staff having to leave the meeting and then return.

➤ On a motion by Troiano and seconded by Feinberg, changes to the agenda were accepted.

**3. Public Participation** - No members of the public were present. Public participation opened and closed at 11:17am.

#### **4. Approval of Minutes**

- A motion was made by Feinberg, seconded by Trombly to accept the minutes from the 17 November Regular Meeting, as well as the 8 December Special Meeting. The vote was passed unanimously.

#### **5. Secretary's Report**

Berk brought attention to the PowerPoint presentation in the Board meeting materials packets. This presentation gives a good overview of the organization along with the programs that it runs. Berk also pointed out that the US Congress had recently passed its appropriations bill, which had favorable terms for HUD funded projects in 2023. The bill includes language prohibiting HUD from moving forward with the Section 8 rental assistance contract administration solicitation it published earlier this year and directed HUD to look closer at how it plans to issue "Performance-Based Contracts" on a state-by-state basis.

- Richardson motioned to accept the report. The motion was seconded by Trombly. The Board voted unanimously in favor to accept the report as submitted.

#### **6. Finance and Information Systems**

Pembroke updated the Board on the status of finances and information technology. She noted that VSHA is only one month into their budget, and it is too early to see how well they are staying on track with some upcoming variables. She also stated that this is an extremely busy time of year, as everyone in finance is preparing for taxes. She noted the progress of her employees; stating that 1099s are out as well as mobile home certificates.

Richardson asked if she expected material impacts to the budget as currently approved, to which Pembroke replied that she does expect changes. Pembroke is closely monitoring the budget and plans to bring a revised budget to the board's attention in March with significant changes. Berk voiced her concern about budget constraints for 2024 and beyond, as most of our funding comes from the federal government and they are currently working through issues with the national debt ceiling.

Pembroke also updated the Board with the status of Information Technology as it pertains to PayData. She explained that VSHA is using PayData for payroll purposes but continues to work through issues with that system with regards to leave and human resources. Despite any setbacks, VSHA continues to automate its procedures in other ways. VSHA is working on issuing iPad/Surface Pros to its satellite offices to use for inspections and other mobile jobs.

- The motion to accept the finance update was initiated by Troiano and seconded by Feinberg. The document was unanimously accepted by the Board.

## **7. Housing Program Administration**

Robinson started by asking if there were any questions pertaining to the Secretary's Report. There were none, so she moved on to other business. Robinson asked for a change to the Administrative Plan. This change is to document the practices that the Section 8 staff are following. This change is to use the Applicant Portal as the primary means of submitting an application for a Section 8 voucher. With regard to the families with hardships – such as no internet access or limited knowledge/skills to use the internet – they can still request a paper copy of the application.

Richardson asked if there was any disadvantage to using paper applications versus the online portal. Robinson clarified that the list is generally established on a first-come-first-served basis, assuming there are no preferences to claim. The advantage comes due to the time to submit the application is almost instantaneous when completed online.

Richardson then asked if there could potentially be any perceived discrimination in the proposed resolution using the words “must use the online application.” The Board and staff members addressed this, and it was agreed that the language will change on the updated Administrative Plan.

- Troiano motioned to accept the change with the caveat that Berk will oversee the language being changed; motion was seconded by Trombly. The board voted unanimously to accept the changes to the plan.

Robinson then recommended the contract of Affordablehousing.com to manage the Section 8 waiting lists. Robinson stated that this contract would reduce the need for two full-time staff members and is currently integrating with PHA-Web. Berk highlighted that this change would reduce the stress of current employees. Berk said that Affordablehousing.com comes highly recommended, and already manages waiting lists for housing authorities in Massachusetts, Maine, and Connecticut. Additionally, this contract would not eliminate the two staff members, simply ease the burden on VSHA employees while continuing to recruit for those positions. Berk said that this decision was not made lightly but is due to the inability to hire staff. It will modernize operations, alleviate overtime, and streamline the waitlist.

Richardson asked for the term of the contract. Robinson provided the details to be \$33,512.00 for a 1-year contract. Berk explained that she would not sign the contract in its current state, but after some revisions would.

- Trombly motioned to approve the outsourcing contract provided the terms are changed to per VSHA's requirement. Richardson seconded the motion under those conditions. The Board voted unanimously to approve the outsourcing contract once changed to agreeable terms.

## **8. Property and Asset Management**

Kuegel briefed the new format used for the Collection Delinquency Report. The Board wholly approved of the new format. Kuegel also pointed out the transfer of thirteen mobile home parks from HFI to VSHA and the purchase of Green Mountain Apartments in December.

## **10. Other Business**

Berk presented the 2023 Strategic Plan and asked for the Board to begin considering goals for 2024 and beyond. She suggested a Board retreat with the overall goal of producing a 5-year strategic plan, along with a succession plan. Farrell shared his approval of the retreat as a way to learn more about each other to become a closer, more tightknit group. Sullivan agreed, that as a newcomer, it would be beneficial. Richardson suggested hiring a consultant to help organize such an event. Farrell also suggested bringing in staff members as well. The Board discussed the timing of this event and narrowed it down to the upcoming summer. There will be further discussions between Farrell, Richardson, Berk, and Liptak to add detail and begin the planning process for the retreat.

Berk brought up the timing of Board meetings. She shared that prior to COVID, meetings were held in person in the VSHA Board room and lunch was catered. The time had been set at 11am to allow for this. But since the pandemic, meetings had been virtual, and Berk wanted to confirm that 11am was still the best time to hold the meetings. Farrell and other Board members confirmed the 11 am time works for board members and stated that they preferred in-person meetings. It was decided to begin trying out the face-to-face meetings in May of this year.

## **9. Executive Session**

Farrell read the following Resolution to go into Executive Session:

"I move that the Board adopt the following Resolution: WHEREAS the Board needs to review and discuss legal advice and matters of contract and WHEARAS premature general public knowledge would clearly put the Authority at a substantial disadvantage; NOW THEREFORE, the Board shall discuss the matters of contract at issue in Executive Session."

- Troiano made a motion to go into Executive Session; seconded by Feinberg. All voted in favor and the Board entered Executive Session at 12:24 p.m.

Robinson, Leno, Blankenship, Abbott, and Beyor left the meeting at 12:24 p.m.

- On a motion by Troiano, seconded by Richardson, the Board unanimously voted to come out of executive session at 12:58 p.m. with no action taken.

#### **10. Adjourn.**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Berk  
Executive Director/Secretary

/RTA