

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT  
January 24, 2024

1. ROLL CALL

The Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Vermont State Housing Authority was held at One Prospect Street, Montpelier, Vermont, and remotely via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 11:01 a.m. by Chair Alex Farrell; and upon roll call, the following Commissioners answered present: Cory Richardson, Vice Chair; Caryn Feinberg, Linda Joy Sullivan, Jo Ann Troiano, and Mary Houghton. Absent: Aaron Jones.

Staff present: Kathleen Berk, Executive Director/Secretary; Kelly Pembroke, CFO; Susan Kuegel, Managing Director of Property and Asset Management; Ellen Danahy Liptak, Director of HR & Administration; Christopher Trombly, Managing Director of Community Development; Elizabeth Whitmore, Managing Director of Housing Program Administration; Tyler Maas, Director, Programs & Housing Development.

Guests. Robin Barnett & Derek Hungerford, KBS (Kittell, Branagan & Sargent)

2. MEETING AGENDA – KBS will report prior to Secretary’s Report.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - No public participation.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A motion was made by Richardson to approve the minutes from the November 15, 2023, Regular Meeting; November 17, 2023, Special Meeting; and December 21, 2023, Special Meeting. The motion was seconded by Troiano. The vote passed unanimously.

Pembroke introduced Robin Barnett and Derek Hungerford from the accounting firm, KBS. They presented an “unmodified opinion” audit with no adjustments needed. They indicated that the audit went well. The audit had more components due to HFI and the transfer of the mobile home parks and Northfield properties in 2023. They commended Pembroke and her team for their work and information provided.

- Richardson moved, seconded by Troiano to accept the 2023 audit report. Motion passed unanimously.

5. SECRETARY’S REPORT

Berk indicated concern about funding at the federal level and a possible continual resolution leading to a sequestration if a funding plan is not passed. This would mean about a 10%

reduction in housing payments. She indicated that it would take several years to make up for the loss if this were to happen. The Administrative Plan has a policy in place to use if we have to remove people from programs. She expects there will be level-funding with a small increase, however that will be a budget reduction in the Housing Program Voucher programming. She said that “this is a lean year for housing assistance dollars.” Berk commented that the Project-based Voucher Program is well sought after, however, she will not allow it to expand beyond the current pipeline, about 100 units, until an appropriations bill is passed.

Act 47, passed as part of S.100 during the last biennium (eviction diversion program), but not funded, is being considered as part of Budget Adjustment Act.

Berk also mentioned that we need to determine VSHA staff’s roles, responsibilities, and cost of supporting HFI. Staff time at the executive level has been tremendous and she wants the Board to be aware. Trombly will work updating the MOU between VSHA and HFI and negotiate with the Boards.

- On a motion by Feinberg, seconded by Sullivan, the Board unanimously voted to accept the Secretary’s Report.

## 6. FINANCE & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Pembroke brought forth a discussion on building renovations. She said the building had been adjusted during COVID, but it no longer is working well. In particular, the front area is not as usable or secure as we would like it to be. As we expand staff and change roles, we need more office space. An architect has gone through the building and came back with some draft plans that will solve these issues, as well as make the bathrooms handicapped accessible and bring the garden level up to code. There is about \$300,000 in a building reserve fund, however, an early “guesstimate” brings the cost to about \$700,000.

Berk indicated that this is absolutely necessary. We continue to be closed to the public, seeing people by appointment only, which is not ideal. The Board had questions on the capacity this will give, and Pembroke indicated there will be some empty spaces, anticipating growth, and that staff who are not full time in the building, will utilize “hotel” desks when they are in the building. “We are trying to be as efficient as possible,” she said. Discussion followed.

cost and ➤ Houghton moved, seconded by Feinberg, to continue the planning process, including an RFP for cost, and bring a proposal back to the Board. Motion passed unanimously.

## 7. HOUSING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Whitmore updated the Board on staff turnover and changes in the Housing Program Administration division. The division has restructured to provide opportunities for growth and more support for new staff. Upcoming training sessions will be held across the whole team. She went over the figures shown in the Secretary’s Report and indicated the goal of a caseload

of 450 is almost there.

## 8. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Trombly steered the Board to the Secretary's Report for the Community Development update. He also referred to the HFI Secretary's Report included for the Board's information.

## 9. PROPERTY & ASSET MANAGEMENT

Kuegel reported that the transaction for the Meadowlane partnership was completed prior to December 31, 2023. VSHA is now the limited partner.

She discussed staff turnover and that she is interviewing to fill the Central Vermont Site Manager position. There are also three Property Superintendent positions open, however, we are expecting to hire for one of those positions shortly. She indicated that there is a possibility of a switch of portfolios and that Tyson Leno and other employees have been stepping up to fill the void. In addition, she is looking to merge the mobile home park managers and site managers for additional coverage. Farrell asked about whether the salaries were competitive, and she responded that the site manager salaries are okay, but she feels the property superintendent salaries are low.

## 10. OTHER BUSINESS

10a. Organizational Chart - Berk referred to a new organizational chart provided to the Board for their information. She indicated that we added or repurposed several positions in the Housing Program Administration division to create advancement opportunities. The next area to look at is Property & Asset Management.

10b. Strategic Directions - Berk presented a Strategic Direction document, asking for the Board's consent to implement it with the executive staff. She envisions the staff working to "calendar" the items and report them out to the Board at regular intervals. Building the Team is her first objective, and she feels that has to be completed before we reach the other categories, however, much of the work can be done simultaneously.

Discussion followed particularly around Goal 2A (Assert our Relevance and Financial Strength), which deals with assessing financial risk associated with new ventures. The Board feels that this should be an ongoing commitment and standard, and not a goal. Goal 4A (Become a One-Stop Shop) was also discussed with Berk explaining her vision of a location where all housing information would be available in a single portal across the state so people can apply through it for various programs. It would also include the opportunity for a rental registry for landlords. She indicated that this is done in other states and VSHA is in a unique position for something like this to work. Another area discussed was Goal 1 (Invest in Comms Capacity) and the indication that a new position, a legislative liaison, would be developed. This was talked about at length with suggestions made on what this might look like, whether it could be a part-time

position or outsourced. In the end, it was decided to change the wording to read, “Develop communications capacity to manage external and internal communications, PR, and act as a legislative liaison.”

➤ Houghton made a motion to approve the four Strategic Directions with the change listed above. Seconded by Troiano and voted unanimously.

10c. Meeting Schedule – The Board decided to continue the current meeting schedule, holding both the HFI and VSHA meetings on the same day, as both in-person and ZOOM meetings.

#### 11. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Farrell invited a motion that the Board adopt the following resolution:

“WHEREAS, the Board needs to discuss contractual matters; and

WHEREAS, premature general public knowledge would clearly put the Authority at a substantial disadvantage;

NOW THEREFORE, the Board shall discuss contractual matters at issue in executive session.”

➤ Troiano made a motion to go into Executive Session at 12:17 p.m., seconded by Richardson. Motion was approved unanimously. VSHA Staff left the meeting, except for Berk.

➤ The Board came out of Executive Session at 12:38 p.m. with no action taken on a motion by Richardson, seconded by Troiano, and unanimously voted.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen Berk  
Executive Director/Secretary

/edl

