

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
March 27, 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 11:03 a.m. by Chair Alex Farrell; and upon roll call, the following Commissioners answered present: Cory Richardson, Vice Chair; Linda Joy Sullivan, Jo Ann Troiano, and Mary Houghton. Absent: Aaron Jones.

Staff present: Kathleen Berk, Executive Director/Secretary; Kelly Pembroke, Chief Financial Officer; Susan Kuegel, Managing Director of Property and Asset Management; Ellen Danahy Liptak, Director of HR & Administration; Christopher Trombly, Managing Director of Community Development; Samantha Green, Director of Field Services; Robert Abbott, Office Services Coordinator; Matt Baron, VSEA Representative. Absent: Liz Whitmore, Managing Director of Housing Program Administration.

2. MEETING AGENDA

Berk asked to add discussion of a Project-Based Voucher for Reid Commons to the agenda before Housing Program Administration. The request was approved by Farrell.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Farrell asked Baron if he had anything to discuss during this portion. Baron declined. No other members of the public were present.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Houghton noted that her presence at the January 2024 meeting was omitted.

- A motion was made by Troiano to approve the minutes with a change to record Houghton's presence. Richardson seconded the motion. The Board unanimously voted to approve the minutes with the change.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Berk informed the board of her recent injury and road to recovery. She stated that she has been working somewhat remotely since the injury but does not feel that her absence has led to any tasks not being completed in a timely manner.

Berk discussed the Housing and Homeless Task Force and Tactical Action Plan. She noted that one of the objectives of the task force is to create a statewide waiting list and universal application for applying to assisted housing programs. Berk had met with the leaders of housing authorities within the state along with a representative from AffordableHousing.com, and all were fully supportive of moving forward with that plan. The next meeting will cover more of the plan on how to achieve that goal and the logistics concerned.

Farrell, who serves as the Commissioner of Housing & Community Development for the State of Vermont, shared what he has learned from discussions at the capital. He noted that the status of many programs may not be decided until late May. Discussions have continued about financing the Manufactured Home Improvement and Repair Program (MHIRP), the Landlord Relief Program (LRP) and rental arrearage which is not administered by VSHA. Because of recent budget issues, he states it is hard to tell what lies ahead for the financing of these programs.

- On a motion by Troiano, seconded by Houghton, the Board unanimously voted to accept the Secretary's Report.

## 5. FINANCE & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Pembroke updated the Board in regard to Information Technology. She discussed email journaling and that VSHA currently stores all inbound and outbound emails going back to 2010. This takes up considerable space on servers, totaling over 2 terabytes. Pembroke reminded the Board that in 2020 they approved a records management policy which was written with the help of the State of Vermont and follows guidelines set forth by HUD. These guidelines show the longest requirement for storing electronic records is seven years. Anything older than seven years will now be deleted. Pembroke also noted that VSHA's email filtering Service, Barracuda, is saving space by stopping the spam emails from being delivered to VSHA employees. Emails that are blocked by Barracuda will not be journaled.

Pembroke also informed the Board that VSHA will be moving to a VOIP phone system. Currently, VSHA receives its phone services through Consolidated Communications, through its contract with the State of Vermont. The VOIP system will also be provided through Consolidated Communications in the same way. Employees that work in the main office building will not likely notice any differences. However, employees that work remotely or off site will be able to access their 828 phone number through an app. She did not provide a cost analysis at this time but does not feel the cost would be large. Costs can be mitigated by renting equipment instead of buying it. This plan is expected to take 3-6 months to implement.

Pembroke then discussed the financials. She provided the Board with the final statements of the 13 MHPs that were transferred to HFI. She reminded the Board that all of these properties came to VSHA with no money, and so were returned in the same way. There is a \$767,510 current cash balance. VSHA staff are currently in discussion about what to best do with these funds, and will report back to the Board.

Moving deeper into the financials, Pembroke noted details of the line items which garnered no additional questions from the Board members. She specifically pointed out the Assistance Payments line item which has increased by \$2.3 million since last year. She correlated this change to the ever-increasing rents and how much VSHA is paying out to help keep families housed. Berk added that as rents increase but funding does not increase at the same percentage, VSHA will be able to serve fewer families than it did the previous years.

- On a motion by Richardson and seconded by Houghton, the Board moved to unanimously accept the financials.

## 6. HOUSING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Berk discussed the Project-Based Vouchers request for Reid Commons. This is a very competitive field with a high demand and many requests for PBVs from VSHA have been received. HUD authorizes VSHA to provide up to 30% of their vouchers as PBVs, and VSHA is close to that cap. Berk suggested that a formal request for proposals be issued to the public so they can formally compete for those vouchers. She also recommended that VSHA work with VHCB, VHFA, and other partners to make sure those vouchers target the population most in need within the state. However, the proposal for Reid Commons needs special consideration. It is a project currently being built in St. Albans with capacity to house 33 elderly. The project had started with Reid Commons assuming they would receive those vouchers. Now, without guarantee of the vouchers, development could be halted. Berk asked the Board for special consideration to approve the vouchers. Discussion continued with multiple questions from the Board. Berk clarified that she had given Reid Commons a letter of support but did not promise anything to them that would constitute their assumption of receiving vouchers.

- Houghton stated that if the formal process had been open, she sees Reid Commons as an application that would have risen to the top anyways, and thus moved to approve the vouchers. Troiano seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the Project-Based Vouchers for Reid Commons.

Green spoke on behalf of Whitmore, who was absent from the meeting. She informed the Board of the FY23 SEMAP scores. VSHA received a score of zero in the category of HQS Enforcement. Green noted there was a perfect storm of situations that led to the substandard score, including staff turnover. She has created an onboarding training to get new Field Representatives up to speed on duty assignments and is looking to provide additional training and refresher opportunities to her staff. She also mentioned a new organizational structure that includes a newly created Inspection Coordinator position.

Going into the specifics of the SEMAP report; there were 781 failed HQS Inspections, which included no-shows. 54 random files had been pulled for review. Since that time, proper notification has been sent out to landlords and participants on what the shortcomings were and are looking to close the loop on those issues.

Berk clarified that SEMAP Certifications usually take place in November of each year. This year, VSHA received a score of “Standard Performer” when they are usually rated as “High Performer.” As such, HUD requested a workout plan to remedy the deficiencies. Green’s discussion reported the workout plan to the Board.

## 7. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Trombly provided an update to the Board on the status of Healthy Homes applications, also stating that his team is moving forward with several INFIL initiatives. These initiatives are MHP portfolio wide and include the Missing Middle funds and FEMA units through the State of Vermont. In addition, he mentioned potential oversight procedures as discussed with the Operations Subcommittee.

Berk added that in the future VSHA will include the HFI Secretary’s Report to inform the Board of new community development initiatives.

## 8. PROPERTY & ASSET MANAGEMENT

Kuegel updated the Board on a segment of the Secretary’s Report referring to property tax. She indicated that the legislature may have overlooked some things when they excluded properties that had certain HUD or RD funding from being eligible for the property tax relief. However, VHFA is still issuing certificates stating that VSHA properties still qualify as affordable housing and receive that property tax relief. She then explained the aspects of Act 75 that would normally exclude these properties.

## 9. OTHER BUSINESS

Berk presented the final document from the new Strategic Plan. This document updates the Mission Statement and VSHA Vision. Berk asked the Board to approve both the Strategic Plan and the Mission Statement. She also informed the Board that the executive staff will be working on strategic directions and scheduling. The new Mission Statement is: *To ensure that quality, affordable housing opportunities are available to Vermonters statewide.*

- Richardson moved to approve the Strategic Plan and Mission Statement. Troiano seconded. The Board unanimously approved these items.

Farrell took the opportunity to thank Melanie Goodman for her work with VSHA on the Strategic Plan.

## 10. EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

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

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

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

He invited the executive staff into the Executive Session

- Troiano motioned to move into Executive Session and was seconded by Houghton. The Board unanimously agreed to move into Executive Session at 12:15 p.m.

Green, Baron, and Abbott left the meeting. The executive staff left the meeting at 12:28 p.m.

- The Board came out of Executive Session at 12:37 p.m. with no action taken on a motion by Troiano, seconded by Richardson, and unanimously voted.

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

Respectfully submitted,

  
Kathleen Berk  
Executive Director/Secretary

/RTA

