

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
May 22, 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, allowing for both in-person and remote attendance via Zoom. The meeting was called to order at 11:00 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; Mary Houghton; and Bryan Plant. 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; Liz Whitmore, Managing Director of Housing Program Administration; Robert Abbott, Office Services Coordinator; Amber Neddo, VSEA Representative.

2. MEETING AGENDA

Farrell welcomed Plant to the Board. The Board members introduced themselves to Plant and then Plant introduced himself.

Farrell then thanked Feinberg for her 23 years of service to the VSHA Board of Commissioners. He read the following resolution aloud:

“WHEREAS Caryn Feinberg has served as a member of the Vermont State Housing Authority Board of Commissioners since 2001;

WHEREAS Caryn Feinberg retired from the Board of Commissioners on May 22, 2024;

WHEREAS Caryn Feinberg has been an invaluable counselor to the Board of Commissioners and to the management and employees of VSHA;

WHEREAS over a tenure of 23 years, Caryn Feinberg distinguished herself with her deep knowledge and abilities related to housing;

WHEREAS the members of the Board of Commissioners wish to thank Caryn Feinberg for her many contributions to the VSHA Board of Commissioners; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners hereby express its gratitude to Caryn Feinberg for her service on the Board of Commissioners for her sound advice

and valued counsel and for all that she has contributed to the Board of Commissioners and to the VSHA; and

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board of Commissioners wishes Caryn Feinberg continued success in all her endeavors and express our hope for her continued health, happiness, and prosperity.”

➤ Troiano moved to adopt the resolution. Richardson seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve the resolution. Feinberg, now a member of the public, opted to remain at the meeting until she left at 12:18 p.m.

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Farrell opened public participation at 11:08 a.m. Berk identified Neddo as the VSEA Representative. Neddo stated that she intends to rotate meetings with Baron but declined any further comment. With no other members of the public present, Farrell closed public participation at 11:09am.

4. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Berk pointed out an error in the spelling of “Reid Commons” in the minutes from the 27 March 2024 Regular Meeting.

➤ A motion was made by Houghton to approve the minutes with that amendment, which was seconded by Troiano. The Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes with the amendment.

5. SECRETARY’S REPORT

Berk provided an update to the Secretary’s Report. In the final days of the State of Vermont’s legislative session, the legislature was considering an amendment to the PHA enabling legislation. This happened very quickly, and with no notice. The committee, Housing and General Affairs, took no testimony while considering this amendment. Ultimately, the House and Senate voted to approve the amendment to 24 V.S.A. § 4010, which mandates that housing authorities provide preference to accessible housing units to individuals who need the features of the specific unit. Berk noted the amendment doesn’t change anything since federal policy already mandates that housing authorities do this. Her concern is the vote happening in the final hours of the legislative session with no testimony and that the enabling legislation of public housing authorities was opened, amended, and passed into law without the knowledge of Vermont’s public housing authorities.

She advised the Board that extra attention will be needed during the next legislative session to prevent such amendments from occurring, to the extent possible.

Berk reported that VSHA received its funding amounts from HUD. She recalled the federal continuing resolution which led to a budget approval in April 2024. This allowed HUD to provide the agency funding letters for calendar year 2024.

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

Berk refreshed the Board on the background of the Strategic Directions. She reviewed the Board goals along with the current progress of work being done to achieve those goals. She has met with several outside consultants who would perform a leadership assessment. She anticipates the cost will be between \$10-15 thousand. Berk asked the Board to consider delegating the task of hiring the consultant to her due to the timing of the next meeting.

Kuegel spoke on the role of Service Coordinators as it relates to supporting our leadership. She stated in the past, Rural Development had not allowed funding of positions, only for properties. That has recently changed. She will look to use RD funding to close the gap on the current properties that do not produce enough cash to support the programs, along with assessing the other RD properties to see if the programs can be expanded to them.

As Berk spoke of the progress being made in each of the categories of the plan, Whitmore detailed the URP (Utility Reimbursement Program) upgrade. Currently many small checks are written to Housing Program participants who receive utility reimbursements. Whitmore would like to transition to a direct deposit method, which will save considerable time for the accounting department and expend less resources. Additionally, many of these participants do not have bank accounts, furthering their burden with having to cash a small check to be able to pay their utility bills.

Berk is taking the lead in developing a one-stop-shop for applicants. This will include a common application which can be completed online and a statewide waiting list. Her vision is that an applicant could go to a single location to apply to multiple waiting lists through multiple affordable housing providers at one time. Berk will also be reviewing the need for a Communication Specialist.

- On a motion by Troiano, seconded by Richardson, the Board unanimously voted to authorize funding and delegate authority for selecting the consultant to Berk.

6. FINANCE & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Pembroke provided financials to the Board and reminded them that VSHA is currently seven months into their fiscal year. VSHA recently received its final proration for calendar year 2023 for administrative fees. That fee was at 97.167%. For the FY24 budget, a proration rate of 92% was used. The budget was also set with a 90% lease up rate, of which VSHA is slightly behind. For the line items that cover salaries and benefits, VSHA is slightly under budget which is attributed to open positions. As she looks towards the budget for FY25, Pembroke notes that

the dental plan has increased by 5.25% and the Blue Cross Blue Shield health benefit may increase by 19.1%. For perspective, those increases will add \$175,000 to the portion of health care covered by VSHA and put the annual total at over \$1 million. Assistance payments have increased by \$3.1 million from the previous year. This is directly related to the increases in rent throughout the state. She anticipates being able to sustain the current number of HAP payments, however she does not think VSHA would be capable of expanding any programs.

Richardson asked Pembroke to elaborate on the insurance expenses. She stated that property and liability insurance prices are going up, and she anticipates a double-digit increase each year going forward.

The Childcare Contribution Tax will go into effect as of July 1, 2024. The tax is 0.44%, which the employer can pass on to the employee up to a quarter, or .11%, of the total tax amount. Pembroke noted that the income limits rose significantly this year, so many employees may qualify for childcare benefits. Discussion followed about how much of the tax to pass on to the employee if any.

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

Pembroke provided the Partnership letters to the Board. She stated the letters cover calendar year, not fiscal year. They all have clean opinions.

7. HOUSING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Whitmore warned the Board of the plan to seek comments on the Annual Plan, 5-Year Plan, and make changes to the Administrative Plan. Some goals of the 5-Year Plan include being recognized as a High Performer on the SEMAP and expanding housing opportunities that have supportive services combined. The public hearing is scheduled for 02 July 2024. Whitmore plans to bring the completed documents before the Board for final approval at the July meeting.

Whitmore noted that Quay Thayer has been promoted to the new position of Inspection Coordinator to assist in training other Field staff on proper inspections. This will help correct the SEMAP deficiencies. Whitmore received a letter from HUD accepting the plan to correct those SEMAP deficiencies. There is also a need to continue to recruit for the Rental Assistance Specialist position.

Berk added details of the upcoming fiscal year and budget constraints. With the current voucher turnover at 11%, the program would not grow, but new vouchers would be issued in response to those that were terminated. However, per unit costs would have to be monitored very closely. If they continue to rise, less vouchers would be able to be issued.

Whitmore spoke of the statewide waiting list that is being developed. The recent draw for vouchers was completed through AffordableHousing.com, which had a less than 10% response

rate. She chalks this up to applicants being very transient and shifting addresses. She believes that if there was one single place to update this, that the response rate would be a lot higher.

8. HUMAN RESOURCES

Liptak asked the Board for a resolution to enter into negotiations with the union. This occurs every three years. Farrell read the following:

“WHEREAS, the Collective Bargaining Agreement (“Agreement”) between the Vermont State Housing Authority (“VSHA”) and the Vermont State Housing Authority Staff Federation of the Vermont State Employees’ Association (“Federation”) terminates on September 30, 2024; and

WHEREAS, Article XXXV of the Agreement provides that “This Agreement shall be automatically renewed from year to year thereafter until either party notifies the other at least one hundred twenty (120) days prior to the termination date of this Agreement of its intent to terminate or amend this Agreement; and

WHEREAS, the Vermont State Housing Authority Staff Federation of the Vermont State Employees’ Association has notified us of its intent to negotiate amendments to the Agreement and that it would like to begin contract negotiations;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT:

RESOLVED by the VSHA Board of Commissioners that the Executive Director and/or the Executive Director’s designee(s) are authorized to bargain on behalf of the Board of Commissioners with the Federation, to reach tentative agreement on the terms and conditions for an agreement between the parties, and to submit the same to the Board of Commissioners for final acceptance and approval.”

➤ Richardson moved to adopt the resolution. Troiano seconded, and the Board voted unanimously to adopt the resolution.

Liptak then presented two updated policies. The first was a Confidentiality Policy with updates for reporting breaches of confidentiality. It also added a section on VSHA propriety materials and information. The second policy is the Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy. The changes made to this policy clarify what is related to housing and what is related to employment. Reasonable Accommodations were removed from this policy as Liptak plans to create a new stand-alone policy for this topic. After discussion, it was decided to make changes to the Confidentiality policy and bring back for approval at the July meeting.

➤ Houghton motioned to approve the Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination Policy in the current form. Sullivan seconded the motion. The policy was adopted unanimously.

9. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Trombly referred the Board to the Secretary's Report which details some of the work his team has done. The bulk of the work has been with the Healthy Homes initiatives for our Mobile Home Parks.

Trombly met with the leadership of the Alliance Property Management which oversees the management of Abenaki Acres, a property owned by VSHA. Trombly came out of the meeting feeling more positive about the relationship and says they are now on a path forward where they have an action plan to resolve some outstanding items.

10. PROPERTY & ASSET MANAGEMENT

Kuegel brought forth the new Tenant Selection Plan. This would apply to Brightwood House and Green Mountain Apartments. She stated that the impact from HOTMA on those properties would be minimal since they are USDA properties. With the newly adopted Non-Discrimination policy, she plans to work with Liptak to ensure proper language is in the plan. Under the Safe Harbor Verification policy, VSHA will not accept a third-party verification except for income verification done through VSHA's Section 8 department. VSHA will conduct all other verifications themselves. She believes this will be an evolving policy that will over time include tenant selection as well as tenant continued occupancy.

- On a motion by Richardson and seconded by Houghton, the Board moved to unanimously approve the new Tenant Selection Plan.

Kuegel presented a letter from Gillespie Fuels indicating the potential \$.70 increase per gallon for heating fuel.

11. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

12. 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 Director of Human Resources and Administration to the Executive Session.

- Troiano motioned to move into Executive Session and was seconded by Richardson. The Board unanimously agreed to move into Executive Session at 12:33 p.m.

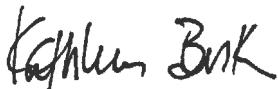
All attendees left the meeting except the Commissioners and Liptak.

- The Board came out of Executive Session at 12:40 p.m. with no action taken on a motion by Troiano, seconded by Plant, and unanimously voted.

Farrell asked for a motion to approve a 3-year reappointment for Berk as the VSHA Executive Director.

- Troiano moved to approve the extension. The motion was seconded by Plant. The Board voted to reappoint Berk as the Executive Director for the next three years.
- On a motion by Houghton and seconded by Richardson, the Board moved to adjourn at 12:46 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen Berk
Executive Director/Secretary

/RTA

