

VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY  
PUBLIC HEARING & REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
July 17, 2024

**PUBLIC HEARING**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The Public Hearing 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 hearing was called to order at 11:00 a.m. by Vice-Chair Cory Richardson; and upon roll call, the following Commissioners answered present: Linda Joy Sullivan; Jo Ann Troiano; Mary Houghton; and Bryan Plant. Alex Farrell, Chair arrived at 11:09 a.m. and resumed his duties at 11:15 a.m. 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; Daniel Blankenship; Homeless Services Coordinator and Policy Director; Robert Abbott, Office Services Coordinator.

Members of the public present: Amber Neddo, VSEA Representative (arrived 11:06 a.m.)

**2. COMMENTS AND DISCUSSION**

Whitmore discussed the 5-year Plan and Annual Plan. She stated that her top goal was to get back to the High Performer status. Other parts of the document were inspired by the upcoming Housing & Urban Development (HUD) changes to the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act (HOTMA) and inspection standards. She spoke of expanding existing programs when possible and, in particular, the use of Project-Based vouchers (PBV). PBVs eliminate the need for housing searches and can be fast tracked to a Housing-Choice voucher after one year of successful tenancy. She would also like to promote and increase the number of participants enrolled in the Family Self-Sufficiency and Homeownership programs.

Whitmore touched on an expansion to the preferences for a Housing-Choice Voucher that she will ask the Board's approval for later in the discussion. The expansion would include state-issued time-limited vouchers for the Move-Up preference.

The progress report shows work done by the department since the last 5-Year Plan. The allocations of vouchers have grown substantially in Foster Care to Independence (FYI), Emergency Housing, and Stability Vouchers. New programs have emerged to include the Landlord Incentive Program.

Within the Annual Plan, Whitmore updated the Statement of Need, which is drawn in part from the State Consolidated Plan. The Annual Plan aligns with the goals of the Consolidated Plan to link persons in need of housing to systems or services that can assist in providing that housing. The waiting list data suggests about 3,400 families are currently waiting for Housing-Choice vouchers. Whitmore added that the waiting list is currently closed except to those with the Disaster Preference or the Move-Up Preference. The Move-Up Preference being the one that Whitmore will ask the Board to expand, giving

a larger number of families the ability to apply. She estimates the current waiting list could potentially be a 5-year wait. Although the waiting list demographics align with the State Consolidated Plan and Housing Needs Analysis, she saw the largest increase in single-member households. In response to changes in HUD regulations for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH), VSHA has increased the income limits for applicants for this program to 80% (Area Median Income). By increasing the income limits, those veterans with higher pensions or disability payments could also be eligible for assistance.

At this time Richardson turned over chairing duties to Farrell.

### 3. CLOSE PUBLIC HEARING

Farrell closed the Public Hearing at 11:15 a.m.

### REGULAR MEETING

#### 1. Call to Order

Farrell called to order the Regular Meeting at 11:15 a.m. A separate roll call was not performed since there were no changes in Board attendance from the Public Hearing.

#### 2. MEETING AGENDA

There were no changes to the meeting agenda.

#### 4. MINUTES

No changes were recommended to the Board for the minutes of the 22 May 2024 Regular Meeting or the 11 June 2024 Special Meeting.

➤ A motion was made by Richardson to approve the minutes from 22 May 2024 as they were. Troiano seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

➤ Troiano motioned to approve the minutes from 11 June 2024 without changes. Sullivan seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by the Board.

#### 5. SECRETARY'S REPORT

Berk elaborated on the Secretary's Report, which included the report given to the HFI Board of Directors. On a state level, the legislature was successful in overriding Governor Scott's veto of numerous bills. One of which was H.687 which provides an additional \$1 million to the Manufactured Home Improvement and Repair Program (MHIRP). The bill also awards \$2.5 million to the Vermont State Housing Authority to stand up a Rent Arrears Program. This bill marks the first time ever that the Vermont legislature awarded funding to the Vermont State Housing Authority.

Discussion followed on whether the \$1 million allocated to MHIRP under H.687 was in addition to another \$1 million discussed in another bill. Berk concluded that she would research that in more detail.

Berk spoke about the updates to the Open Meeting Law. VSHA will come into compliance with the law by posting videos of the meeting on the company website for 30 days after the approval of minutes, approximately 90 days.

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 Richardson, seconded by Troiano, the Board unanimously voted to accept the Secretary's Report.

## 6. FINANCE & INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Pembroke briefly discussed the May financials. Administration fees are trending slightly under projections. This is due to her budgeting of the HCV lease-up rate at 90%, when in fact, it is currently 87%. The administration fees are offset by the management fees that will increase in January. Salaries are still off, but coming back closer to the budgeted numbers as positions are being filled. Equipment fees increased this month with the \$50,000 major purchase of new computer equipment. Overall, Pembroke stated that VSHA is ahead of the budget this year, which sets VSHA up for a good position going in to 2025. The latest projections for health insurance show a possible 19.1% from Blue Cross Blue Shield. Other increases include the property taxes for the main office building and the new Child Care Contribution tax.

Pembroke is expecting level funding from HUD, meaning about the same amount as the previous year. Berk added that level or flat funding is actually a budget cut to housing programs.

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

## 7. HOUSING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

Whitmore previously briefed the Board as to the changes to the 5-Year and Annual Plan during the Public Hearing. Next, she briefed the changes to the Administrative Plan. The changes would take effect 01 October 2024. Most changes were due to regulatory changes by HUD, HOTMA, National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE), or Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Whitmore has decided not to enforce the \$100,000 limit for program participants though it does still apply to applicants. Applicants with \$100,000 or more in assets will not be eligible for the program. Whitmore also reduced the look-back period for criminal background checks from seven years to three years to align with HUD goals. She updated the local ranking system for local preferences and adjusted the minimum rent from \$50.00 to \$0.00.

For the next Board meeting, Whitmore plans to provide updates to policies that are still being worked on. Regarding the Limited English Proficiency Implementation Plan, she intends to partner with AALV to provide translation services when necessary. The plan for Project-Based vouchers is being reviewed by Lunn and Berk with considerable changes due to HOTMA.

Upon providing an explanation of the changes, Whitmore asked the Board to approve the new Administrative Plan, Annual Plan, and 5-Year Plan.

Farrell read the following resolution aloud:

“NOW THEREFORE, be it resolved that the Vermont State Housing Authority Board of Commissioners accepts the PHA Annual Plan for the period of October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025 and the PHA 5-Year Plan for 2024-2028, including the substantial amendments to the Section 8 Administrative Plan, the PHA Certifications of Compliance with the PHA Plan, Civil Rights, and Related Laws and Regulations, as presented, and authorizes the Board Chair to sign the certifications and approve the submission of the PHA Annual Plan for CY2024 and 5-Year Plan for 2024 – 2028.”

- On a motion by Troiano and seconded by Houghton, the Board adopted the resolution to approve the plans.

Whitmore then commented that those plans have an effective date of 01 October 2024. However, she asked for immediate approval to expand the Move-Up Preference for Housing-Choice vouchers. There are currently about 120 families across the state that receive Vermont Rental Subsidy, most are due to lose that funding 30 September 2024. This expansion will hopefully capture those families before another bout of homelessness. With this change, she asked to remove the Housing Instability Preference, which was instituted to capture families coming off VERAP assistance.

- Troiano motioned to approve the immediate expansion of the Move-Up Preference. Houghton seconded the motion. The Board unanimously approved the change to the preference.

Berk explained the Leasing & Spending Projection reports to the Board. She stated these tools help drive decision making when it comes to voucher issuance versus funding availability. Linking these tools to Pembroke’s financial statements of utilization, Berk declared there may be some options when faced with upcoming budget restrictions. An option would be reducing the voucher payment standards. This could mean assisting more families, but each one would be assisted less. The counterpoint to this is that those families would then need to pay more out of their own pocket to cover the cost of rent. If the families do not have the means to do this, it could lead to them being at risk of homelessness. Another option would be increasing voucher payment standards to meet inflation, but without more funding, this means less families could be assisted. Berk said she would continue to provide updates to the Board.

Blankenship addressed the Board to provide an update on the homelessness situation. The Point In Time report comes out every year in January. He explained that it is very hard to accurately account for homeless families, however this is the only consistently produced report available. This year, the report found 3,458 unhoused people in Vermont, which is a 300% increase over pre-COVID levels. Those unhoused people had access to shelters, as opposed to an additional 166 homeless that did not have access to shelters. This is also a 21% increase since last year. The number in each age category increased except for ages 18-24, which could be due to the new youth initiatives that have taken place. Blankenship also pointed out the racial disparity, with black Vermonters being unhoused at 5.6 times that of white Vermonters. He also mentioned that the general state-wide grant for Shelter + Care has been stagnant as he has not issued any new subsidies for years now. This is mainly due to a lack of

service providers. The only active service provider is Pathways Vermont, which has a separate grant of their own.

Berk highlighted the opening of Riverwalk Apartments in White River Junction. VSHA provided four Stability Vouchers leveraging the A Way Home program in addition to four HUD/VASH vouchers. Farrell joined by reminding the Board that Vermont ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in homeless persons per capita. Those that he has dealt with feel that the Point In Time report really under-captures the true number of homeless people that could be within the state.

#### 8. 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 Alliance Property Management leadership 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.

#### 9. 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.

#### 10. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

#### 11. 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."

➤ 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 Berk.

The Board came out of Executive Session at 12:40 p.m. with no action taken. The meeting was adjourned at 12:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Kathleen Berk  
Executive Director/Secretary

/RTA

