



**VERMONT ECONOMIC PROGRESS COUNCIL**  
COUNCIL APPROVAL REQUIRED AT NEXT MEETING.

**MEETING MINUTES**  
**JUNE 29, 2023**  
**VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM**  
**9:30 A.M. TO 10:40 A.M.**

**Members Attending Virtually:** Chair John Russell; Sen. Thomas Chittenden; Jamie Stewart; Heather Chase; Michael Keane; Thas Richardson, Mike Donohue; Rep. Emilie Kornheiser; Mark Nicholson; and Kim Gobeille

**Members Absent:** Rachel Smith

**Staff Present:** Abbie Sherman, Executive Director; Angie Farrington, VEPC Programs Manager.

**Others Present:** Sarah Pelkey (Village of Poultney), Paul Donaldson (Village of Poultney), Alan-Glen Burnell (Village of Poultney), Lyle Jepson (Chamber & Economic Development of the Rutland Region)

---

### 9:30 a.m. Roll Call and Agenda Review

Chair John Russell called the meeting to order. Members present are noted above. Chair John Russell inquired as to any additions or deletions to the agenda.

### 9:31 a.m. Minutes – April 27, 2023 Regular Meeting

Chair John Russell inquired as to any corrections or changes to the draft meeting minutes for the April 27, 2023, Regular Meeting. Hearing none, requested a motion.

**At 9:32 a.m.** Michael Keane moved to accept the minutes of the April 27, 2023, Regular Meeting. Kim Gobeille seconded the motion. Chair John Russell inquired as to further discussion, hearing none requested a roll call for the vote. The motion passed. 7-0-0

- ❖ Aye: Chair John Russell; Michael Keane; Sen. Thomas Chittenden; Heather Chase; Thad Richardson; Mark Nicholson; and Kim Gobeille.
- ❖ Nay: None
- ❖ Abstain: None

Jamie Stewart and Rep. Emilie Kornheiser joined the meeting at 9:35 a.m. and provided their introduction.

### 9:35 a.m. Public Comment

Chair John Russell inquired as to whether any members of the public present wish to provide public comment or announcements, hearing none, moved to the next Agenda item.

## 9:39 a.m. Community Recovery & Revitalization Grant Program Applications

Abbie Sherman summarized the procedures for CRRP review and the requirements that the Council will consider.

## 9:40 a.m. Village of Poultney: Water/Sewer Infrastructure Improvements

Sarah Pelkey, Town/Village of Poultney Community Development Director and Paul Donaldson Town/Village Manager provided a summary of Poultney's application. Pelkey outlined that per the 2020 US Census, Poultney lost 412 residents since 2010 which is a 12% decline in population. Pelkey spotlighted that the Village of Poultney has a Designated Downtown and is home to the Poultney Main Street Historic District (National Register). Pelkey presented details regarding the economic development and long-term initiatives the Town and Village of Poultney are currently undertaking since Green Mountain College closed in 2019, which included revitalization of community, population growth, support use of Green Mountain College Campus, support development of outdoor recreation economy, and ensure Poultney is sufficiently served by the water and sewer system.

Mike Donohue joined the meeting at 9:40 a.m.

Paul Donaldson provided an overview of the project for which they were requesting CRRP funds. This included installation of generators for two drinking water pump stations; installation of a sewer pump station generator; rehabilitate the existing cast-in-place concrete water reservoir due to a crack in the wall of the tank, and engineering services to secure necessary permits. Donaldson outlined that the installation of generators is needed to allow for Poultney to continue to provide sewer and water services while the power is out for a significant amount of time and its need support the planned growth and development of the Green Mountain College (GMC). Donaldson provided an example stating that when that when the well pump station goes down due to power outages, Poultney has to immediately contract sewer pump trucks to keep up with the demand or sewer will begin to overflow.

Pelkey summarized the plans of the Redevelopment of the Green Mountain College, with Bhakta Spirits being a current tenant. Pelkey outlined that it's anticipated that by the end of the three-phase project a total of 118+ jobs will be created. When GMC closed, 110 jobs were lost, so this would assist in bringing back those lost jobs.

Angie Farrington provided a summary of the VEPC staff review which outlined that the Green Mountain College Redevelopment was presented to meet the business development project criteria with the understanding that phase 1 of the 3-phase redevelopment is occurring regardless of the public improvements. Phases 2 and 3 are estimated to be fully implemented in 7-10 years, and are anticipated to create 30+ new full-time positions.

Farrington stated that due to a lengthy period of economic decline, increased tax revenues to support municipal reinvestment have not yet been realized. With a declining population, and flatlined tax receipts, the community is not yet in a position to propose bonded debt expenditures nor has its municipal operating budget increased to a level that would absorb these infrastructure improvement expenses. Farrington outlined that while the project size and timelines may not differ without the usage of CRRP funding, Poultney has three additional water/wastewater system improvement projects that are in early planning stages and project estimates have not yet been provided to them. The project for which CRRP funds are being requested is using 77% of Poultney's APRA allocation and will put them at a disadvantage as they will be unable to implement recommendations derived from other projects. Without CRRP funding, Poultney will be unable to implement the full scope of its required water and wastewater infrastructure projects as there will be a funding gap, thereby causing Poultney to delay projects which would be detrimental to the current economic environment and negatively impact private sector investment. Farrington stated that Poultney's grand list growth from 2011 to 2021, as calculated by the Tax Department and the Joint Fiscal Office, is 1.0% and that this is considered stagnant.

Michael Keane questioned if Bhakta Spirits is new to the region and those who have been hired are new to the area or were previously employed at GMC. Pelkey responded that some are local who previously worked at GMC and some are new to the region. Bhakta has locations in France and in Vero Beach, FL.

Rep. Emilie Kornheiser asked if current developers leave the GMC campus, which pieces of infrastructure will remain under ownership of Poultney and be able to be utilized. Donaldson stated that Poultney has a 99-year lease for all amenities they have on the campus.

Lyle Jepson spoke in support of Poultney's commitment to the project outlining that for the private development of GMC to continue, reliable public infrastructure is necessary.

Michael Keane requested Poultney outline what three biggest risks they may encounter and what their strategy is to mitigate those risks. Pelkey outlined that using the majority of their ARPA funds towards this project will leave no room to support other necessary economic development and public infrastructure projects. Donaldson stated that Poultney has aging infrastructure and they run the risk everyday something will break and water and sewer will not be available for an extended period of time. He also noted that they are in the process of working an emergency operation management plan. Jepson outlined again without reliability public infrastructure the develop of GMC and other development cannot occur.

At **10:30 a.m.** Jamie Stewart made a motion that the Council find that based on the documentation provided by the Village of Poultney's for their "Poultney Village Water/Sewer Infrastructure Improvements" that the project:

- 1) Clearly requires substantial public investment over and above the normal municipal operating or bonded debt expenditures;

- 2) Are public improvements which are integral to the expected private development, that being business development by creation of a new business within the project area which will create new, quality, full-time jobs that meet or exceed the prevailing wage for the region; and
- 3) That “but for” the CRRP funds, the project would not occur as proposed in the application or would have occurred in a significantly different and less desirable manner.

And therefore, the Council recommend the Interagency Team approve the Village of Poultney CRRP application. Heather Chase seconded the motion. Chair John Russell inquired as to further discussion, hearing none requested a roll call for the vote. All voted in favor and the motion passed. 10-0-0.

- ❖ Aye: John Russell; Michael Keane; Mike Donohue; Heather Chase; Thad Richardson; Kim Gobeille; Jamie Stewart; Emilie Kornheiser; Thomas Chittenden, Mark Nicholson
- ❖ Nay: None
- ❖ Abstain: None

## 10:31 a.m. Executive Director Updates

Executive Director Abbie Sherman provided the following updates to the Council:

- Community Recovery & Revitalization Program (CRRP): Through the course of creating the grant agreement for North Hero, they notified us that their scope of work has changed. This includes smaller and different type of tank, and replacement of damaged lines. The change seems to be in part initiated during the permit review process by the Agency of Natural Resources, and it doesn't appear at this time to affect VEPC review of the Nexus and But For criteria.
- Vermont Employment Growth Incentive Program (VEGI):
  - Since April VEPC meeting there have been 5 new inquiries and 1 new pre-app submitted. While there has not been a lot of inquires Abbie has been attending the ARPA Tours, which include several business visits throughout the day. Most recently Abbie toured Washington County which included a visit to Lawson's Finest Liquids, which received a VEGI authorization in 2017. Abbie also attended a tour of Essex businesses coordinated by GBIC. A Rutland County business tour is planned for some time in July, which is being coordinated by Lyle Jepson. Abbie will be meeting Launch VT explain the VEGI program. Abbie outlined that there may be a VEGI Application for the July meeting.
  - A memo from the Vermont Department of Labor was provided to VEPC. This memo provides the information needed for VEPC Staff to update the Labor Market Areas (LMAs) that are eligible for the LMA enhancement. In summary the Lebanon LMA (White River Jct) moves to the eligible list. The memo also provides the information needed to know which LMAs fall under the 140% or 160% minimum qualifying wage categories. The Springfield and Woodstock LMAs are moving to the 160% category. These changes apply to any applications submitted from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024.
  - VEGI Annual Report: Abbie and Randall Szott have been working on the VEGI Annual Report that is due September 1. Since legislation did not pass with new

reporting requirements, Abbie is reviewing areas that can be included in the report that is still within the current law as well as incorporating accessibility requirements.

➤ TIF:

- The South Burlington TIF Audit was released and overall was positive with no findings.
- Angie Farrington has completed all Spring Monitoring visits with a few follow-up meetings occurring over the next month to resolve some of the findings.
- St. Albans is requesting a boundary adjustment of their district due to mapping error when the District was first established and a parcel being bisected. VEPC staff is looking into next steps.
- Hartford also has a district boundary issue due to two parcels merging. VEPC staff is looking into next steps.
- Burlington Waterfront: VEPC staff met with the City regarding the audit findings from the State audit and requested they submit a letter to VEPC outlining their intentions to contest to any of the findings.
- Burlington Downtown: The City has submitted their substantial change request for the Downtown District, which includes their proposal for the Champlain College Development Fee. VEPC staff are currently working on reviewing the request and it's anticipated the Board will receive first introduction to the request at the July 27 Board meeting. VEPC staff also attended the entrance conference for the Burlington Downtown TIF State Audit.
- Killington OTV: Angie Farrington has been coordinating with Property Valuation and Review Division (PVR) and the Town to complete certification of that District.
- VEPC staff have had ongoing discussions with Rutland regarding their plans for a TIF District in which they have been working on for over a year.
- TIF Rule: VEPC staff is in the process of updating TIF Rule which will include the TIF Clarifications that were provided in Act 72 (2023). A meeting has been scheduled with the Tax Department regarding the implementation of Act 72. An update clarifying these changes will be provided to the TIF Districts.
- VEPC Rule: It's anticipated that an updated VEPC Rule will be provided at the July Board meeting to review and adopt.
- VEPC Retreat Update: It has been determined that the VEPC retreat will be at the Langevin House at Vermont Technical College in Randolph Center on October 26. Brian Remer from State's Center for Achievement in Public Service will be facilitator. The focus of the retreat will be on VEGI with a few tours at the end of the day. The intent is to invite legislative members to gain a greater understanding of executive sessions, the "but for" review, and to discuss ways to improve the program.

**At 10:41 a.m.** Jamie Stewart moved to adjourn the meeting. Michael Keane seconded the motion. Chair John Russell requested a vote. All voted in favor and the motion passed. 10-0-0.

*Minutes taken by Angie Farrington: June 29, 2023*

*Revised by Abbie Sherman: June 30, 2023*

*Approved by the Council: July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023*