



VERMONT ECONOMIC PROGRESS COUNCIL
COUNCIL APPROVAL REQUIRED AT NEXT MEETING

MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 29, 2024
VIRTUAL VIA ZOOM
9:30 A.M. TO 12:00 P.M.

Members Attending In-person: Chair John Russell; Sen. Wendy Harrison, Jamie Stewart; Rachel Smith; Heather Chase; and Rep. Stephanie Jerome

Members Attending Virtually: Michael Keane; Kim Gobeille

Members Absent: Thad Richardson; Mike Donohue; and Mark Nicholson

Staff Present: Jessica Hartleben Executive Director; Ellie Beckett VEPC Grants Program Manager; Judy Bruneau DED Economic Development Specialist; Kelly Chambers Admin Services Coordinator III; and John Kessler ACCD General Counsel

Others Present: DED Commission Joan Goldstein; Sam Anderson Greater Burlington Industrial Corp

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, hearing none, and moved on to the next agenda item.

9:32 a.m. Minutes – December 14, 2023, Regular Meeting

Chair John Russell inquired as to any corrections or changes to the draft meeting minutes for the December 14, 2023, Regular Meeting. Hearing none, requested a motion.

At 9:32 a.m. Michael Keane moved to accept the minutes of the December 14, 2023, Regular Meeting. Jaime Stewart seconded the motion. Chair John Russell inquired as to further discussion, hearing none requested a roll call for the vote. The motion passed. 5-0-2

- Aye: Chair John Russell; Jamie Stewart; Heather Chase; Michael Keane; Rachel Smith
- Nay: None
- Abstain: Rep. Stephanie Jerome, Sen. Wendy Harrison

9:33 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.

9:33 a.m. Legislative updates

DED Commissioner Joan Goldstein did a PowerPoint presentation on VEGI, and focused on how we need to update wages to provide opportunity, how to target the living wage, and how to bring outside capital into the state to grow the economy, DED worked with Guidehouse to help come up with recommendations to see what they can do to improve the economy, they provide a comparison with other New England states who have similar programs like VEGI, "Jaimie Stewart asked what the outcome was that VT received based on the other New England states", Commissioner Goldstein responded, "that it pales in comparisons to our other states, and we are on the path and aligning, and this provides more opportunities for Vermonters." Commissioner Goldstein provided a VEGI proposal to the house that the program should have a forgivable loan, upfront payment, and underwriting provided by VEDA, and when targets are met after 3 years, the loan would be forgivable, another option would be eliminating sunset, then the goal would be to increase the median wage and incentive growth in tradable and higher paying sectors.

Commissioner Goldstein provided the following updates to the Council: The house decided to not go with the ideas mentioned above when presented to legislation, the next idea would be the DRIA program, to buy out property that was affected by the flood, ACT 250 segment. Chair John Russell asked a question about the elimination of the sunset, asked about H10, and has a concern that it is beyond the scope of what this council is capable of. Commissioner Goldstein said the House resurrected H10, and it mentions doing a study and recommends that the council correspond with the legislation to share that it is a tall order for a volunteer committee and no additional budget.

Sen. Wendy Harrison, believes that it would be helpful to hear from companies who have used VEGI, if they are looking for a study, could you use Guidehouse study? She felt like it was good information on the slides that Commissioner Goldstein provided that would help her understand the program. Sen Harrison talked briefly about ACT 250 and said that the study needs to look at ACT 250, as a whole. The National Resource Board is paid by permit fee, if they do not have permits, then they do not receive payment believe that the structure is good and is based on how it is now and not back to how it was, which will prevent developers from leapfrogging. Tier 1 is Towns with robust zoning and staffing, Tier 2 is what is not Tier 1 or 3 and Teir 3 would be natural areas that should be protected. The tier proposal was supported by developers, businesses, and conservationists.

Jaime Stewart commented that VEGI tax data be brought to Legislation to show how successful the program has been and can be.

Rep Stephanie Jerome, asked why the council feels like they are not getting applicants?, Executive Director Jessica Hartleben believes that the process is lengthy, and we are not getting a lot of larger business that VEGI was made to target, and Jaime added that the “but for” is a hurdle and there is a perception that the work done with businesses they feel like that they are put through the grinder and the what is confidential and what is public information. Commissioner Goldstein mentioned that if you do not have the staff as a CEO to project growth, it makes it hard for these applicants, applicants are risk averse. Chair John Russell added that companies do not want to apply due to proprietary information that do not want to put forth, there is a wage threshold, and a minimum of employees. VEGI is a specific type of program.

10:34 a.m. Executive Director Updates

Executive Director Jessica Hartleben provided the following updates to the Council: mentioned that they have a new staff welcoming Ellie Beckett VEPC Grants Program Manager; and Judy Bruneau DED Economic Development Specialist. The staff will also be resuming monitor visits and have been working on TIF reports. A Substantial Change Request for TIF was received for the City of Burlington, and it will be reviewed and brought to March’s meeting. A VEGI application was received, but it was incomplete, and the application is still pending until the incomplete information on the application is completed.

At 10:46 a.m. Jamie Stewart moved to adjourn the meeting. Rachel Smith seconded the motion.

Minutes taken by Kelly Chambers: February 29, 2024
Revised by Jessica Hartleben: March 11, 2024
Approved by the Council: March 28, 2024