

**VMCTA EXECUTIVE BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday January 23, 2020
Barre Town Offices**

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, Fairlee; Past President Donna Kinville, South Burlington; 2nd Vice President Julie Graeter, Colchester; Treasurer Audra Girouard, Concord; Secretary Dawn Custer, Hubbardton; and Members at Large – Charles Degener, Woodstock; and Diana Vachon, Shelburne

MEMBERS ABSENT: 1st Vice President Tracy Borst, Thetford; Members at Large -Deb Hawkins, Pawlet and Diane Judd, Holland; and Auditor Sue Gage, Brandon

OTHERS PRESENT: Carol Dawes, Barre City Clerk/Treasurer and Deanna Robitaille, Vermont Property Valuation & Review (PVR)

9:39 a.m. – President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig called the meeting to order.

AGENDA REVIEW AND MODIFICATIONS

No modifications were made to the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Committee Update – Carol Dawes, Legislative Committee Chair

Carol Dawes explained it is very early in the legislative session. It is the second year of the biennial and there is not as much opportunity for new ideas. The legislature is cleaning up ideas brought forth during the last session. There is a lot we would like to see kept on the back burner until the next session. Some of the clean-up pertains to liquor licenses. No one took into consideration that clerks keep a portion of the charges from first and second class licenses. No compensation to clerks was provided for in the renewal of third class licenses. Gwynn Zakov, Policy Advocate for Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT); and the Vermont Department of Liquor Control (DLC) were consulted. The talk acknowledged there is an administrative cost and it was thought a \$50 administrative fee on top of the cost of a third class liquor renewal could be added for processing a third class renewal as a stand-alone, which happens rarely. All liquor licenses were supposed to be on one document. That didn't happen. Part of the reason is the DLC is running behind. The hope is to move to an online system. The license holder does everything online, pays the state and town fees online and clerks get notified when a license is available. It is not certain if the online process will be ready by December 2020. Georgette Wolf-Ludwig noted a concern for license holders who are unable to do things on a computer. Carol noted all towns will have one but for the majority it should be an easier process.

The Secretary of State and VLCT are working on clarifying language about viewing, accessing and copying public records. What can be charged for and what cannot be charged? Draft language has yet to be seen. It is not going to make life easier. It will call for more free access for the public. It has been acknowledged it doesn't mean vital or land records, which have their own state requirements and fees. The Fees Bill missed recording fees associated with tax sale documents. Language has been drafted and submitted to the House Government Ops Committee. There are a couple of other things to be looked at which the legislative session may not get to. Revisions to the language regarding multiple documents noted on one page. Adding language pertaining to deeds and surveys regarding clerks being able to refuse to record a deed if the survey doesn't accompany it. The same would apply to surveys submitted without deeds. There is a call for reviewing trust mortgages. Do we need two copies? Do we need to retain the hardbound Green Mountain Power annual supplements? Most concerns won't be addressed this session. The committee is concentrating on tax sale documents. The collection of fees reports needs some

adjustment. Carol explained not a single clerk in the state lives on fees alone. Some get money from the general fund in addition to fees. The reports try to point out the fees collected don't begin to cover the costs associated with a clerk's office. Lucrecia Wonsor, Killington Town Clerk, worked hours to put a spreadsheet together to report fees. It is set up to enable fees to be entered daily.

The Vitals Bill has been a major hurdle. This year we would like to see if the list of those eligible to obtain certified copies can be expanded to include grandchildren, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles. It is usually nieces, nephews, and grandchildren who try to obtain copies to help their grandparents, aunts and uncles. The first set of rules were adopted one and a half years ago by the DOH. The VMCTA reached out for inclusion – nothing. An email was sent and the Association was told the public comment periods were closed. The rule making was supposed to be a transparent process. The process lacked transparency. The DOH wasn't on board with proposed changes and will testify against VMCTA for proposed changes.

Carol noted she reached out to Will Senning, Director of Elections. There aren't any proposed election changes this session. Regarding retention of the abstract grand list, a retention schedule is being sought. Currently, it is likely a holdover from the period when grand lists were handwritten and the abstract was part of the document and was consistently added to.

A miscellaneous tax bill has some language pertaining to treasurers. Error & Omissions currently says before December 31st. The proposed change is on or before December 31st. The Department of Taxes wants to standardize tax bills across the state. The earliest tax bills can be mailed is August 1st and the earliest the first payment can be made is September 1st. This affects communities that have early August 15th deadlines. Deanna Robitaille noted tax dates are established by the voters. Carol agreed noting her city's is in its charter. The Dept. of Taxes has said the language will include it supersedes all charters. The bills have been customized by towns to include their hours, interest rates and if postmarks are accepted. This year all towns had to adjust the central section for changes to be made.

The committee continues to meet periodically with attorneys, title researchers, VLCT and realtors to make the fees bill stronger. An updated best practices book is being worked on. Figuring out training compliance and accountability is being worked on. How to hold clerks accountable when they are elected. How to blow the whistle on a clerk. Someone had an attorney in their office and it bordered on abusive. Once a plan is in place for a best practices book the legislature may be reached out to for financial support with the layout, research and publication.

B. PVR/TOEC (Town Officers' Education Conference) – Deanna Robitaille

Deanna Robitaille noted the discussion pertaining to the abstract grand list reminded her she has been working with the listers and VSARA (Vermont State Archives & Records Administration) for some retention schedules. Regarding the grand list software vendor, PVR is waiting for the contract to be signed and it is hoped the announcement will be made the first week in February. PVR will be available for meetings and spring trainings and hopefully the vendor will be available as well. Once the contract has been signed it is hoped the vendor will be able to attend a VMCTA E-Board meeting. The vendors report it will be a seamless transition and has been in all municipalities they have worked with. At least two of the vendors have worked with states that have town governments and not just county governments.

TOEC director, Gary Deziel asked if there are clerks who could do a couple of round table sessions. Three to five would be needed. Donna Kinville explained clerks backed away from TOEC because it was poorly run, they never paid for copies and time. The numbers in the class were highly underestimated. TOEC made money but never paid for expenses. Deanna noted it would be nice to have VMCTA's support and have the association reach out to individual clerks. The board agreed if the clerks did not have to develop the education or make copies.

This year's TOEC topics include – PVR's Updated Grand List, VALA (Vermont Assessor's and Listers'

Association) Open Forum, GIS Mapping, Libraries, Historic Property Management, Records Retention & Management, Climate Change, Strategies for Engaging Young People, Open Meeting Law – Making Great Meetings Happen, AARP – Reaching Out to the Elderly in Your Community.

Donna noted any time clerks can talk to members is appreciated. Georgette agreed noting VMCTA is happy to support the endeavor of a clerk round table at TOEC. Deanna reported she receives calls pertaining to ACH payments towns receive from the Dept. of Taxes. Anything from PTA = Property Tax Adjustment. LUC = Land Use Change. She added she would like to see the advice slips change so the descriptions look like everyone else's payments. Moving homestead vetting to PVR is being considered so it will be less of a run around. The Board thanked Deanna and noted it is appreciated that the tax department has her as the liaison between the department and the clerks/treasurers. Deanna stated she loves being able to keep the connection open.

C. Committee Update – Julie Graeter, Education Committee Chair

Julie Graeter reported the committee met last Friday. Charles Degener is the vice-chair, Heidi Racht, Huntington Town Clerk, is the secretary. The spring trainings are scheduled for April 23rd and May 7th. One will be held in Fairlee, the other possibly in the Middlebury area. Post card reminders will be sent after Town Meeting. Diane Judd will be asked to handle registration. There will be three topics presented for both clerks and treasurers. Clerk classes consist of basic recording of a document with information on fees and what stuff is in the vault, election closing for vote from the floor and tabulator towns. How to close and election and what goes in the box. Thirdly, the legislative updates. Treasurers classes are reconciling year end taxes and ways to collect taxes, banking – available technology and tools available. Lastly, sending taxes to a lock box. Burlington's taxes are sent to Albany, NY. The joint clerk/treasurer topic is navigating state websites, elections, my Vermont tax, education taxes and searching statutes. Georgette noted Fairlee has a sound system, two large screens with projector and microphones. Donna suggested Randolph Tech Center as a possible location.

D. Membership Committee – Diana Vachon, Committee Chair

Diana reported she told Nellie Noble, Granby Town Clerk, about the postcards and outreach to non-members. She suggested a non-member rate for the Annual Meeting. Membership applications are still coming in slowly. Letting people know they will no longer have access to the listserv has helped. The committee is looking at a new vest for the fall fundraiser. Georgette noted membership should have its benefits, being on the listserv, member rates for trainings, and the overall cost of membership is inexpensive.

REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 5, 2019

Charles Degener made a motion seconded by Audra Girouard to approve the minutes of the November 5, 2019 meeting with corrections. All members were in favor. The motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Audra Girouard reported she had a warrant for \$11,189.03. She reminded members the New England Association of City and Town Clerks (NEACTC) yearly request for \$2,000 was discussed at the last meeting. Last year they hadn't asked for the money. The warrant includes NEACTC for the current and previous years, as well as, the lobbyist. Donna Kinville made a motion seconded by Diana Vachon in favor of approving the warrant in the amount of \$11,189.03 for November 5, 2019 – December 16, 2019. All members voted in favor. The motion carried. Audra noted she neglected to transfer the unspent scholarship funds to a reserve fund. \$1,950 was transferred. There is a little over \$4,000 in the reserve. The tax return was filed. The signature card to add Georgette Wolf-Ludwig as a signer was presented. Dawn Custer signed the Business

Card Resolution. Julie Graeter signed and notarized the same.

OLD BUSINESS

A. 2020 Annual Meeting – Lake Morey Inn contract

Georgette reported there were some errors on the Lake Morey Inn contract. After the Inn was visited in December, VMCTA was told the rooms would only be available on Wednesday, September 26th. The problems with the 2019 conference were discussed, rooms, meals, snacks, self-serve dessert on banquet night, dancing and the band. Georgette noted she was struggling with rooms only being available on the 26th. A lot of vendors use the rooms the night prior to the first day of the conference as do clerks and treasurers. If the date could be changed to September 13th, 14th and 15th, VMCTA can be completely accommodated. She asked the Board members if they would support the conference change. The Tunbridge Fair starts September 17th. The 2021 conference could be Wednesday – Friday. 2021 could bring a possible change of venue. Lake Morey Inn will be year to year to see if the problems are corrected. The Board agreed to the change of dates.

B. Card Room February 12th

Donna stated she would like to see something sent to the senators to remind them to visit VMCTA's table. Georgette suggested the list be obtained from Carol and added something could be put on the listserv to invite people. The gift is a staple remover/letter opener with the VMCTA logo. In white/black the cost is 300 for \$318. If green/white it is \$1.42 each - \$426. It was decided the color would not have enough impact to pay the difference.

C. NEACTC Constitution Amendment Discussion

Georgette explained at this past year's conference NEACTC wanted to amend its constitution so each state holds its own NEACTC conference with its own tax id and does its own filing. Connecticut explained it is the NEACTC's conference, it just happens to be held in different states. Donna explained they are concerned with the earning thresholds for each conference. Each state raises and spends the money for the conference and leftover funds are applied to the next NEACTC conference to be held in that state. It was suggested NEACTC could pay to have the tax filing done.

D. Lifetime Members

Audra reminded the Board there were former clerks who were going to be awarded Lifetime Membership at the Annual Meeting. It was overlooked. It was suggested it be done at the business meeting of the 2020 conference.

OTHER BUSINESS

A. Democracy Fund Update

Georgette reported Donna Kinville went to the first organization symposium in D.C. She explained she never knew how much was entailed in elections until she went this year. Clerks from different states were there, mostly clerks in charge of polling places and ballots. Iowa, California, Colorado, Arizona and Wisconsin talked about how they run things differently. Some have 500,000 people in the polls. The Iowa caucuses and Colorado take a week to tabulate votes. There are a ton of resources available on the Democracy Fund website. Democracy Fund gives money to smaller organizations to get information out. She stated she would love to have them come back to the Annual Meeting. They have a \$15,000,000

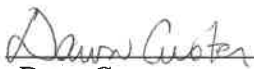
endowment funded by the gentleman who started E-Bay. It is totally non-partisan and about getting the information and vote out. The big concern is cyber-security. Georgia holds its elections without paper backup. There was a representative from the National Association of Secretary of States there. They are putting out #TrustedInfo2020. All Secretary of State's are supposed to get it out to their state's election officials to distribute to voters. Democracy Fund has symposiums twice a year. She stated she would like to have the links available on the VMCTA website. They are a non-partisan resource for election officials and voters.

B. New VMCTA Display

The display is starting to show age. It is over twenty years old. A new one that tri-folds and has a white board on the back is \$116.35. Different ideas were discussed and it was decided to hold making a decision.

The next E-Board meeting was set for April 10, 2020; 9:30 a.m. at Barre Town Offices.

Adjourn: Georgette Wolf-Ludwig adjourned the meeting with the consensus of the Board at 12:10 p.m.

Attest:  _____
Dawn Custer
VMCTA Secretary