

**VMCTA EXECUTIVE BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
Friday April 24, 2020  
Via Zoom (an online meeting provider)**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, Fairlee; Past President Donna Kinville, South Burlington; 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Tracy Borst, Thetford (for first ½ hour); Treasurer Audra Girouard, Concord; Secretary Dawn Custer, Hubbardton; and Members at Large – Charles Degener, Woodstock; Deb Hawkins, Pawlet; Diane Judd, Holland and Diana Vachon, Shelburne

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Julie Graeter, Colchester and Auditor Sue Gage, Brandon

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Jill Remick, Deanna Robitaille, Christie Wright, and Lorraine Siciliano – all representing Vermont Property Valuation & Review (PV&R); Carol Dawes, Barre City Clerk/Treasurer; Donna Kelty, Barre Town Clerk/Treasurer; and Bobbi Brimblecombe, Marshfield Clerk/Treasurer

10:04 a.m. – President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig called the meeting to order.

**AGENDA REVIEW AND MODIFICATIONS**

Georgette asked the Board's permission to amend the agenda allowing New Business to be conducted first. The Board agreed by consensus.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Committee Update – Carol Dawes, Legislative Committee Chair**

Carol Dawes informed the Board she would present an update on items currently in the works. A lot that is not tied to COVID-19 has been placed on the backburner. The Legislative Committee met with the Secretary of State's Office (SOS) at which election proposals were shared. Some details are not to be shared publicly now. They plan to do an extensive outreach encouraging people to sign up for absentee ballots. Postcards, similar to the ones received from political parties with a tear off request may be sent to voters. The intent for the August primary is to have the election run as they have in the past and not be a vote by mail. Traditionally, the August primary sees a significantly lower voter turnout than other elections. Nothing has been finalized regarding how things will work at the polls. There needs to be an in-person component for both the August and November elections for same day registration and polling opportunities. Personal protective equipment (PPE) kits have been ordered for each polling location. The current proposal for the November election is to vote by mail. There will need to be an election day polling place for voters to register and for election polls. They want to have it refined by the end of May. If the election is to be by mail, ballots will need to be ordered. There are changes coming. Money has been received for elections and will be used to provide postage paid envelopes. Different variations were discussed. Making elections an essential function to enable more people to work, processing absentee ballots in the tabulators prior to the election and letting mail sit for three days to protect against the spread of the virus and possibly extending the time after polls close on election day to count and feed absentee ballots received by mail which may be required to be left unopened three days, to be processed. Only ballots received by election day will be counted. It was wondered how hand count towns would process ballots received by mail. Would they have to wait to count the ballots several days after the ballot is received? If that is the case, would they have to bring the poll workers back to count them? Deb Hawkins noted the mail may be quarantined but the ballot run through the tabulators on election day will have been processed and touched by voters that day. Carol explained voters and/or poll workers will be wearing gloves. The ballots received in the mail will be touched by numerous people before they are received.

Donna Kelty shared her town vote is scheduled for June 2, 2020. The polling place is the school. It is

closed and disinfected. They do not want to open it. To do the entire town as vote by mail is cost prohibitive. The budget would be exceeded in postage alone. There is no other venue in town to hold an election. The solution is to use the select board's conference room. It is large enough to hold four tabulators. Live broadcast is available, so the integrity of the election is not questioned. There will be a drive-thru for same day voters set up at the public works garage. A drive-in for people to check in as they would at the polls. The ballot will be received, and they will go to a parking area to complete the ballot and exit in a different lane. The ballots will be deposited in a locked box. The box will be transferred to the select board's conference room and fed into the tabulators. It will require a lot of signage. They will have to ensure every voter can reach the ballot box to deposit the ballot. She noted she wasn't sure where the November election would be held if vote by mail is not approved. It could be an additional cost to the town to have the school open and pay to have it sanitized.

Georgette noted her school board decided to have an election. They are doing a district wide mailing with a return request to be sent to the district's clerk for each town. Because of the Articles of Agreement, the polling place must be open set hours. It is unsure how the ballots will be counted.

Carol continued reporting noting the Senate Government Operations (Senate Gov Ops) and several committees discussed empowering select boards to abate interest and penalty on property taxes for the COVID 19 year only. It passed in the senate and is in the Ways & Means Committee in the house. It doesn't touch education tax. The towns must make the school whole whether the funds are available or not. Each town may be giving schools a significant amount of money which has not been collected or that towns do not even know if they will be able to collect. It is hoped something will be put in place to waive the penalty on late education payments by municipalities. The biggest issue facing the legislature is land records. Last Friday the Governor added language which said clerks may open their offices to allow access to land records. An informal poll of clerks was conducted this morning and 40 – 70% are open with limitations. A large group testified before Senate Gov Ops regarding access to land records. It was the same group of people who testified regarding the fee changes. Members of the bar and title associations along with Vermont League of Cities and Towns and researchers. Having land records digitized and available online throughout the state was discussed. The intent is to get the group together starting as early as next week. The goal is accessibility. It was noted some clerks who have made the switch to online availability have noticed a decrease in the revenues. It was noted if there is a statewide system the state would get the revenue as happened with UCC recording. Carol noted it is a conversation that needs to happen and all sides need to be heard from. Anything pertaining to land records, no matter which perspective is being presented, has to do with the good of our townspeople. The intention is to bring a group of people together to hear the pros and cons. Tanya Marshall, of Vermont State Archives & Records Administration, sent a sample of the State of Iowa's centralized hybrid land records system for some to view. It was incredible. It is uncertain how it is accessed. Georgette asked what would be the best way to communicate updates to the E-Board. Donna Kinville volunteered to be the voice of the E-board.

Carol reviewed some items that are now on the back burner. It is unsure if they will be brought to the forefront during this legislative session. Liquor license changes. The change to the approval of class 3 liquor licenses made it through with no change in the amount of money collected by the clerk. That may not be changed this session. Revised language regarding the retention period of abstract grand lists. Review of the fees bill to correct the oversight on recording tax sales and being able to expand the list of who can have access to vital records so it includes grandchildren.

Georgette thanked Carol.

## **B. PV&R Software Update**

Jill Remick noted she was feeling humbled by the challenges clerks are facing. She began reporting on the software update noting an announcement was made on Wednesday that Axiomatic LLC was selected as the vendor for the grand list software. There is a comprehensive web page to answer questions on PV&R's

site to answer a lot of questions the department thinks will be asked. The key points: › Business will be conducted as normal this year and next › Both Axiomatic and NEMRC are eager to get ready to work together to transition the software › towns use NEMRC for more than their grand list and this will not affect the other modules › Axiomatic was the least expensive vendor but that was not what won PV&R over, PV&R's counterparts in different states advised the department to hire them noting it would not be regretted › a lot of states were solicited to see what could meet the needs for our state › there will be 12 – 15 onsite trainings around the state each year, as well as, webinars and online support › Axiomatic strictly does grand list assessment and taxes, it does not provide all of the services NEMRC does › the department is excited about what Axiomatic can do for us and the possibilities › NEMRC is very willing and interested to work with them to make this as seamless a transition as possible › Lorraine Sicilliano will be helping with a lot of the logistics and helped develop the current web page.

Deanna Robitaille added Axiomatic is willing and able to integrate with any accounting system and is willing, eager and able to work with any municipality. Lorraine Sicilliano asked to echo Jill's sentiments adding she was humbled by the logistics clerks face regarding elections. She noted her contact information is available on PV&R's website. It was asked if this is strictly grand list software. Jill answered yes explaining there is a two-year window to decide if the state wants a CAMA system. It was noted Axiomatic is willing to attend a VMCTA E-board meeting to do a presentation.

### **C. Education Committee Update – Julie Graeter, Education Committee Chair**

In Julie Graeter's absence Charles Degener, Education Committee Vice-Chair spoke. He noted spring trainings were on hold indefinitely. Virtual trainings and how to hold them were considered. Georgette asked if the speakers for the Annual Conference were being communicated with. Charlie believed Julie has been in contact with the speakers.

### **REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF JANUARY 23, 2020**

Deb Hawkins made a motion seconded by Donna Kinville to approve the minutes of the January 23, 2020 meeting with corrections. All members were in favor. The motion carried.

### **TREASURER'S REPORT**

Treasurer Audra Girouard reported she emailed the warrant. The check from Associated Press was received. Georgette wondered if the revenues for the other elections this year would change due to possible changes in the way elections will be conducted. It was noted memberships will be renewed in the September/October timeframe and wondered if membership will increase because everyone was given access to the listserv during the COVID 19 emergency. Georgette asked if the Annual Meeting money was received from vendors who paid late. Audra answered yes noting some vendors pay months after the Annual Meeting. She suggested vendors pay before Annual Meeting. Georgette stated she hoped to have Sandy Pinsonault, Dorset Town Clerk and Vendor Chair, attend the next E-board meeting to determine when it is best to reach out. Charles Degener made a motion seconded by Donna Kinville to approve the warrant in the amount of \$7,942.00 for the period of January 23, 2020 through April 21, 2020. All members were in favor. The motion carried.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

#### **A. 2020 Annual Meeting**

Georgette reported she had a call in to Erin Shaughnessy at Lake Morey Inn. The last communication was in January and there isn't any word about the deposit. Donna Kinville explained one isn't needed. Georgette continued, noting the Annual Meeting is scheduled for September 13, 14 and 15, 2020. Currently, we will proceed as if it will take place. The prep and mailings is usually done in July. Sending postcards to clerks and treasurers directing them where to find the packet information was discussed at a

prior meeting. It was noted the postcard mailing is a good idea especially since there wasn't any revenue for spring trainings. The documents for registration etc. need to be made available on the website as soon as postcards are sent or prior to. They need to be on the website before postcards are received. Donna noted the Annual Meeting itself still needs to be held in the event the conference is canceled.

## **B. Card Room**

Donna reported it was different this year than last. Not as many people stopped by. It was less confusing than last year. It has its place. It puts the VMCTA in front of the senators and representatives. It is inexpensive, the only expense is what the Association hands out. She noted she thinks it is worth continuing. The only trouble is finding a good day. We are always scheduled near Government Day which makes clerks and treasurers have to determine and choose which is more important. She hoped for earlier in February or later in March next year. It was noted the first week in February would be good if we can get it.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **A. COVID-19 Discussion**

Georgette informed Board members she spoke with a clerk who wondered if the VMCTA was going to come out with guidelines for opening offices. It was noted that each office is different and it should be done on an individual basis. Deb Hawkins noted the governor and the Agency of Commerce and Commercial Development plus the Vermont Department of Health set updated guidelines each week and each clerk or treasurer sets the guidelines for their offices based on the weekly updates. Everyone has different levels of comfort and each office is set up differently. It was wondered where cleaning supplies could be purchased and noted it is important to protect poll workers. Having online calendars available for lawyers and researchers et al to book appointments was discussed.

### **B. Listserv**

Georgette noted Sara Haskins, Morrisville Town Clerk/Treasurer, has been great. She keeps track of non-members using the listserv since it was opened to everyone for COVID-19 support. There are thirty new people currently using it. The listserv etiquette policy is sent. It is a great opportunity for people to connect during this time. Some feel overwhelmed by the amount of email on the listserv. Charlie suggested setting up a separate email account specifically for the listserv noting that is what he does. Donna suggested a filter in Outlook which would send it to a separate inbox folder.

### **C. Nellie Noble**

Georgette stated with everything Nellie Noble, Granby Town Clerk has been going through her news of having cancer is awful. She would like to stay on as chair of the Membership Committee. She needs this. It will be good to make certain there are enough people on both the Membership and Fundraising Committees. It was agreed supporting her is what is best.

The next E-Board meeting was set for June 5, 2020; 10:00 a.m. via Zoom.

**Adjourn: Georgette Wolf-Ludwig adjourned the meeting with the consensus of the Board at 11:54 a.m.**

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dawn Custer  
VMCTA Secretary