

**VMCTA EXECUTIVE BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, December 10, 2020
Via Zoom (an online meeting provider)**

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, Fairlee; Past President Donna Kinville, South Burlington; 1st Vice President Tracy Borst, Thetford; 2nd Vice President Julie Graeter, Colchester; Treasurer Audra Girouard, Concord; Secretary Dawn Custer, Hubbardton; and Members at Large – Deb Hawkins, Pawlet; Diane Judd, Holland and Diana Vachon, Shelburne

MEMBERS ABSENT: Member at Large Charles Degener, Woodstock and Auditor Sue Gage, Brandon

OTHERS PRESENT: Vermont State Representative Patricia McCoy, Rutland-1 and Sandi Pinsonault, Dorset Town Clerk-Treasurer

9:31 a.m. – President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig called the meeting to order.

AGENDA REVIEW AND MODIFICATIONS

No revisions were made to the agenda.

Update on Town Meeting Legislation – Vermont State Representative Patricia McCoy

Rep. McCoy informed members the next legislative session is up in the air because of COVID-19. She explained she anticipated COVID issues would be at the forefront of the next session. Both houses of the Government Operations Committee (Gov-Ops) have met once regarding Town Meeting. She explained to them that Town Meeting is a different beast; each Town and each ballot is different. Some vote partially from the floor, some entirely, while others are entirely Australian ballot. There is a sense the legislatures are leaning toward letting the towns do what they choose. Some may go forward with business as usual while others may adapt for COVID. She explained if anything is going to take place legislatively, it will be quickly. The session resumes on January 6, 2021. The first week is primarily ceremonial which allows 1-2 weeks for decision making. She noted she is not aware of VMCTA's position. Georgette expressed she was in favor of allowing towns to postpone Town Meeting. She explained petitions for articles to be added to the warnings are due by January 14th. It was noted towns feel as if they are in a limbo state. Rep. McCoy explained the legislature is considering a change which would not require signature collection on petitions. It was noted towns currently have the right to waive signatures if the select boards choose. Rep. McCoy wondered how much HAVA (Help America Vote Act) money was left. Sandy Pinsonault answered \$3,000,000 was the balance at the last committee meeting. Donna Kinville suggested those funds could possibly be used to replace tabulators. It was noted the current tabulators used by towns have very old technology. Donna noted the legislature enabling different legislative changes is not the same as saying we shall or you shall. It leaves decisions in the municipalities hands. It allows towns to have options. Rep. McCoy asked the Board its thoughts pertaining to the November General election, regarding mailing ballots to 100% of the voters. Board members noted concerns. Many did not receive the ballots; were upset they did not have the option to opt in or opt out of requesting a ballot on their own, some felt the ballot at the poll was not identical to the one received in the mail, many tore up or threw out the ballots received in the mail because they did not request them. It was noted Secretary of State Jim Condos made the decision to mail ballots to everyone for the November election before the state shut down due to COVID. There were concerns noted that he did not reach out to clerks, the individuals who run elections, to seek input. Clerks are not invited to the table. Several towns had 50% of the ballots voted, completed at the polls. Rep. McCoy noted one issue is the cost to mail ballots to everyone. Yes, voters can throw out the ballot if they choose not to vote. Some brought the ballots with them to the polls. Some brought the ballots to the poll but handed it in and insisted on a different one being issued. It was noted Secretary Condos has an advisory committee with a member of the VMCTA's Legislative Committee and four to five others as members. It was noted the President of the Association used to serve on that committee. Rep. McCoy informed Board members that they should know which clerks are on

Secretary Condos' Advisory Committee and who appointed them. She noted a mix of individual clerks with differing points of view should be represented.

Rep. McCoy noted another item coming before the legislature this session pertains to the education tax and it possibly being collected at the state level. Donna explained VMCTA did a survey of its member towns and received 129 responses. Rep. McCoy noted the level of service and understanding taxpayers receive at the local level would not be the same at the state level. Select Boards will work with individuals if there are extenuating circumstances. They can make decisions based on what is better for their community and town.

Rep. McCoy and the Board had a brief discussion regarding land records and online availability. In closing, Rep. McCoy asked to be notified if any bills being discussed in the legislature affects clerks of treasurers noting she would keep an eye on it.

IIMC (International Institute of Municipal Clerks) Region I

Sandra Pinsonault reported she flew to Grand Rapids, Michigan in November for the mid-year meeting. Fourteen of the twenty-four board members were present. It is hoped the Annual Conference will be held there in May 2021. Dr. Jane Long resigned her position as Director of IIMC's Professional Development. IIMC is currently advertising for a replacement. The Annual Conference is May 9 – 13, 2021 in Grand Rapids. Sandy explained her position as Region I Director ends in May. It was asked when IIMC would make the decision to cancel its conference. The answer was April. Tracy noted IIMC opened online teaching through December 3, 2020 and wondered if it would be extended into 2021. Sandy believed it would be extended. Sandy announced the Region I meeting in March is happening with someone helping with the online aspect. Zoom Athenian Dialogues are allowed until June 30, 2021.

REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF November 12, 2020 MEETING

Diane Judd made a motion seconded by Donna Kinville to approve the minutes of the November 12, 2020 meeting with corrections. All members were in favor. The motion carried.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Audra Girouard reported not a lot has taken place since the last report; \$2,600 was received from the Associated Press. The checking account balance is \$47,859.72, there is \$10,077.35 in the Scholarship reserve. Today's warrant is \$513.70, which contains all items from November 7, 2020 through December 9, 2020. Deb Hawkins made a motion seconded by Diane Judd to approve the warrant in the amount of \$513.70. All members voted in favor. So, voted.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Act 175 Survey

Donna Kinville noted the results were tallied and sent to Legislative Chair Carol Dawes, Barre City Clerk-Treasurer. Of the responses received, 75% were not in favor of the education tax being processed at the state level. Some of the reasons provided were – loss of penalty and interest monies collected and the lack of the personal relationship with townspeople. Georgette noted at the last meeting the Board agreed to report the results to Jill Remick, Director of Property Valuation and Review. It was wondered if the responses were one from each town or were there multiple respondents from a single town. Most results represent one per town was the response. Audra noted her surprise at the number of responses that did not see any pros or cons about the proposed act.

B. Annual Meeting contract – Lake Morey Inn

Georgette reported the contract is the same as the one in 2020. The dates have been changed. The Annual Conference will be September 22 – 24, 2021. The contract does not include meal choices for the banquet.

She noted she feels comfortable with the contract. Notification of cancelation needs to be given in July. Tracy Borst made a motion seconded by Diane Judd, in favor of VMCTA President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig signing the contract with Lake Morey Inn for the 2021 Annual Conference. All members voted in favor. So, voted.

OLD BUSINESS

A. Retirees Serving on Committees

Georgette reminded Board members the topic of retirees serving on committees was tabled from the previous meeting. Donna noted she was concerned it could take opportunities away from active members being able to serve and receive points toward certification. She suggested retirees could serve in an advisory capacity. A suggestion of limiting retirees to one per committee was made. Georgette suggested retirees may have more time to figure out topics and the technology needed for curriculum. It was suggested a retiree could serve at the President's approval; as ex-officio members who would not be taking a committee spot nor count as part of a quorum. It was agreed to discuss the subject further at the next E-Board meeting.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

A. Membership Committee

Diana Vachon reported eight new towns have joined. There are 372 members.

B. Fundraiser Committee

Diane Judd reported an Athenian Dialogue is scheduled for February 7, 2021. The committee will meet via Zoom in January. Order forms for name plates and pins are available. They take about a week to arrive once ordered.

C. Education Committee

Julie Graeter reported the committee hopes to meet in January. On demand, virtual training is being researched. Some of the topics being considered are: Navigating State Websites and Banking Basics. The committee is looking for the best platform on which to hold the meetings noting they can be recorded if Zoom is used. Tracy noted Jim Ognibene is an excellent resource. He will let you know what works and what doesn't work. Georgette mentioned Anita Sheldon, Manchester Town Clerk, had a spontaneous Zoom meeting for the primaries. She suggested the Board do something similar for a Town Meeting Round Table. People could Zoom in to input what their towns are or are not doing. Julie noted the committee talked about it at the last meeting, floor votes or Australian ballots. She noted clerks cannot wait for the Legislature to decide; it will not allow enough time to have ballots ready to mail and receive them back in time.

OTHER BUSINESS

A. Democracy Fund

Georgette reported she attended a remote symposium with Democracy Fund, a non-partisan organization offering election information. The Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL) is a sponsor. They had \$350,000,000 in grant money to award for election supplies and expenses. There were 113 towns in Vermont that were recipients of grant money and 2,500 towns throughout the United States. Josh Goldman is willing to help with election trainings and has videos available.

B. New England Association of City and Town Clerks (NEACTC)

Tammy Legacy, Roxbury Town Clerk, was sworn in as 2021 President on December 4th. She is moving forward with plans for the November conference in Stowe. She should know by late spring if the conference can still be held.

C. Connecticut Attorneys Title Insurance Companies (CATIC) Lawsuit

Donna Kinville reported six or seven Vermont municipalities are being sued by CATIC for not having land records available during reasonable hours. They would like all records to be available for specific hours as reported on the Secretary of State’s website. She noted in her office all researchers are currently booking time to come in. The land records index is being sent via email. Records are being printed or emailed and researchers can send a check but that is not how they want business conducted. They want to be able to inspect the land records via an online system or in the clerk’s office. Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) has touched base with the towns that are being sued to see if the clerks are okay. They also provided a list of attorneys’ names who do not have a conflict or personal interests in land records. Bob Fletcher is the attorney representing all the towns involved. There is a hearing on Friday, December 18th. Julie wondered what CATIC was hoping to obtain from the lawsuit. Donna believed it was for clerks’ offices to be open normal posted hours no exceptions. Small towns would not be able to close for a period by putting a sign in the window. Only a few towns around the state were chosen for the law suit but it is meant for the state in its entirety. All the towns involved in the lawsuit are being professional. The clerks and the select boards are working together.

Georgette reported VLCT is in search of ten to fifteen people interested in serving on an equity committee.

D. Zoom Roundtables

Tracy explained VLCT is offering critical training for moving to Australian ballot on December 17th and one pertaining to articles and warnings on January 13th.

The next E-Board meeting was set for January 21, 2021; 9:30 a.m. via Zoon.

Adjourn: Georgette Wolf-Ludwig adjourned the meeting with the consensus of the Board at 11:50 a.m.

Attest: _____
Dawn Custer
VMCTA Secretary