

**VMCTA EXECUTIVE BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Thursday, February 17, 2022
Via Zoom (an online meeting provider)**

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Tracy Borst, Thetford; Past President Georgette Wolf-Ludwig, Fairlee; 1st Vice President Diane Judd, Holland; 2nd Vice President Diana Vachon, Shelburne; Secretary Dawn Custer, Hubbardton; and Members at Large – Karmen Bascom, South Royalton; Charles Degener, Woodstock; Sara Haskins, Morristown; and Anita Sheldon, Manchester

MEMBERS ABSENT: Auditor Sue Gage, Brandon; Treasurer Susan McNamara-Hill

OTHERS PRESENT: Carol Dawes, Barre City Clerk and Treasurer; Patti Lewis, Fayston Clerk and Treasurer; Jill Remick and Deanna Robitaille, both of Property Valuation & Review (PVR)

9:04 a.m. – President Tracy Borst called the meeting to order.

AGENDA REVIEW and MODIFICATIONS

No revisions were made to the agenda. Tracy reported there would not be a Treasurer’s Report this meeting.

REVIEW AND APPROVE MINUTES OF January 6, 2022 MEETING

Georgette Wolf-Ludwig made a motion seconded by Diane Judd to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2022 meeting as presented. All members were in favor. The motion carried.

TREASURER’S REPORT

No Treasurer’s Report was presented.

NEW BUSINESS

Tracy suggested rearranging the scheduled order of New Business as Jill Remick and Deanna Robitaille had already joined the meeting. All members agreed by consensus.

A. Jill Remick & Deanna Robitaille, PVR ~ Legislation

Jill Remick introduced herself. She noted she is excited to be in the middle of the roll out of VPIE (Vermont Property Information Exchange) which will replace the previous grand list software. In January, the system went live with sales verification. The 2022 equalization and ratios study will be available to see what is happening statewide regarding CODs (Co-efficient of Dispersions) and CLAs (Common Level of Appraisals). What has happened in the state regarding property values this past year is mind blowing. The market has not been like this since 2008. The Current Use is a complicated process built on an old data exchange. We are looking forward to a time when that will be replaced. This year the roll out will include homestead declarations, tax filing and grievances. It is a huge project and it is mid-stream. There has been great feedback from the training. The system is meant to be as intuitive and real time as possible. It is web based with a login. PVR is bracing itself for the major transitions. Deanna Robitaille noted people are encouraged to contact PVR with both negatives and positives. Jill agreed noting PVR needs to hear what is needed on the clerk and treasurer end. What tax billing software is your town using and possible other software programs that PVR should know about to help make each transitional merge smoother. Deanna noted as the program continues to build and thoughts begin about the need for accounting programs this becomes more important. Some towns are already expressing changing software. She wondered how PVR can best advocate for municipalities. Jill noted the lawmakers respond when organizations like VMCTA or their constituents touch base with them. It does matter if you communicate with your representatives and senators. Tracy asked what the roll out timeline will be for tax billing. Jill answered the plan is to be live

by May 2023 to have the system ready to print billing by July 2023. The system also allows the towns to use and print from their own tax billing software. Tracy suggested PVR reach out to clerks and treasurers at VMCTA's fall conference in September. Diana Vachon noted the conference is Tuesday and Wednesday, September 20th and 21st. Jill noted Tuesday would be the preferable day. Tracy informed Jill and Deanna the VMCTA does not reach all municipalities and suggested a survey may be a good outreach.

B. SOS Oversight of Municipal Clerks/ Land Records & Legislative Committee Update – Carol Dawes

Carol Dawes noted an item she had that overlaps with PVR is the push for refunds to taxpayers. What is the best way for refunds to be issued. She explained the state education fund had a healthy surplus last year and the state would like to give quite a bit back to the taxpayers. Jill noted PVR spoke to NEMRC (the current tax billing system used by most municipalities) and they expressed concerns that their software is not designed for that. It can be done though. Deanna asked if the legislature has considered giving taxpayers a flat amount via the homestead pre-bate or a straight percentage. Carol noted they are considering whether they would like the municipalities to issue the checks or the state. She noted she is hoping as they continue to push forward the state will issue the checks. Jill reviewed some legislation being considered.

S.169 – If a TIF municipality overpays can they be reimbursed

S.261 - A .225 of 1% retention happening on reconciliation that goes through the Agency of Education in a timely manner.

H.583 – Allows the listers to appeal BCA decisions to PVR. She noted PVR does not support that

H.512 – Creating a statewide land records digitization program is being considered, as well as, how it will be administered, where it will be hosted. PVR wants to support the towns and make certain the towns have what they need.

Jill continued noting it is difficult for towns to find assessors and listers to do the work necessary. During a reappraisal cycle it is challenging as there are not enough certified firms who want to contract in Vermont. Other agencies see it as a crisis. Small towns are at a disadvantage because firms are paid based on assessed value. Carol noted Barre City has been without assessors for fourteen months. Jill noted the state has \$6 billion in assessed grand list values and the work is being done by volunteers or low paid people in a thankless job. Tracy explained Thetford lost two veteran listers. There is currently one serving with three years of experience, someone brand new and a vacancy with no expressed interest. Deanna noted PVR had some proposals they have been working to put together. They have considered educating listers before they step in just to ensure that those volunteering are interested in the job. She noted PVR would like to see an increase in the per parcel fee paid to municipalities; 2005 was the last increase. VMCTA was successful in working to increase the recording fees. PVR also suggested the reappraisal money sent to municipalities be required to be set aside in a reserve fund and saved year after year to help cover the big expense of a reappraisal. Carol noted Barre City is entering the reappraisal process next year; it took 20 years to raise enough money to cover the contract.

Carol reported most bills that were on the radar at the beginning of the session do not appear to be going anywhere. The House Government Operations Committee is giving their time to the reapportionment.

H.490 – Is proposing individuals can only hold one elected position at a time. It is not believed it will lead anywhere.

The Department of Liquor Control is finally moving forward with an online licensing portal. They hope to have it ready in six months. She noted she has been offered an opportunity to try and break the system. There will be training for it at the fall conference. We will receive notification an application is pending. It will be held until the town receives its payment. The applicant will be emailed so they are aware the application will not be approved until money is received by the municipality. She asked, regarding the announcement that Secretary of State Jim Condos is retiring, if the Association has a policy regarding the endorsement of a candidate. Anita Sheldon noted when Secretary Condos first ran a debate was held at the VMCTA Conference. A moderator asked questions. The Association itself did not endorse anyone. Carol noted there have been conversations with the House Commerce and Community Development Committee. A group of lawyers, bankers and realtors are pushing to do away with clerks holding the responsibility of land records. No clerks are involved in the discussions. In a way, they are setting rules. The land record could still be recorded on a local level. It would then go into a statewide system and made available. She

wondered who would oversee and inspect this. There are discussions that would move toward being able to accept digital recordings. It will be up to the clerks. Accepting digital recordings is allowed everywhere but Vermont. The same would apply to remote notarization. It would allow Vermont clerks to be able but not mandated to accept remote notarizations. Carol noted it is VMCTA's intention for the latter two pieces of legislation to be enacted. It is hoped to have an update regarding the best practices of recoding land records, especially regarding indexing. There are lots of good examples available. She noted it would be desirable to update the standards and best practices also. VSARA is willing to reach out to COTTS, Kofile, etc. to see if they are willing to offer a state contract with the hope of economy to scale. There is hope to find some funding for this. It has been pointed out there is a lot of resistance from some select boards regarding the cost of digitizing land records. Bankers and lawyers want to see a statewide system. They are being directed to the VMCTA website which has links to land records for 101 Vermont towns who have digitized land record systems, or at the very least indexed them digitally. It makes more sense to access everyone's records via the VMCTA website then to spend \$30 - \$40 million for a statewide system. She believed the land records may come before the committee as soon as this week. Tracy suggested the presentation include the fact that property sales have been at record levels even though there has not been access to clerks. The lawyers and bankers cannot hold all clerks accountable for one or two. Carol explained they pushed for this to go before the House Commerce in the hope of going before like-minded, business-minded people. Two members of the committee are former select board members who have sympathy for clerks. The VMCTA needs to take a role working on revisions to the Standards and Best Practices of Recoding Land Records. VSARA wants all vendors currently being used to be willing to offer state pricing. In other states the clerks' associations run like a min-municipality. They can set their own fees and other such things. Some of the situations the lawyers and bankers complained about had extenuating circumstances. A clerk was sick then the assistant quit, those situations fall on select boards. Diane Judd suggested mandatory clerk training. She wondered about who interviews appointed clerks and whether they even know what a clerk does and should be able to do. Tracy asked for input as to what the VMCTA should do. She noted the Association has no authority to tell an elected clerk what to do either. It was agreed the best practices should be updated. Some noted requiring mandated training would be a good idea.

C. Proposal for Publication – Patti Lewis

Patti Lewis began by noting there has been discussion for years about town clerks and treasurers putting a book together about our stories. She suggested it could be a VMCTA fundraiser. She noted she and her daughter would collect the stories and do artwork. Diane Judd noted her enthusiasm for the idea adding clerks who retired in the last 5 – 10 years could be included. Patti noted she would like to reserve the rights, as the editor of the project, to edit submissions. She asked to not be held to a time limit. Diane suggested a possible company for publishing. Patti explained there will be the cost of printing and supplies the Association would have to cover. Diane noted all fundraisers have an initial investment cost. Patti noted a pre-publication copy would be sent to the E-board for review and emphasized it was not to be distributed. Pre-sales would be for a hard copy of the book. The second edition could be an online edition made available on the VMCTA website. Tracy noted if the Chair of the Fundraising Committee was in favor, she did not believe a motion was needed. Patti asked emails to be sent to her home address not the work address.

D. Pricing for Annual Conference

Pricing for the Annual Conference was tabled until the next meeting.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

A. Certification and Continuing Education – Diana Vachon

Diana Vachon reported the Spring New Clerks and Treasurers training is scheduled for April 27, 2022 in Fairlee and May 4th in West Rutland. It is going to be held in person unless the state is shut down. Carol Dawes is teaching, Donna Kelty, retired Barre Town Clerk & Treasurer and Tammy Legacy, Roxbury

Town Clerk are co-teaching. Someone is needed to do land records in the afternoon. Donna Kelty will hold a session called “Things No One Tells Us”. Lucrecia Wonsor, Killington Town Clerk & Treasurer will be teaching a treasurers’ session going over the duties and responsibilities. Sue Johnson, Cornwall Town Clerk & Treasurer will go over audits and what every treasurer needs to know. Bobbie Brimblecombe, Marshfield Town Clerk & Treasurer will hold a tax collections session. There will be a couple of sessions announced in the coming weeks.

Diana noted for the September Annual VMCTA Conference, Brendan Fisher of UVM will be a keynote. His session will be, *Leadership Inspired by the Wisdom of Nature*. She hoped to have it be approved by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks. The Conference theme is Climate Change – Be the Change in Your Community. PVR has a session, Vermont Department of Liquor Control, Elections will present regarding the November General Election. Brad James from the Vermont Tax Department. Jim Barlow will do a Municipal Law session regarding town clerk roles and responsibilities and VASARA will present regarding the environment in the vault. Sara Haskins noted VASARA is willing to visit towns and do an environmental assessment of their vaults. Tracy lining up the theme and various topics was a job well done.

B. Membership Committee – Diana Vachon

Sara Haskins noted she receives weekly emails from clerks who are getting bounced off the listserv. She noted she believes the issue is on their end. The system probes email addresses several times a day. If an email doesn’t respond back to the system the user is automatically kicked off. She noted she receives no notification. Tracy suggested the clerks in question may want to subscribe to a free email account and have it forwarded to their town accounts. Maybe it will work that way. Diana wondered if there was a Zoom option for spring training and if the sessions were recorded and put on the website, would there be a charge for access. Georgette noted the only charge was to cover the lunch expense.

OTHER BUSINESS

Items for the next meeting ~

The pricing for the Annual Conference was tabled. The question regarding endorsement of a candidate for Secretary of State and municipal records to be discused.

The next E-Board meeting was set for April 7, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom.

Adjourn: President Tracy Borst adjourned the meeting at 11:05 a.m.

Attest: _____
Dawn Custer
VMCTA Secretary