

**Land Access and Opportunity**  
**Board December. 19, 2022, 5:30 –**  
**7:00 p.m. by conference call**  
**Meeting Notes**

Facilitator Xusana Davis convened the Dec. 19, 2022 meeting of the LAOB at 5:33 p.m. The meeting concluded at approximately 7:15 p.m.

Board Members present: Xusana Davis, Office of Racial Equity; Samantha Langevin, RELEAF Initiative; Arnold Thomas, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance; Pacificque Nesngiyumva, U.S. Commission for Refugees and Immigrants; Jon Bosley, Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs; Raheemah Madany, Pride Center of Vermont; Kirsten Murphy, Vermont Development Disabilities Council; Jess Laporte, Every Town Vermont; Irmagard Stiehl Figueroa on behalf of Lynn Stanley, National Association of Social Workers, Vermont; Rev. Mark Hughes (alternate member), Vermont Racial Justice Alliance;

Board Members not present were: Karim Chapman, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors; Naomi Moody, NAACP

VHCB staff present: Gus Seelig, Executive Director; Trey Martin, Director of Conservation and Rural Community Development

Members of the public present: Malcolm Greene; Grace Gershuny

1. Meeting Notes from December 5, 2022 were reviewed and no edits or changes were requested. Board members are invited to send written requests for edits or changes in the future if needed.
2. In lieu of the planned agenda and report from the Legal Working Group, Meeting Facilitator Xusana Davis proposed that the Board enter into Executive Session to discuss a personnel issue that occurred at a Legal Working Group meeting the prior week.

Not all Board members were in agreement about whether to move to Executive Session, given the Board's strong preference for full transparency and access for members of the public. To address this concern, it was proposed that Executive Session would address only the incident in question, and a report out would be provided to the members of the public upon return from Executive Session.

In the absence of consensus, a vote was taken and six were in favor of moving into Executive Session to discuss the personnel matter and two opposed. After this vote, the Board moved to into Executive Session at approximately 5:50 p.m.

The Board returned from Executive Session at approximately 6:45 p.m. and provided this summary of their deliberations and discussion:

- The Board’s discussion addressed an incident that occurred in a Legal Working Group meeting, where a disagreement between a Legal Working Group member and one of the Board’s attorneys occurred. The disagreement became heated, and the attorney’s tone and response were disrespectful and unprofessional. Not just the Working Group member in that dispute, but others present experienced this as harmful, hurtful and unacceptable.
- Board members expressed support for those affected and a strong desire to engage in honest dialogue to address not just the disrespect, but the power dynamic of a White attorney addressing a Black Board member in this manner, as well as the role and duties of witnesses present in incidents like this.
- The goal of that dialogue, which will be carried out by the Legal Working Group, with support from VHCB, will be to set expectations and conditions for cultural sensitivity, respectfulness and professionalism in the Board’s continued work with its contractors.
- The Board expressed agreement to continue working with the attorneys hired to support the Sunrise Report submission, pending the conversation to be scheduled as soon as possible by the Legal Working Group.

### 3. Public Comment

- Malcolm Greene: expressed disappointment in the Board’s use of Executive Session, noting that this was a second meeting in a row where there was very little progress. Members of the public attend this meeting in order to be helpful, and it felt hurtful to be left out of the discussion for over 50 minutes. Malcolm asked to be included on the Board or the working group going forward. Malcolm recommended this resource to the Board’s attention:  
<https://www.blackagenda.com/black-agenda-radio-december-16-2022>
- Grace Gershuny offered this comment through the meeting chat:

“Thank you for your open and transparent process to discuss a difficult question. My objective is just to introduce myself and the land sharing project that I am working on with Cooperation Vermont. I circulated a concept paper in July that explains what it is about: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AM6BHLWrn-Ohex2X\\_CNbxhTsiV1sG5rt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109115459140475914099&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AM6BHLWrn-Ohex2X_CNbxhTsiV1sG5rt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109115459140475914099&rtpof=true&sd=true),

With a recent update message here:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AM6BHLWrn-Ohex2X\\_CNbxhTsiV1sG5rt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109115459140475914099&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AM6BHLWrn-Ohex2X_CNbxhTsiV1sG5rt/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109115459140475914099&rtpof=true&sd=true)”

### 4. Upcoming meetings currently scheduled:

- a. Legal Working Group – 12/28
- b. (Optional) Board working session to discuss Sunrise Report draft, either Jan 3 or Jan 4, from 5:30 – 7:00 (VHCB to circulate email regarding the dates)
- c. Next full Board meeting – Jan. 9; Jess Laporte to facilitate.