

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

Facilitator Pacifique Nsengiyumva convened the meeting at 5:37 p.m. The meeting adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Board Members Present: Kirsten Murphy, Vermont Development Disabilities Council; Xusana Davis, Office of Racial Equity; Arnold Thomas, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance; Mark Hughes, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance; Rich Holschuh, Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs; Jess Laporte, Every Town Vermont; Raheemah Madany, Pride Center of Vermont; Pacifique Nsengiyumva, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Vermont; Samantha Langevin, Vermont RELEAF Collective

Board Members Not Present: Karim Chapman, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors; Lynn Stanley, National Association of Social Workers, Vermont; Naomi Moody, NAACP Vermont Chapters

VHCB Staff and LAOB Attorneys Present: Gus Seelig and Trey Martin; Anthony Iarrapino and Robert Appel

Members of the Public Present: Isaac Owusu, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance; Liz Mackey; Buster Caswell; Liz Mills; Malcolm Greene

Facilitator Pacifique Nsengiyumva convened the meeting with the following land acknowledgement:

*We gather virtually today from our communities, homes and offices on land that is the traditional and unceded home of the Abenaki people. These lands and waters have been the site of meeting and exchange among Indigenous People for thousands of years. As part of the work of this Board, I want to invite us today to honor, recognize and respect the Abenaki as the traditional stewards of this landscape. In our work, we will strive to respect and protect this land, while continually honoring the legacy of Vermont's Indigenous People, the Abenaki People of the Dawn.*

Board members shared the following after a period of silent reflection:

- We are oriented as a Board towards action and enterprise, but we must strive to achieve stewardship and responsibility for each other and the land on which we find each other in a cooperative – not competitive – lifestyle.

- Simplicity is about walking gently on the planet. Even if we cannot undo the damage done by those who took the land from its original stewards, we can strive always to reduce impact and increase opportunity.
- Reflecting on principles: responsibility and accountability; I am because you are; none of us can exist as individuals unto ourselves; and we are all interconnected.
- How, when, why and where we acknowledge the land and the responsibility we hold is a daily activity! These exercises are very important, and the most important thing we can do is to take action and increase justice.
- If we are reflecting on how we honor the original stewards of this land, this Board's process must take a different view of the land. We cannot see the land as commodity or the object of financial transaction. A comprehensive and holistic approach would also acknowledge the non-human beings on the land, as well as the land itself.
- All of this work is deeply personal. Are we landowners? Are we land stewards? Thinking about land and place is also a reminder that the legislation that created LAOB was predicated on land ownership and capitalist systems of oppression. Our work is the work of transformation and translation.
- When I consider the words that were read on this acknowledgement, I think of the creative process that generates language: air, breath, sound, vibration, meaning and power. Depending on whose tradition you follow, we were sung into existence. When we choose words, speak words, we make a now from the past, choose a future from the now. Our reflections are a light to show us that future.
- This reflection hits deep and brings up a lot of trauma for the ancestors before me who were dispossessed. We are intertwined in an effort to achieve balance, until, a coming together with all beings and all life on this planet. Our work is to manifest that reality of unity, that future of thriving life, that collectivism.
- Meeting Notes from November 21, 2022 were reviewed and no edits or suggestions were made. Those Meeting Notes are posted on the VHCB webpage for the LAOB and may be reviewed at any time; if anyone has edits or suggestions, please contact Trey at VHCB.
- The LAOB's Legal Working Group reported on the ongoing process with Attorneys Appel and Iarrapino.
- Kirsten Murphy, Samantha Langevin, Jess Laporte and Mark Hughes provided an overview of current status of the work:
  - Sunrise Report is due on Jan. 15. Time is short, and the Board may need to deliver an initial report with additional detail later. The attorneys are striving to have an initial draft around 12/27/22, based on an outline to be prepared by Trey Martin at VHCB.

- The attorneys have created a work plan (which was circulated before the meeting) spelling out the division of labor for their research and outreach.
- The attorneys' work will be guided by this North Star: how do we create programs that provide funding, support and services dedicated to individuals, families and collectives representing historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities?
- Working group will be meeting as frequently as they can, as timeline is very short. As a result, the Working Group will be working with the attorneys on a first draft, and will then provide opportunities for the full Board to review.
- Robert Appel provided a self-introduction and overview of the legal crucible that the attorneys are working in – how to identify options that will create progress within the parameters of legal options and opportunities.
- Anthony Iarrapino provided an overview of notes from working group meetings:
  - Initial Report is important opportunity for this Board to introduce itself and its goals to the Legislature, even if that is an initial report to be supplemented later.
  - Will be competing with many other agencies and non-profits in an environment of shrinking resources.
  - VHCB/Trey to prepare and circulate to Working Group members a report outline with responsibilities for VHCB, Board members and Attorney Team.
  - Report draft to Working Group 12/27. Final draft 1/9. Report to be submitted on 1/17.
  - Office hours will be established for board members to hear from, raise questions to, and meet with the attorneys.
- Rev. Hughes added thanks and praise for the excellent work of the attorneys, and emphasized how critical it is for the Board to trust the Working Group with the initial draft, and he reminded them to be prepared for a final draft review around Jan. 9.
- Pastor Thomas underscored the frustration and skepticism that many have for the governmental structure we must work within – and the need to hear from those members of the community who are hurting more than we are so that the LAOB can speak on their behalf. Moving our agenda along, working as needed within those governmental conventions, being aggressive, but grounding ourselves in the needs of the most vulnerable – these are goals.
- Jess reminded the Board that it has a broad scope of authority and opportunities – including looking at other sources of support and funding that will help the Board to broaden its impact and/or undertake programs that might be better funded with

private, philanthropic funding. We can create that other container and offer a vision that goes well beyond what the General Assembly might authorize.

- Gus Seelig invited the attorneys to look at special purpose financing, of the kind used to fund Champlain Housing Trust's BIPOC Home Ownership Program. Also asked the Board to think about what institutions should be asked to support the work of the Board (e.g. New England Farmers of Color Network).
- Trey offered to work with attorneys to set office hours dates and publish working group meeting dates so that anyone who wishes to join is able to.
- **Public Comment** – 10 minutes (Pacifique Nsengiyumva facilitated)
  - Malcolm Greene invited to Board to consider cutting reflection time shorter in order to ensure more time for righting wrongs. He also suggested that the whole way government approaches funding needs to be transformed to provide benefits to those who our system has not helped traditionally – we should not ask those who have been left out of the benefits of our system to go find support and capacity elsewhere from private funders. Let those who have benefitted heretofore go find their own funding.
  - Buster Caswell offered a reading to support process and outcomes that benefit those who work on and with the land. Their participation is required for sound decision-making.
  - Liz Mills offered: this was an informative meeting, thank you for all of your work! I think the reflection point at the beginning is a critical way to frame why we're here.