

Land Access and Opportunity Board Meeting
September 8, 2022 - 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
DRAFT Meeting Minutes

The Sep. 8, 2022 Land Access & Opportunity Board meeting was convened at 5:32 p.m. with a quorum of seven members present. Pastor Arnold Thomas acted as facilitator.

Board members present: Arnold Thomas (Vermont Racial Justice Alliance), Kirsten Murphy (Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council), Laurie Stavrand (U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants Vermont – *interim*), Raheemah Madany (Pride Center), Liv Peña (Vermont ReLeaf Collective – *interim*), Xusana Davis (Vermont State Office of Racial Equity), Lynn Stanley (National Association of Social Workers –Vermont)

VHCB staff present: Gus Seelig, Trey Martin

Guests present: Jen Daniels, Malcolm Greene, Buster Caswell

1. Opening greeting and introduction icebreaker: Members of the Board and guests shared stories about why they are involved in this board and what draws them to this work.
2. Members of the Board reviewed the minutes from the Aug. 8, 2022 meeting. There were no substantive edits or questions from the members present. Members may contact Trey Martin if they have any edits or suggestions.
3. Board members engaged in a substantive discussion, facilitated by Pastor Arnold Thomas, who initiated conversation with the following questions:
 - How is the LAOB's work similar/different from the VT Housing and Conservation Board?
 - How is affordable housing defined? Who defines it?
 - What programs and agencies have similar objectives in providing affordable land and housing to historically marginalized groups? How can we align our efforts?

A summary of VHCB programs and history offered by Gus Seelig, including the intention of VHCB-funded housing partners to have 1/3 of their board membership be persons who are utilizing the programs with lived experience, including residents of partners' housing.

Gus also noted that the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Vermont State Housing Authority and the Vermont Economic Development Authority's agricultural lending program were all named in the statute as entities for the LAOB to advise in better meeting the needs of historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities.

Board members commented:

- Welcome the opportunity to expand VHCB's focus on housing and land access (based on income) to meet the needs of BIPOC and other marginalized groups in Vermont.
- Question about whether VHCB perspective may be dominant culture/white centric, and looking forward to the opportunity for hard conversations and stretching that we need to do.
- Question how much we want to focus on existing systems and processes because it is convenient, versus creating new structures for justice, equity and access?
- Lynn Stanley offered to bring interns into the process in order to help research what's being done in other parts of the country to advance the cause this board was formed to address.
- Comment that affordability definition is based on idea that renters can spend 30% of household income on housing, and this is tied to Federal Poverty level definition. This is not realistic or responsive to the needs of many.
- The work of LAOB can seem overwhelming. Our work goes much further than just low- and moderate-income Vermonters and needs to reflect the needs of groups with so many different kinds of needs. There are many different perspectives.
- Definition of affordable housing doesn't work, and the actual lived experience of those in affordable housing needs to be better understood.

4. VHCB facilitated a conversation about three discrete business items:

- a. Trey Martin reviewed the draft Request for Proposals for Legal Services and upcoming process:
 - Need to post the RFP as soon as possible. VHCB asked for help to circulate and share the RFP broadly through the networks of board members in order to reach out as broadly as possible to potential respondents. VHCB will also need assistance to review bids and select candidates moving forward.
 - **Consensus to post RFP as soon as possible.** Board members agreed that the RFP should be posted right away. VHCB will inform the board when the posting has been made and ask again for participation in this process.
 - Pastor Thomas volunteered to assist with the RFP process.
 - Others are invited to let Trey Martin know before the next meeting if they'd like to participate.
- b. VHCB shared that there has been an inquiry from a potential donor who is considering donation of her house and land to LAOB. VHCB will conduct an initial evaluation of the property and opportunity and share with Board members as soon as that has happened. Board members invited to participate in the future. A

legal service provider may be able to help Board members understand this opportunity further as well.

- c. Legislative planning, news and opportunities: Trey Martin and Xusana Davis shared notes and reflections from policy development discussions, including a potential bill being introduced on the topic of housing equity. Xusana noted and others agreed how difficult it can be to comprehend the nuance of these policy conversations, even for those actually engaged in legislative policy. There needs to be a digest of these opportunities for board members.

5. Pastor Thomas facilitated public comment from three guests present:

Buster Caswell commented that it is very important to take care of the people who take care of our food systems; and to provide the homes those people need. This is a very diverse and fragile work force. Food security begins with homes, access to land and ownership opportunities for those workers. Farm workers don't often have much power, but should have a very important voice. Recommendation that we need a committee to adequately represent the needs and interests of agriculture workers.

Jen Daniels offered support and commendation of Board's work.

Malcolm Greene offered a comment about the time it has taken to convene and move this Board's work forward. He hoped that the LAOB will not get bogged down in the details, but focus on big picture issues. For example the transfer of wealth and ownership opportunities to workers.

6. Pastor Thomas concluded the meeting with a brief summary of progress:

- This meeting helped to create a deeper appreciation of the working relationship and opportunities for collaboration between VHCB and LAOB.
- The Board decided to move forward with the legal services RFP (which will be an evolving document and process), because it is crucial and timely to move this forward.
- LAOB needs to be about the business of pushing the envelope. We can't get bogged down in bureaucracy and red tape, and we must ensure we are including new Americans, BIPOC Vermonters, and all those who have been denied access and justice in our process.

7. The next Board meeting will be Sep. 19, 5:30 – 7. Kirsten Murphy will be facilitator of that meeting.

Zoom Coordinates for 9/19 meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7762892697>

Meeting ID: 776 289 2697

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