

1 **NRPC Board of Commissioners Meeting**  
2 **January 31, 2024**  
3 **7:00PM**  
4 **Virtual Meeting**  
5

6 The meeting of the Board of Commissioners was held using the Zoom platform.  
7

8 **Attendance**

9 Commissioners: *See attached*. A quorum was present to conduct business.

10 Staff: Catherine Dimitruk, Bethany Remmers, Amy Adams, Shuan Coleman, Dean Peirce, Sara Gratz,  
11 Christine Porcaro, Peter Jenkins

12 Guest: Kevin Chu  
13

14 Chair B. Irwin welcomed attendees and called the meeting to order at 7:02 PM.  
15

16 **Adjustments to the Agenda**

17 None.  
18

19 **Welcome, Introductions, Opening remarks**

20 Chair B. Irwin welcomed everyone to the NRPC's January board meeting. Participants briefly  
21 introduced themselves.  
22

23 **Opportunity for Public Comment**

24 No members of the public offered comments.  
25

26 **Minutes from the November meeting**

27 *Y. Dandurand motioned to approve the November minutes. B. Buermann seconded. Motion carried.*  
28

29 **Guest: Kevin Chu, Vermont Futures Project**

30 K. Chu shared a presentation on the Vermont Futures Project (VFP) and prompted attendees to  
31 consider the question "Who is Vermont For?" K. Chu shared that VFP has a mission question, which is  
32 "How can we use data to support the evolution of VT's economy towards a thriving future full of  
33 opportunity for all?" The way VFP is addressing that question is by creating an economic action plan  
34 centered around people and places. Last fall VFP announced the goals of growing the state's  
35 population to 802,000 and the number of non-seasonal housing units to 353,000 by the year 2030. K.  
36 Chu said these goals are a starting point for having data-informed conversations.  
37

38 K. Chu stated that a good way to start answering the question "Who is Vermont For?" is to ask "Who is  
39 Already Here?" Vermont has the lowest fertility rate in the country and 20,000 fewer students in our  
40 school system today than we did two decades ago. Vermont attracts a lot of out-of-state students to  
41 our colleges but ranks last in the country at retaining them. A large percentage of the state's  
42 population will retire soon from the workforce and these residents will continue to need housing and  
43 healthcare. According to a NY Times reporter Vermont is on the leading edge of a demographic trend  
44 that will soon reach the rest of the country. Regarding this trend, Vermont will either be a leader of

1 what to do or what not to do. The dangers of doing nothing are a shrinking workforce, loss of  
2 businesses, declining state revenue, increased cost of living, health care will become more expensive  
3 and difficult to access, and the per pupil cost of education will go up. We need more people moving to  
4 VT to help mitigate each of these issues.

5  
6 K. Chu shared that the department of labor predicts an average of 15,000 retirements each year  
7 through the end of this decade. VT should be adding about 13,500 people annually to meet workforce  
8 needs and this is how we calculated the 802,000 goal. This increase should be equitable and increase  
9 the percentage of non-white residents, which will have a positive economic impact. VT will also be a  
10 relatively better place to live in the future regarding climate impacts. Building more housing is key to  
11 the population goal, and housing can also be part of the solution to climate change because new  
12 buildings will be more efficient and, if planned well, closer to places of work.

13  
14 K. Chu shared slides around public opinion. When asked if they support the growth of VT's population  
15 to strengthen its workforce, more people said yes than no. This trend by age showed higher yes  
16 responses by older Vermonters. K. Chu concluded that we should use data to plan for the future and  
17 argued that that future should include more people moving to VT.

18  
19 Discussion and questions:

- 20 - H. Garrett shared that many young people leave because they can't find housing. Therefore more  
21 affordable housing is key. He also noted VT's high cost of living, but also that the quality of life is high.
- 22 - B. Irwin asked how this data has been received by state leaders who can advance these  
23 recommendations. K. Chu responded that state representatives are actively using VFP information as  
24 talking points and that VFP was formed in partnership with VT's Chamber of Commerce as a consistent  
25 data and research voice to the policy arena.
- 26 - M. Scholten asked if the slides could be made available for sharing and shared a story about  
27 perspective health care professionals not taking jobs due to lack of housing.
- 28 - H. Garrett asked about data on cost of living and wages in VT compared to other states. K. Chu  
29 responded that VT's cost of living is relatively high, and wages are relatively low, which is why business  
30 growth pared with college student retention needs to be part of the equation.
- 31 - H. Garrett asked about data on the state's program to pay people to move to VT. K. Chu responded  
32 that that program is being phased out as the situation has switched from needing on convince people  
33 to move here, to having more interest in VT than we have housing for.
- 34 - C. Verderber shared that VT can be good place for people who have remote work jobs, but the  
35 housing needs to be addressed. K. Chu added that remote workers moving to VT should be considered  
36 a net benefit because they pay taxes, shop in the community, and may switch to working for local  
37 businesses.
- 38 - B. Morris stated that remote workers are not going to build the homes we need. Contractors are in  
39 such high demand that many are quoting out a year in advance. K. Chu responded that the education  
40 system has pushed 4-year degrees and overlooked the trades for too long. We are seeing the  
41 consequences of this higher ed prioritization.
- 42 - P. Zamore shared a challenge he sees is that the state is doing a great job encouraging housing  
43 development, but local communities are often resistant. He suggested this resistance to growth may  
44 come from a desire to protect the environment and concern about costs to infrastructure, but

1 concerns about growth are not based in facts. Local folks can hold up changes that will allow for more  
2 housing. K. Chu responded by sharing a few more slides around how to dispel myths and change  
3 attitudes.

4 - B. Irwin stated that P. Zamore hit the nail on the head and that encouraging change at the local level  
5 could be most effective.

6 - H. Demars shared that builders are incentivized by profits to build high-end homes when we need  
7 more affordable housing. There should be more incentives for planned unit development. K. Chu  
8 agreed that incentives are better than rules and joked we need a carrot season rather than stick  
9 season.

## 10 11 **Commission Reports**

12  
13 **Finance/Operations** – K. Waite shared that the Finance Committee met in January and reviewed  
14 the audit report. The committee was pleased to report that the audit went smoothly and NRPC is in  
15 good financial standing. He thanked everyone involved.

16  
17 **Personnel** – L. Ruple shared that the Personnel Committee met in January and proposed a couple  
18 of changes to the personnel policy, one to comply with state statute. The committee also discussed  
19 hiring.

20  
21 **Executive Committee** –B. Irwin shared that the executive committee met in January and reviewed  
22 the audit as well. He announced that there will be a presentation on the audit and an action item  
23 for the board to approve the finance committee’s recommendations later in the meeting. B. Irwin  
24 also shared that the executive committee had an initial review of the personnel policy with some  
25 back and forth on the proposed changes. The executive committee will return for a final review of  
26 the personnel policy before it is brought to the full commission.

27  
28 **Project Review Committee** –B. Buermann shared that project review committee met in January  
29 and looked at one project. This was a solar project, and the review was specific to the tax benefits  
30 of doubling the already existing solar array. The committee had no concerns regarding the project  
31 expansion aside from a slight encroachment on wetlands. B. Buermann shared that this project is  
32 similar to other solar projects they have reviewed and that the committee will review it again when  
33 the final application is submitted. The committee also reviewed their policy regarding salt  
34 application.

35  
36 **Transportation Advisory Committee** – H. Garrett shared that TAC met in January and had  
37 Representative Matt Walker attend. Rep. Walker sits on the state transportation committee and  
38 shared what is happening in Montpelier. TAC discussed with Rep. Walker some of the things they  
39 would like to see happen in our region. H. Garrett also shared that a resident of the town of  
40 Swanton called into the TAC meeting with a concern on Rt. 207. TAC had already been discussing  
41 this location before the individual called and Rep. Walker said he would see what could be done by  
42 the state to address the safety concern at that location.

1 H. Garrett shared that they continued to discuss the problem of only having 5 TAC members  
2 attending regular meetings. B. Morris added that 5 is quorum for TAC and if someone is missing,  
3 they cannot take any actions. H. Garrett mentioned that he understands people have busy  
4 schedules and TAC is open to suggestions of different meeting times. C. Dimitruk added that she  
5 and Kyle Grenier have discussed ways to target towns they especially want to hear from regarding  
6 transportation planning. They plan to reach out to town selectboard chairs to request more  
7 participation on TAC. B. Irwin asked if sending a survey to try finding a better time would be  
8 helpful. K. Waite said it would be interesting to know why people aren't coming and suggested that  
9 low attendance may be a sign that people feel like they don't make a difference by attending. H.  
10 Garrett agreed that in past years they didn't have much input to give regarding state projects, but  
11 that has changed. Now the state is taking more input from TAC. Also, there used to be several town  
12 road foremen on TAC, but there are none currently.

13  
14 **Energy and Climate** –C. Dimitruk shared that the energy and climate committee had to be  
15 cancelled due to staff being out. B. Irwin added that the last couple of meetings have been really  
16 productive with great discussions around the extremely important energy issues facing VT.

17  
18 **Brownfields Committee** –M. Sherlund shared that brownfields committee did not meet in January,  
19 but they will meet on February 12<sup>th</sup> to discuss several projects.

20  
21 **Regional Plan and Policy Committee** – P. Zamore shared that they did not meet and there is  
22 nothing coming up on the committee's agenda right away. C. Dimitruk shared that there will be  
23 items for the committee to address soon.

24  
25 **Vermont Economic Progress Council (VEPC)** – D. Grant had nothing to report.

26  
27 **Green Mountain Transit** – B. Buermann shared that GMT is working on going back to charging fares  
28 in Chittenden Co. on local urban buses and commuters. It is a process that is taking longer than  
29 anticipated and as always budgets are tight. C. Dimitruk added that GMT is going through an  
30 organizational assessment and an interesting finding was that in the last 20 years GMT's  
31 administrative staff was cut in half and the service area has more than doubled. There should be  
32 some good recommendations from this assessment.

33  
34 **Healthy Roots Advisory Committee** – M. Scholten shared that the HRC advisory committee met in  
35 early December and received preliminary numbers from the gleaning program. Numbers reported  
36 at that time were down somewhat from 2022. This was due largely to flooding on one partner farm  
37 and to the wet summer in general. M. Scholten also shared about the number of regular recipient  
38 sites, number of farms, number of school gleaning field trips, Ben & Jerry's corporate gleaning trip,  
39 CCV intern, and strong fall gleaning despite the weather. There was also an update on the Sheldon  
40 storage site that is storing gleaned produce. The committee also discussed the HRC individual  
41 campaign and the presentation on the Dairy Business Innovation Grant highlighting HRC's work  
42 with three farms.

43  
44 **Northwest Vermont Regional Foundation** – did not meet.

1  
2 **Municipal Plan Review Committee** – C. Dimitruk shared that the staff report is accurate in that the  
3 committee did meet and did some work for a couple of towns.  
4

5 **Staff Announcements**

6 - C. Dimitruk shared that the legislature is starting to work on the Future Land Use report that the  
7 RPCs prepared and that the NRPC board reviewed in November. The legislature is also working on  
8 some potential changes to the open meeting law to hopefully make the hybrid option permanent  
9 for most boards. The governor’s proposed budget has a 3% increase in base funding for RPCs.

10 - S. Coleman shared that there is an increased interest in preparing for the April 8th eclipse and  
11 meetings scheduled around public safety planning.

12 - D. Pierce shared that the two basin councils that we serve continue to meet on an every-other-  
13 week basis. We are in our 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of soliciting applications for funding and awareness continues to  
14 grow around the kinds of support we can provide.  
15

16 **Healthy Roots Collaborative presentation**

17 C. Porcaro shared the HRC annual report and clarified that it spans a calendar year rather than the  
18 fiscal year. It was a challenging year for farm partners and the gleaning program due to the flooding  
19 and wet weather, but still not that far off from the number of pounds gleaned the previous year.  
20 Highlights from the annual report included an increase in local purchasing from farms, our new  
21 storage space in Sheldon donated by the Abbey Group, and the purchase of a new hybrid truck and  
22 refrigerated trailer for the food access program made possible by a grant from the EDA. C. Porcaro  
23 shared that HRC has worked hard to diversify our sources of funding with an even split between  
24 non-profits, government, and foundation/philanthropic sources of funding. B. Morris asked about  
25 the impact of the late frost on fruit crops. P. Jenkins said the gleaning program did not find this to  
26 be a major issue for the orchards HRC works with.  
27

28 **FY23 Audit Report and Action Item**

29 K. Waite said that Bethany prepared a nice summary of the audit report that was included in the  
30 board package. It was a successful audit thanks to the work of staff. There were no deficiencies  
31 found in the audit including programs and financial statements. There were also no deficiencies  
32 found in the single audits of specific federal programs. NRPC has been determined to be a low-risk  
33 auditee, which is important from a grant perspective. NRPC also had a growth in our fund balance  
34 of \$79,774, and a positive and growing fund balance is a sign of a healthy business. The total fund  
35 balance is \$743,000. \$316,000 of that is assigned and \$426,000 is unassigned. Something the  
36 finance committee will look at in upcoming meetings for budget adjustment is should more funds  
37 be assigned to specific uses. The finance committee met with Catherine, Amy, and Bethany to  
38 review the audit report in some detail and recommend that the full board approve and ratify the  
39 audit.

40 M. Scholten had a question about the \$900,000 balance and not being covered by FDIC insurance.  
41 Bethany shared that staff followed up with the auditors about this question. Generally, FDIC  
42 insurance is capped at \$250,000 per bank and NRPC uses two banks, People’s Trust and Union Trust  
43 for brownfields, and this is what the auditors pulled the information from. However, NRPC  
44 participates in a program called the Intra Network Deposits Program through People’s Trust, which

1 protects us from the \$250,000 cap so we don't have a \$900,000 exposure. Bethany stated that  
2 Catherine refers to this program as a sweep account. Catherine and Bethany noted they will  
3 continue to follow up with People's Trust and the auditor to get clarity on whether these types of  
4 accounts provide the needed coverage.

5  
6 B. Irwin asked for a motion regarding the FY23 audit.

7  
8 *B. Buermann motioned that the board accept the recommendation of the finance committee to*  
9 *approve the audit and thank the staff for the outstanding job they have done on an annual basis in*  
10 *the operation of the organization. H. Demars seconded.*

11  
12 B. Irwin asked if there was further discussion on the motion to accept the recommendation of the  
13 finance committee, specifically to accept the FY23 audit, which is ongoing regarding clarification of  
14 the insurance coverage of funds. M. Scholten asked if there is insurance to cover the  
15 commissioners. C. Dimitruk said there is a liability coverage for officers because they are the ones  
16 empowered to take action, and as a political subdivision of the state, we have a certain level of  
17 protection as public officials.

18  
19 *B. Irwin called a vote on the motion to accept the FY23 audit. Motion carried unanimously.*

20  
21 **Commissioner Announcements.**

22 H. Demars shared appreciation for Dean's report on water quality progress.

23  
24 **Adjourn**

25 *M. Scholten motioned to adjourn. C. Verderber seconded. Motion carried unanimously.*

26 The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:48 pm.

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