

Executive Committee Report

Date: November 13, 2024

Meeting Type: Teams

Members Present: Gary De Gasta, Peter Fagan, Mike Klopchin

Members Absent: Brenda Cruickshank, Charly Dickerson

Invited Guests (staff members): Melissa Jackson, Asa Whitcomb (absent), and Robyn Boland

Meeting Start Time: 10:00 am

Motion to accept the 18 September 2024 Report (minutes) made by COL Fagan, second by Mr. Klopchin. No further discussion. Motions carried unanimously.

Strategic Plan Goal #7: Enhance Leadership. Action Steps and Background Context: "To enhance the leadership of management and the Board in order to lead expanded services and geographic reach as a statewide organization for veteran care".

Status updates of the six "Action Steps" to Implement EC Strategic Plan Goal #7:

- 1. Refine the Board composition and committee structure to support VVH's strategic vision.**
EC – No change - For the first time in several years the Board has a full contingent of 21 Trustees.
- 2. Develop committees or work groups to advance the implementation of this Strategic Plan between Board meetings.**
EC – No later than January 2025, all BoT Committee Meetings should be scheduled and posted on the "Quarterly Tracking Chart for Committee Meetings" for the new year.
- 3. Recruit targeted expertise to the Board including legal, strategic planning advisory, and grant-writing experience to the Board.**
EC – No change - Grant Writing remains the only Strategic Plan-targeted expertise not represented on the Board.
- 4. Plan for new management structures as VVH establishes new locations and services with executive- and facility-level management.**
EC -- The Home and its Board of Trustees now have legislative authority "to provide new or coordinate the provision of services, supports", and "to establish another nursing home in Vermont". At least for the immediate future, the Home Administration and its Board "intends to pursue a goal of financial solvency without compromising the quality of healthcare or services, and to diligently work on employee stabilization and the reduction of its contracted personnel costs, rather than adding service lines or expanding to a new location".
- 5. Support and encourage management leaders to be active in national organizations and associations.**
EC -- The BoT continues to encourage active organizational participation.
- 6. Continue to invest in the education and development of VVH's supervisors and middle managers.**
EC -- Offering Board-funded scholarship monies to Home Management for educating and developing current supervisors and middle managers but also for the development of promising future leaders.

Pending Board Policies -- Chair of By-Laws Committee and Nominating Committee, Charly Dickerson as unable to attend the meeting, hence no update on his Draft documents was available. However, the documents (noted below) will be available for Board review and approval during its December 11 meeting.

- Postings on websites, the state calendar, recordings of meeting minutes, etc.
- Guidelines for Elected classified employee Trustee pertaining to Vermont statute which states the elected employee can be removed for cause by the Governor.

Education and Training Program -- Work Group Chairperson, COL Peter Fagan noted feedback from the Board Education Program has been positive. He will have a formal report for the December 11 Board meeting.

Operations -- CEO Melissa Jackson

- **VA Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care** – CEO Jackson reported that while in Washington, DC this week, she was informed by the Office of Geriatrics and Extended Care that a representative would be willing to travel to Vermont and speak with the Board – possibly at its Annual Education and Training Program.
- **Donation notifications:** Mr. Dickerson advised the Home of a Vermont Statute which required a “request approval” from the Joint Fiscal Office to “accept” donations over \$15,000 and also the requirement to report gifts over \$1,500 to both the Joint Fiscal Office and to Finance and Management. CEO Jackson reported that VVH is now in compliance with all donation reporting requirements.
- **Staff stabilization/reduction of contracted personnel/expenses:**
 - CEO Jackson and COO Whitcomb have begun working with Shelley Morton, Human Resources, Labor Relations Manager, and Doug Pine, Deputy Director of Talent Acquisition Services, on a proposal for the Home to have a “**preestablished expedited hire into range**” Decision Tree – enabling the VVH to make a decision on what levels to bring in new hires without having to secure administrations’ approval – approval might take up to 3 weeks to secure! The authority would also help some current employees’ compensation to be more in line with new hires.
 - The **step up for the LNA2 classification** was denied. Waiting for an informal review.
 - The **Pick Up Bonus for classified staff** is stalled pending Labor Relations and VSEA discussions.
 - Since it is not a contractual issue, HR and the Agency of Administration do not have to be involved in the **holiday and shift differentials** for the temp positions.
 - All of VVH job listings now are called **Evergreen – they stay open until filled** – we need a side agreement for the Pick Up Bonus (which is authorized at corrections and the state hospital).
 - We have hired enough LNA’s to cover the third shift, which has permitted us **to cancel some of our LNA Agency staff contracts**. Second shift is still our biggest need, but we are working hard on filling it.
 - For two consecutive years, the **US News and World Report** recognized VVH as one of the Best Nursing Homes in the country for Short-Term Rehab and, for the first time, as one of the Best Nursing Homes for Long Term Care. There is only one other home in Vermont to achieve this recognition.
- **Malcolm Baldrige:**
 - Silver application meetings continue weekly. Will be sending what is completed so far to our consultant for his review by December 1. Final application due date is the end of January 2025.
 - Also **plan to develop a post-tour survey** asking “Was there something you were expecting to see that you didn’t?” This would be an opportunity for feedback, to learn and gain more information.
- **Partnering/sharing – conversations with VA Officials and WRJ Executive Director, Dr. Brett Rusch:**
 - During a conversation with the VA Secretary in DC regarding the **VA home and community-based care**, CEO Jackson mentioned her favorable discussions with Dr. Rusch and indicated the VVH enthusiastically welcomed consideration for VA “pilot programs”.
 - Currently, **state veteran homes are not authorized to be providers with Optum for veterans who are rated with a 70% or greater service-connected disability**. VA legal counsel has determined that monies given to a state veteran’s home for VA construction must be used “solely for that purpose or the VA has the right to recoup the funds”. If this interpretation of the law can be changed, and if the Home deems there is “excess capacity” of our rehab gym (currently used for our nursing home and Dom residents), it would allow us to become an outpatient rehab

provider under Optum and fulfill a desperately-needed community service – there would be no overhead, it's additional revenue for the Home. The VA Secretary has identified getting the legal interpretation changed as his number one priority.

- **NASVH** (National Association of State Veterans Homes) **has requested more money to be devoted to the VA Construction Grant Program.** There is \$1.2 billion in NASVH priority projects alone, yet the VA has budgeted only \$155 million.
- Conversations with Dr. Rusch continue on **how best to support home/community care for veterans.** Dr. Rusch is well-respected in Washington and should he be effective in identifying sharing/partnering dollars, **it would be necessary for the VVH to secure a commitment from the state to help fund the endeavor beyond the duration of the program's initial funding and/or secure alternative funding sources.**
- **Veterans Farming Initiative** (Bennington Conservation District and the Bennington Fair Food Initiative – Land Use Agreement / lease): CEO Jackson reported the Fair Food Initiative Board recently approved the VVH's Land Use Agreement lease which is now ready for final signature(s). A press release on the Initiative will subsequently be prepared.
- Update on Trustee advocacy in support of the CEO:
 - **Securing a full and meaningful annual VVH Budget:** Per the November 7th Budget meeting, Budget Commissioner Greshin has agreed to “rebase” the VVH's budget – rather than requiring the Home to submit a budget which does not cover its personnel, fixed and operating expenses, the VVH will be funded for an “all in” budget (including the \$5m +/- for contracted personnel). The expectation is the Home will operate within the “all in budget” and, but for a pressing emergency, not request a budget adjustment.
 - **Addressing the unintended (negative) consequences of CMS Staffing Guidelines:** The rumor is that President-elect Trump may rescind President Biden's CMS Staffing Executive Order.

Compliance Program -- CO Asa Whitcomb (absent). CEO Jackson reported a **HIPAA audit will take place next week.** In preparation of the audit, ADS (Agency of Digital Services) scanned the state website for potential security breaches and has identified several high-risk vulnerabilities in our medical records system, which, in addition to breaches, could lead to federal fines.

Other EC discussion items:

- **Board-funded “scholarships”** – At the December 11 BoT meeting, CEO Jackson will report on how much money the Home devotes to employee training and education and provide the Board options to provide “Board scholarships” to enhance the Home's employee education and training programs.
- **Employee Compensation** – As noted above, Home Administration is making considerable progress in streamlining employee hiring as well as improving compensation for exempt employees. The CEO and COO have initiated paperwork to enhance compensation for exempt employees next year (the state failed to inform the VVH of this year's deadline and increased compensation was not offered). The Executive Committee will be providing follow-up.
- **Crispe Room Recording and Acoustics improvements – possible funding by the Board.** CEO Jackson was requested to secure cost estimates for improving the Crispe Room acoustics (in addition to its sound system) to present to the Board at its December meeting. Since the Crispe Room, with its sub-optimal sound and acoustics, is the BoT primary meeting venue, the Board may authorize discretionary funds to be used to fund some or all of the costs for Crispe Room renovations/improvements.

Executive Session: n/a

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 11:15 am.

Next meeting: Tentative: February 26, 2025, at 10am via Teams.

Gary De Gasta
Committee Chair

November 14, 2024
(sign and date)