

Executive Committee Report

Date: February 28, 2024

Meeting Type: Teams

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

Members Absent: Charly Dickerson

Invited Guests (staff members): Melissa Jackson, Asa Whitcomb (unable to attend), and Robyn Boland

Meeting Start Time: 10:30 am

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 -- Based on the Board’s review of the Gibbous Market Study, changes in the Board’s composition and committee structure do not appear warranted at this time. Items requiring action will be tasked to current committees for review and analysis with any findings and recommendations submitted to the full Board.

2. Develop committees or work groups to advance the implementation of this Strategic Plan between Board meetings.

EC – All 2024 Quarterly Committee meetings (apart from full Board meetings) have been scheduled and posted on the “Quarterly Tracking Chart for Board Committees” -- thank you Committee Chairs!

3. Recruit targeted expertise to the Board including legal, strategic planning advisory, and grant-writing experience to the Board.

EC -- No Change. By Statute, the BoT consists of 21 members, 15 of whom must be veterans. Since there are currently only 13 veteran Trustees, the two existing vacancies must be filled by a veteran. With the anticipated departure of Dr. Jackie Kelly, one non-veteran vacancy will exist.

The Board continues to not meet its goal -- to recruit members with legal, Grant Writing and Strategic Planning expertise.

4. Plan for new management structures as VVH establishes new locations and services with executive- and facility-level management.

EC -- The VVH does not intend to undertake any programmatic changes or geographical expansion of current operations in the near term. Rather, the Home will use this Study data to help make informed future decisions. Should the Board/Home adopt geographical/programmatic expansion off the Bennington campus, it is expected that a supervision/leadership position at that location will be necessary (with supportive services, e.g. financial, logistics, human resources, etc.) likely provided by Bennington campus personnel.

5. Support and encourage management leaders to be active in national organizations and associations.

EC – Update: Christina Cosgrove, Behavioral Health Director, has been invited to present the Home's stellar Namaste Program (which focuses on comfort, dignity and pain management) at this year’s **International** Namaste Conference. On behalf of the Board, the President has sent Christina a congratulatory email. She will be publicly recognized during the April 10th BoT meeting.

6. Continue to invest in the education and development of VVH’s supervisors and middle managers.

EC -- No change. The BoT endorses the Home’s employee Learning Management System and welcomes the opportunity for Trustees to participate in its programs as appropriate.

Trustee Committee Assignments: New Trustee committee assignments have been made.

Ombudsman Program: CEO requested the EC review and discuss the EC Ombudsman Program/Committee/Forms. Based on a recent visit, L&P surveyors expressed confusion -- the State has a Long Term Care Ombudsman who advocates for nursing home residents and the Board's Executive Committee has an Ombudsman Program (created over a decade ago to address the volatile labor-management climate which existed at that time and to offer an alternative and confidential means to share issues and concerns directly with the Board. Fewer than a half dozen forms were submitted for Ombudsman Committee intervention/Board intervention since the Program's inception. In recent years, union-management relations have markedly improved).

After considerable discussion, the EC concluded its Ombudsman Program has outlived its usefulness and will be discontinued. The EC accepted the Administration's proposal to add the Board's contact information to the Home's VVH Feedback Form thereby providing residents, families, visitors, vendors, etc. an alternative means to directly communicate (pro/con) with the Board.

Education & Training Program: **Work Group Chairperson COL Peter Fagan.** No change. The October 2024 Program will again be held at the Lake Morey Resort with key topics of Compliance and Trustee Fiduciary Responsibilities.

Compliance Program: Recurring CO Board meeting update will be provided at the April 10th Board meeting along with a Trustee Compliance education primer - "Practical Guidance for Health Care Governing Boards on Compliance Oversight".

Operations (CEO topics):

- **Covid 19 and viruses:** Currently there are no covid or flu cases – only some respiratory issues, but nothing to be considered as out of the ordinary pre-covid.
- **Malcolm Baldrige:** Have not received results from the bronze application. The Silver application is due next January. The consultant, a Baldrige Examiner, is offering a 2-day intensive Silver level application seminar in the near future.
- **Gibbous Market Study:** Prior to today's meeting, CEO Jackson emailed the EC a proposed Market Study Executive Summary (ES) for input. Once responses have been received, she will send the ES to the full Board along with her proposed talking points for presentation at the April Board meeting.

The first and most important talking point will explain that the VVH does not intend to undertake any programmatic changes or geographical expansion of current operations in the near term. Rather, the Home will use this Study data to help make informed future decisions. Along the way, there could be an opportunity to engage in "pilot programs" with organizations such as the WRJ VAMC.

The Market Study is an initial step for future planning and there are a myriad of issues to address and overcome, not the least of which are staffing, budget and legislative authorities.

- **FY 25 and beyond Budget Challenges:** CEO Jackson and COO Whitcomb hope to have a conference call with Commissioner Greshin soon to gain clarity on what to include/not to include in the Home's budgets henceforth. (EC discussion **below** under CEO Request for Board Advocacy)
- **Commandant's House:** CEO reported the Commandant' House has been winterized - water drained and heat turned off. Next steps will be to evaluate whether the building contains asbestos and, if so, the costs for abatement plus the ways and means to address the costs for demolition. One proposal under consideration is for the police department to use the building to practice tactical entry and the Bennington Fire Department to perform a controlled burn of the building. The costs and disposal of the resulting debris would still need to be determined. CEO Jackson will have various recommendations and cost estimates provided to the Board for discussion at the **June** meeting.

- **Crispe Room sound/internet systems:** An initial estimate of approximately \$10,000 was received for improving some aspects of the audio system in the Crispe Room. While Vermont anticipates its future communication requirements will include remote access (internet/MS Teams), funding has yet to be allocated. The Home will include estimated costs in its budget request. Support (moral and financial) by the Board may be proposed.
- **CEO requested Board advocacy and strategies regarding:**
 - Securing a “full” and meaningful VVH Annual Budget** -- CEO’s ultimate goal is to be transparent, honest and forthright with the legislature and the public and to present budgets which address true needs and requirements.

A budget strategy under consideration is “expenditures in anticipation of revenue” – general fund monies to be expended anticipating revenue from the Medicaid settlement for the upcoming budget cycle. Depending on the outcome of discussions with the Commissioner, letters of support from Trustees may be requested.
 - Addressing the unintended (negative) consequences of CMS Staffing Guidelines** -- CEO reports that recent CMS communications intimate a ruling on Staffing Guidelines is currently under consideration. Senator Sanders is a strong supporter of the Guidelines while Vermont is concerned over the unintended consequences the Guidelines will have on the state’s nursing home industry and its residents. The Board will await the ruling before considering if actions are necessary and appropriate.
 - Streamlining the State’s hiring policy for hiring and retaining healthcare managers, professionals, technical and support staff** -- In an effort to enlighten Trustees about the state’s onerous and antiquated hiring requirements, CEO Jackson will describe the process in a presentation to the Board and offer her thoughts on how we might advocate for policy changes.

Representative Morrissey’s Bill: The bill to enable the VVH to provide services to veterans outside of the Bennington Campus was unanimously passed out of Committee and currently awaiting action by the Committee on Appropriations.

Reports on two Board policies: The policy for Posting on Websites and the State Calendar and the policy on Elected Classified Employees were both **deferred** due to Mr. Dickerson’s unavailability.

Proposed agenda items for April 10 13 BoT meeting:

- “Practical Guidance for Health Care Governing Board on Compliance Oversight” -- review and discuss key points -- CO and President
- Executive Summary (10 pages) from the Gibbous Market Study with recommended Talking Points
- Status on the conversion of the EC Ombudsman activities to the VVH Feedback Form
- CEO update on the Commandant’s House -- Costs and options (**June** meeting)
- Recognition: Christina Cosgrove, Behavioral Health Director for the Namaste Program.

Executive Session: A motion was made by Mr. Klopchin to enter Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter, second by CPT Cruickshank. Entered Executive Session at 11:50am. A motion was made by Mr. Klopchin to exit the Executive Session, second by COL Fagan. The EC returned to its open meeting at 12:05pm.

Adjournment: After noting the next EC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 10:00am via Teams, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by COL Fagan, second by CPT Cruickshank. The meeting was adjourned at **12:07pm**.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 1, 2024, at 10:00 am via Teams.

Gary De Gasta
Committee Chair

February 29, 2024
(sign and date)