

# Executive Committee Report

**Date:** May 1, 2024

**Meeting Type:** Teams

**Members Present:** Gary De Gasta, Mike Klopchin, Brenda Cruickshank

**Members Absent:** Charly Dickerson, Peter Fagan

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

**Meeting Start Time:** 10:04 am

Motion to accept the February 28, 2024, Report (minutes) as submitted made by Mr. Klopchin, second by CPT Cruickshank. No further discussion. Motion 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 -- Our three new Trustees are actively participating in the business of the Board.

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

EC – 2024 Quarterly Committee meetings have been scheduled and posted on the "Quarterly Tracking for Board Committees" document.

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

EC -- While two Trustee vacancies currently exist, it is unlikely the Board will achieve its targeted 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 -- **H.794**, a bill sponsored by Rep. Mary Morrissey, is working its way through the General Assembly. If passed, the bill will permit the Home to better serve Vermont veterans into the future, to enable the VVH to diversify and to expand its programs and services beyond the confines of its Bennington campus.

At least for the immediate future, the Home's administration intends to focus on stabilizing staff and reducing contracted personnel costs -- Strategic Planning must and will continue unabated.

**NOTE:** Further discussion and H.794 updates provided below under "Operations".

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

EC – The BoT continues to encourage active participation.

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

EC -- The BoT endorses the Home's employee Learning Management System (LMS) and encourages the Trustees to participate in the LMS programs.

## **Board Policies** -- Chair of By-Laws Committee and Nominating Committee, Charly Dickerson (not present).

Draft policies (listed below) are expected to be available for Board review and approval during the June 12 Board meeting:

- Postings on websites, the state calendar, etc.
- Elected classified employee Trustee and guidelines pertaining to the statute (which states the elected employee can be removed for cause by the Governor).

**Education and Training Program** -- Work Group Chairperson, COL Peter Fagan (not present). No update provided at this time. Key topics for the October Education and Training Program will include Compliance and Trustee Fiduciary Responsibilities.

**Operations** -- CEO Melissa Jackson

- **Staff stabilization/reduction of contracted personnel/expenses:** Scheduling changes and utilizing temporary staff for transports have achieved a 53% reduction in agency overtime in the week ending April 27 compared to the previous week. CEO will be meeting with DNS on May 3 to review agency contract end dates and to gradually adjust staffing levels (and personnel expenses) while maintaining quality resident care.

- **Malcolm Baldrige:** Anticipate receiving Bronze Application status results by the end of May.

Since attending the 2-day intensive Silver level application seminar, the Silver application process has been added to our weekly leadership meetings. The Silver application's due date is the end of January 2025.

- **H.794 comments and update:** CEO Jackson and President De Gasta provided testimony in support of the bill on April 17 to the Senate Committee on Government Operations. Previous testimony was also offered by Vice President Fagan and State Representative and Trustee, Robert Hooper. Dr. Brett Rusch, Executive Director, White River Junction VA Healthcare System, sent a letter of support to the Committee.

**NOTE:** The letter will be added to the June 12 Board meeting documents.

Earlier this morning, CEO Jackson emailed the Board an H.794 amendment language update which, if passed, will provide authority to be able to erect an additional nursing home (apart from the Bennington campus). The bill has the support of key Committees, but still needs to be voted on by the Legislature -- anticipated by mid-May.

- **Talking Points/White Papers** – in order to summarize strategies and facilitate Trustee advocacy in support of the CEO, the Board requested “reference documents” (White Papers/Talking Points):

- **Securing a full and meaningful annual VVH Budget:** Will be meeting with the Department of Finance and Management in two weeks and should be receiving instructions very soon for Fiscal Year 2026. Due diligence and actions taken by the Home (reducing contracted staff overtime and not renewing some contracted personnel, relocating all residents off American Way, increasing the resident census, etc.), the budget adjustment request for this year is expected to be significantly reduced (from \$3m to \$500k+/-).
- **Addressing the unintended (negative) consequences of CMS Staffing Guidelines:** There are multiple phases (deadlines) with the CMS staffing mandate. VVH is classified as a “rural” facility, so our compliance timelines are longer than others – we have 2-5 years to fully comply. The first phase requires adding a “Staffing and Retention” section to our Facility Assessment by August 8<sup>th</sup> which is being worked on and is expected to be met.

Our overall nursing staff level is 4.44. We currently meet the CMS RN nursing staffing requirement while our LPN and LNA staffing levels are higher than the CMS standard. Our greatest concern is the anticipated retirement of several of our RN's. We are competing with the private sector and State salaries are on the low end. In spite of our challenges, we will focus on recruiting RN's to be in compliance with the May 2029 CMS RN staffing standard. We are encouraging our LPN's to become RN's. While the State offers tuition reimbursement, not everyone wants to return to school.

**NOTE:** Attached is the CEO's “White Paper on Vermont Veterans' Home CMS Staffing Mandate” (posted to Teams) which will be discussed during the June 12 Board meeting.

- **Streamlining the State's hiring policy for hiring and retaining healthcare managers, professionals, technical and support staff:**

**NOTE #1:** The Board will be asked to focus its energies “on the State level, particularly on improving the nursing pipeline” (how can we get more people into RN schools when there is a lack of educators because most of those nurses have retired): “work with the State to streamline

its hiring process” and to “advocate for increased salaries” (to make VVH positions more competitive with the private sector).

**NOTE #2:** Attached is the CEO’s “White Paper on Vermont Veterans’ Home CMS Staffing Mandate” that includes “Streamline the hiring process for State Employees” section which will be discussed during the June 12 Board meeting.

- **Market Study** – In four key bullets, the CEO’s “White Paper on Vermont Veterans’ Home Marketing Study” (posted to Teams) summarizes the position of Administration and the Board of Trustees regarding the convergence of the Market Study and the VVH Strategic Plan relative to diversification and expansion of services/service lines:
  - Currently VVH and the Board have no plans to add new service lines. This is due to the impact of the national healthcare workforce shortage.
  - Our focus is on stabilizing the staff at the facility in Bennington.
  - We will continue to investigate pilot projects and partnerships and no decisions will be made without an in-depth feasibility study.
  - Working with Representative Mary Morrissey on H.794, if passed, this legislation will give the Home statutory authority to offer services outside of our location in Bennington.
    - Any new services would be fully vetted and presented to the legislature for their approval.
  - ❖ CEO Jackson will present her comments early during the June BoT meeting in order to accommodate scheduled afternoon activities.
  - ❖ After two years of concerted effort to comply with a VA requirement, a formal Imaging Contract has been consummated with SVMC.

**Compliance Program** -- CO Asa Whitcomb

- CO Whitcomb is working with COL Fagan, Chair of the Education and Training Workgroup, regarding content she will be presenting to the Trustees during this year’s Program in October.
- During each of the bi-monthly regular Board meetings, CO will continue to provide her Compliance Report. Additionally, she will show a short 5-minute Compliance educational video clip (vignette).
- While also serving as the Acting Environmental Services Director, and with the able assistance and leadership of electrician Travis Oakes, the Maintenance Department has “stepped up to the plate” and is taking necessary actions to resolve identified compliance issues.
- Interviews start tomorrow for the Environmental Services Director open position. Some members of the Maintenance Department will be included in the interview process, and hopefully some members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee will also be available to participate in the interviews.

**Executive Session:** n/a

**Adjournment:** After noting the next EC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 18, 2024, at 10:00am via Teams, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 am.

Next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 18, 2024, at 10:00 am via Teams.

**Gary De Gasta** **May 3, 2024**  
Committee Chair (sign and date)