

# Executive Committee Report

**Date:** September 18, 2024

**Meeting Type:** Teams

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

**Members Absent:** n/a

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

**Meeting Start Time:** 10:00 am

Motion to accept the 1 May 2024 Report (minutes) made by COL Fagan, second by CPT Cruickshank. Motion to accept the 9 August 2024 Special Meeting Report (minutes) as published made by Mr. Klopchin, second by CPT Cruickshank. 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 -- For the first time in several years the Board has a full contingent of 21 Trustees. Joining recently appointed Trustees (Chip Troiano, Larry Cupoli, Sandy Pinsonault), are our newest members: Dolores Krawczyk (retired Criminal Justice Addiction Therapist), Peg Flory (a former State Legislator) and Frank Wetherby (a retired NCO and current Domiciliary resident). Peg and Frank have received a telephone-welcome to the Board and invitation to the October 22-23 Education Program. All 3 new Trustees plan to attend in October. Mentors have also been assigned: Gary De Gasta for Dolores, Larry Cupoli for Peg, and Melissa Hurt for Frank.

### **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. Committees have been holding meetings and canceling them when necessary.

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

EC -- Peg Flory has an impressive legal background. Frank Wetherby has years of experience with strategic planning in the military as well as in the civilian sector. Grant Writing remains as the sole targeted expertise not yet represented on the Board.

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

EC -- While Act 147/H.794 (effective Date of July 1, 2024) provides the Vermont Veterans’ Home’s Board of Trustees the authority “to provide or coordinate the provision of services, supports”, and “to establish another nursing home in Vermont”, at least for the immediate future, Home Administration and its Board “intend to pursue a goal of financial solvency without compromising the quality of healthcare or services, 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 participation.

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

EC -- The concept of Board-funded scholarship monies for Management to educate and develop employees and supervisors is an agenda item for discussion (see “Other agenda discussion items” below).

**Pending Board Policies** -- Chair of By-Laws Committee and Nominating Committee, Charly Dickerson:

No update provided. Draft policies (listed below) are expected to be available for Board review and approval during the December 11 Board meeting.

- Postings on websites, the state calendar, recordings of meeting minutes, 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 noted the key topics for the

October Education Program will be compliance and Trustee fiduciary responsibilities. During the Social Hour, State Representatives attending the Tuesday evening’s dinner will be introduced, but will not be making presentations or speaking. Peter will thank them for attending and reiterate the importance of their continued support to the Home.

**Operations** -- CEO Melissa Jackson

- **Mock Survey:** A two-day unannounced Mock Survey was conducted by Clay and Associates. Their final report should be received by the end of the week and the findings and Plans of Corrections will be provided to the Board. Mock surveys provide an opportunity to identify opportunities for improvement and correction prior to the State survey anticipated for October.
- **Donation notifications:** Mr. Dickerson inquired whether the Home was aware of, and in compliance with, Statute. The VVH does “request approval” from the Joint Fiscal Office to “accept” a donation over \$15,000. However, Title 32, Section 5, pertaining to gifts to the State also requires that gifts over \$1,500 be “reported to” both the Joint Fiscal Office and to Finance and Management. The CEO will verify if requirements for both donation categories are being met.
- **Security Code Colors:** VVH has changed its code numbers system to “colors” to meet the National Code Colors requirement as well as to better assist agency staff and/or personnel coming from another facility. Each employee has a “cheat sheet” card on their ID clip that lists the color for each code.
- **Staff stabilization/reduction of contracted personnel/expenses:** Six of the seven LNA’s that recently graduated have been hired and “put a dent” in our LNA openings -- we are already advertising for our next LNA class. Unfortunately, we are still struggling with RN’s and LPN’s hires. A request has been submitted to the State to change the minimum requirement for our RN Supervisors to have a Bachelor’s in Nursing, but only 2 years of experience rather than five. The hours per patient per day for September increased due to COVID; however, the overtime hours for both agency and VVH staff has gone down. There are 64 open positions across the facility, most of which are in nursing.
- **Malcolm Baldrige:** We received the Bronze Award May 30. Our intent to apply has been submitted and the Silver application process has been added to our weekly leadership meetings. Starting in October, we will work on writing each section and send it to our consultant for his feedback. The goal is to have a draft Application completed by Thanksgiving. The final application’s due date is the end of January 2025.
- **Upcoming visit with White River Junction VA Executive Director, Dr. Brett Rusch:** The meeting to discuss partnerships has been rescheduled for January 23rd. There will likely be focus on telemedicine. Another recent topic to be explored is assist local veterans with transportation to White River for their appointments. [Not discussed but possibly “an issue” (for some veterans) will be entitlement to “travel pay” -- for SC or other “travel eligible veterans” -- using VVH-provided transportation.]
- **Veterans Farming Initiative** (Bennington Conservation District and the Bennington Fair Food Initiative – Land Use Agreement / lease): After requesting various offices in Montpelier to review the Land Use Agreement, none evidenced an interest. The Lease is ready for signature. Brief discussion to develop a Home-Board Policy regarding land use activities. The Buildings and Grounds Committee, in

conjunction with the Administration, will review all requests and proposals. VVH currently has a Land Use Policy, and the CEO will review it with Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair, Cathy Tester. Also discussed was the possibility of a Veteran Farming Initiative proposal to use VVH farm compost (for they would charge us substantially less than the \$5k we pay our current vendor). Once their Executive Director is appointed, s/he will be requested to meet with B&G Chair Tester to consider various options.

- **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:** Finance Director McClafferty has presented initial numbers to start building the budget. Since the governor will not have released his budget, our VVH proposed budget numbers must be kept confidential. During the October Education Program, CEO Jackson will share recently released data from the Vermont Healthcare Association on use of agency staffing across the state. Environmental Services Director, Greg Krizan, will also present Capital Budget projects that require reprioritizing.

If Vermont’s Affordable Heat Act is passed, the cost of heating oil could go up considerably (over a dollar a gallon!). Due to the huge budget shortfall with the A-wing construction, the initial scope of the project has changed. The VA has advised it will rescind its original construction grant and we will need to reapply for funds under a cost-sharing proposal of 65/35% (Federal/State). We will request the reassignment of monies from last year’s capital budget (for B-wing and C-wing) to finish the A-wing design.

Due to life-safety issues on A-wing, combined with agency staffing costs, the re-opening of A-wing does not appear to be a viable option. CEO Jackson will consider taking 30 beds out of service (to reduce the Bed Tax) if we can be guaranteed (in writing) that those beds will be restored once A-wing construction has been completed.
  - **Addressing the unintended (negative) consequences of CMS Staffing Guidelines:**

The CMS staffing mandate is in court in New Jersey -- several private nursing homes are suing. CMS provided 75,000 pages as to why the mandate should remain in effect!

### **Compliance Program** -- CO Asa Whitcomb

- CO Whitcomb will be meeting with COL Fagan, Chair of the Education and Training Workgroup, next week finalizing her presentation to Trustees during the October Education Program.
- While no major findings were found during a Compliance Audit last week, a few best practice suggestions were offered including providing compliance education to newly-appointed Trustees.
- CO Whitcomb was congratulated on her selection to the LeadingAge National level Larry Minnix Leadership Academy.

### **Other EC discussion items:**

- **Bennington Conservation District and the Bennington Fair Food Initiative** -- Land Use Agreement / lease – Board / Home Policy / SOP on Land Use Agreements.

**Tasking:** As referenced above, the Buildings and Grounds Committee, in conjunction with Administration, will develop a Land Use Policy for consideration by the BoT at its December meeting.
- **Board “scholarships”** -- There was discussion regarding the opportunities and challenges associated with the Board providing the Home (CEO) an "annual" distribution of discretionary monies (amount to be determined) for employee and management education and training.

**Tasking:** Management will discuss the preliminary proposal with the union. If discussions are favorable, the topic will be included as a discussion item for the December BoT meeting.
- **Employee Compensation Work Group** -- The feasibility of creating a Board / Home Work Group to review and recommend the Ways and Means for improving employee compensation was discussed. Can/how can the BoT help to ensure the Home has what it needs to recruit and hire its employees? It became evident that there were a myriad of factors to consider when trying to answer the question e.g. starting salaries, classification issues, disparities in pay for Registered Nurses from one state agency (State

Hospital, Corrections) to another (VVH), how to access and engage high level state officials (Adam Greshin, Commissioner Department of Finance and Management and Beth Fastiggi, Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Human Resources (DHR), etc.

**Tasking:** Subsequent to the October Education Program, the key issues will be framed by the EC and the CEO (including individuals who might add value to such a Work Group). The topic will be presented for discussion at the December Board meeting.

- **Crispe Room Recording and Acoustics improvements were considered for possible funding by the Board.** The new Open Meeting Law requires that Board meetings (and possibly other meetings, e.g. Executive Committee) be “recorded” and the recordings retained. The Board’s primary meeting venue is the Crispe Room where acoustics are poor at best and the room’s recording equipment is outdated and ineffective. At the request of the Board, the Home estimated an expense of around \$5k to improve the recording system. However, the acoustical improvements were not requested.
- **Tasking:** CEO Jackson was requested to secure cost estimates for improving the Crispe Room acoustics (in addition to its sound system) for presentation to the Board at the December meeting for discussion, including the possibility of using Board discretionary monies to help fund the project.

**Executive Session:** n/a

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 11:25 am.

**Next meeting:** 13 November 2024 at 10am via Teams.

**Gary De Gasta**  
Committee Chair

**September 20, 2024**  
(sign and date)