



Vermont State Ethics Commission

Meeting Minutes

August 2, 2023

Remote Attendance*

1. Call to Order: The regular meeting, held remotely via Zoom, was called to order by Paul Erlbaum at 10:02 A.M. Also present for the meeting were Commission members Michele Eid, Sarah Biolsi Vangel, Chris Davis, Executive Director Christina Sivret, and Administrative Assistant Erin Smith. Commissioner Sarah Butson was absent.

2. Approval of Minutes: On the motion of Michele Eid, second by Sarah Biolsi Vangel, minutes of the June 7, 2023, meeting were approved. As there was not a quorum of Commissioners who were present at the May 3rd meeting, the minutes from the May 3rd were not approved.

3. Public Comment: None.

4. Executive Session: At 10:05 A.M., on the motion of Chris Davis, second by Michele Eid, the Commission went into Executive Session to discuss complaints and Guidance requests received over the last few weeks, including a draft Advisory Opinion. At 10:45 A.M., on the motion of Sarah Biolsi Vangel, second by Michele Eid, the Commission voted to conclude the Executive Session and return to open session. The Commission agreed to approve the Advisory Opinion (AO_4_2023) discussed in Executive Session.

5. Executive Director's Report:

Flood Update: Administrative Assistant Erin Smith provided an update on the flooding as it relates to the Ethics Commission office in Montpelier. Current information suggests that the building will be unavailable for use for 90+ days.

Upcoming Projects: Executive Director Christina Sivret updated the Commission on the status of research related to the Commission's priorities for the upcoming legislative session. The Campaign Legal Center is preparing a report for the Commission on national best practices for municipal ethics which is expected be ready shortly. The Commission's long-term consultant, TJ Jones, recently submitted a research report on national best practices on ethics enforcement

options for the Commission. The Executive Director reported that DHR informed the Commission that they do not believe they have authority to enforce the Code of Ethics and are unable to investigate complaints that solely allege violations of the Code. The Executive Director is seeing a pattern in which complaints come in and there is no place to refer them for investigation and enforcement. This is particularly true when complaints allege violations of the Code of Ethics by members of boards and commissions.

The Executive Director noted that the Commission is understaffed. At a minimum the Executive Director position needs to become full-time, and more staff may need to be added depending on what happens with the Commission's priorities during the next legislative session. This will need to be taken into consideration in the Commission's next budget request.

The Commission is working with VIC/NIC regarding the creation an online submission option for financial disclosure forms. The goal is to have a system for online submissions in place by early December. The Executive Director also wants to add a search function for the website, particularly now that the number of Advisory Opinion is growing, and will discuss this with NIC as well.

6. Other: Commissioner Michele Eid raised the question of possible conflicts of interest if named to serve on an additional board. The other commissioners and Executive Director did not believe that there was a high likelihood of conflicts of interest arising in the scenario described.

7. Adjournment: Michele Eid moved to adjourn, second by Chris Davis. The meeting adjourned at 10:58 A.M.