



Vermont State Ethics Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 8, 2025 (unapproved)
Remote Attendance*

1. Call to Order: The regular meeting, held remotely via Zoom, was called to order by Chair Paul Erlbaum at 10:03 a.m. Also in attendance were Commission members Jack Kennelly, Michele Eid, Chris Davis, Will Stevens, Executive Director Christina Sivret, and Administrative Assistant Peggy Delaney. Commissioner Sarah Butson was absent. A member of the public, Dixie Zens-Sunderland, was also in attendance.

2. Approval of Minutes: On the motion of Chris Davis, the meeting minutes from October 2nd were approved. On the motion of Michele Eid, the meeting minutes from December 18th were approved.

3. Public Comment: Dixie Zens-Sunderland shared that he is a selectboard chair who was recently appointed as the municipal Ethics Liaison to the Ethics Commission. He was attending the meeting to learn more about the Ethics Commission.

4. Welcome Commissioner Stevens: The Commission welcomed Will Stevens, who was recently appointed to the Ethics Commission by the Committee on Committees. Commissioner Stevens shared that his experience includes previously serving as a town mediator, selectboard member, planning board member, and as a State Representative from 2007-2014. He also said that he had gone through the mediation program at Woodbury College and is interested in the Commission's plans to establish a pilot mediation program.

5. Executive Director's Report: Executive Director Sivret shared that the Commission's volunteer student intern, who is working with the Commission for the month of January, has started work on the annual report, and is planning to research ethics mediation programs in other states during the second half of the month.

Municipal Ethics Update: Executive Director Sivret shared that the municipal ethics training is now online. It is about 45 minutes long and gives a general overview of Act 171 and the statewide Municipal Code of Ethics. Commissioner Michele Eid said she took the training and thought it was very good.

Pursuant to Act 171, several dozen municipalities have named an ethics liaison to the Commission, with more names coming in on a regular basis. Municipalities have until the end of the month to name liaisons.

Included in this year's annual report will be an update to last year's municipal ethics report, which did not include a section on enforcement. TJ Jones is working on it now, and Executive Director will review it for inclusion or attachment to the annual report. Several commissioners volunteered to be available to testify if needed this year. In particular, the Commission needs additional staff, and this will be the priority with the appropriations committee. We have asked for two full-staff members, one legal counsel and one staff attorney.

Executive Director Sivret relayed that VLCT again asked if we would review their model complaint procedure. She reiterated to them that endorsing specific complaint procedures is outside the scope of the Commission's authority, and that because VLCT insures against the conduct being investigated, there is also a financial conflict of interest in VLCT advising on issues related to complaint investigation.

Financial Disclosures: We have received about 70% of the Executive Officer financial disclosures and they are posted on the website. Next year there will be penalties for those who don't submit them on time.

Other Business: The Board of Judicial Conduct has refused to share the disposition of a case the Ethics Commission referred to them over a year ago, even though they are required to do so by statute. This is not a new obligation, but something that has been in effect for the last six years. This is quite concerning because they cited constitutional concerns that have been regularly considered in the context of the application of state ethics laws to the judiciary and rejected. Executive Director will formulate a response.

6. Executive Session: At 11:05 a.m., on the motion of Commissioner Stevens, the Commission went into Executive Session. Executive Director Chris Sivret reported on complaints and requests for Guidance that had come in since the last Commission meeting. At 11:30 a.m., Commissioner Michele Eid moved to leave Executive session, seconded by Commissioner Chris Davis.

7. Adjournment: At 11:45 a.m., Chair Erlbaum moved to leave the meeting, seconded by Michele Eid.

