

**Vermont Commission on Women**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Wednesday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2019 | 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**  
**32 College St, Montpelier VT**

**Commissioners present:**

Marcia Merrill (Chair), Carol Buchdahl, Lisa Carlson, Mary Daly, Ruth Finn, Kellie Campbell (by phone), Emilie Kornheiser, Kim Nolan, Marybeth Christie Redmond, Lisa Ryan, Kerry Secrest, Heidi Tringe (by phone), Lisa Senecal

**Commissioners absent:**

Ed Adrian, Deborah Bucknam, Charlotte Dennett

**Advisors present:**

Amy Brady, Voices for Vermont's Children  
Candace Elmquist, VT Dept of Finance & Management  
Aly Johnson-Kurts, Change The Story

**Guests: Caitlin Cusack**

**Staff:** Cary Brown, Hannah Lane, Lilly Talbert

**Presiding:** Marcia Merrill

**Recording:** Hannah Lane

**1. Call to order and approval of agenda**

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Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m.

**Meeting Agenda Approval Process:**

**MOTION** made by Carol and seconded by Kerry Secrest:

To approve the meeting agenda, giving discretion to the chair to deviate from the agenda as necessary.

**MOTION APPROVED. Agenda adopted.**

**2. Welcome/Introductions**

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Marcia welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves. Marcia said farewell to Ruth and thanked her for her service.

**3. Approval of May 2019 Meeting Minutes**

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**Approval of May 2019 Minutes**

**MOTION** made by Carol, seconded by Marybeth:

To approve the May 2019 minutes as submitted.

**MOTION APPROVED. Adopted as presented.**

**4. Approve meeting schedule for FY2020**

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**FY2020 Meeting Schedule Approval:**

**MOTION** made by **Carol** and seconded by **Lisa**

To approve the meeting FY2020 Meeting Schedule as proposed, agenda, giving discretion to the chair reschedule meetings as necessary with sufficient notice.

Heidi Tringe and Lisa Ryan by phone voted “yes”.

**MOTION APPROVED. Meeting schedule adopted.**

## **5. Women Owning Woodlands with Caitlin Cusack, Forester for central and western Vermont, Vermont Land Trust**

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The Vermont Land Trust is a statewide conservation organization preserving farms and forests for nearly 40 years now. Women’s Owning Woodlands (WOW) is a project of theirs, along with the Women’s Agriculture Extension, Vermont Woodlands, Vermont Cover’s, and UVM’s Rural Extension.

Many women become woodland owners by inheritance and aren’t necessarily involved in the management until they own it. Women and men often approach land management differently. Financial resources are cited as a greater challenge by women. They have been offering some women-focused workshops, but they don’t have a good network of support once they go through those programs.

WOW has an idea for a project launch, but they are at the beginning, and they are looking for some guidance and feedback, data, research, survey development, and help for them to think about the best way to support women landowners going forward.

Feedback offered by commissioners included:

- Training of male foresters about how to better interact with women landowners
- How much of the land in current use is there for tax benefit purposes vs. operating/profitting from the land intentionally?
- Vermont Women’s Fund has a robust email list and connection with women who support lots of different things; contact Meg Smith.
- Watershed Resilience could be a good connection
- Accessing lower-income women who have inherited land could be a challenge; reach out to select boards and town clerks.

Hannah will scan and share the handout provided.

## **6. Staff Updates**

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Legislative Updates:

- Gov. signed H.57 which preserves access to abortion in Vermont
- Reproductive liberty constitutional amendment passed the Senate & House and will come back in 2021

- Paid Family and Medical Leave did not pass, nor did minimum wage.
- Child Care funding bill passed
- Equitable alimony reform. S.99 proposed broad changes and was tabled for next year. A miscellaneous judiciary bill passed and included:
  - Making the income and duration guidelines permanent after adjusting them for new federal tax changes
  - Adding retirement as a factor that should be considered at the time of divorce
- A Taskforce on Campus Sexual Violence was created; VCW is not a member but will follow their work.
- Emilie added information about review of the judicial appointment process.

#### Change the Story:

- Business Peer Exchange proposal to spin off into independent LLC
  - Value is that CTS is a temporary initiative, not an organization. It's a catalyst, but now it needs a home.
  - Concerns about spinning off to a for-profit. Could it be a non-profit?
  - Other Commissioners voiced support for a for-profit entity.

#### H.707 Sexual Harassment Public Outreach and Collection

- Two contracts going now, Resource Collection & Development with Abigail Hartman, and Public Outreach with Marketing Partners.

#### 2020 VT Suffrage Centennial Alliance

- Lilly helps with coordination
  - Kickoff event in Friday, September 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 at Middlebury College
    - Facebook is live, the website goes live this week
    - Seeking volunteers for marketing and fundraising if anyone wants to get involved or knows someone
  - The primary event will be a march and Statehouse Lawn event in August, 2020
  - NAACP event about racism in the suffrage movement
  - Burlington Waterfront

#### Change The Story commentary project with VTDigger and a pitch call to VPR.

It was suggested that writers infuse these with personal story.

Brynn, VCW's summer intern, is working on the Legal Rights of Women in Vermont Handbook and sharing Vermont Department of Health work on social media.

### **7. Discussion of Department for Children and Families, Report from the Education and Human Development Committee**

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Postponed until September.

### **8. Election of VCW Chair**

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**Appointment of VCW's new Chair**

**MOTION** made by Carol, seconded by Marybeth:

To elect Lisa Senecal as Chair of the Vermont Commission on Women.

**MOTION APPROVED. Lisa elected.**

**9. Vermont National Guard, with guests:**

BG Gregory Knight, Adjutant General of the VT National Guard  
CPT Mike Arcovitch, State Public Affairs Officer, VT National Guard  
CPT Scott Detweiler, Equal Employment Officer and Diversity/Inclusion Officer, VT National Guard  
SSgt Christina Lazelle, Interim Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, VT National Guard  
MSgt Sarah Lemay  
Spc Gloria Kamencik

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Comments from VT National Guard guests:

What can you do to make us better?

Acknowledged need to improve culture to allow folks to come forward with concerns.

Articles painted a negative picture, but they aren't the norm.

Hundreds of vacancies; need every service member they have.

Handed around his Command Philosophy

Inclusive & Developmental Counsel

Developed expectations of conduct, which goes to every member.

Highlighted particular women of achievement in the Vermont National Guard; there are women in positions of senior leadership.

Just hired first female F35 fighter pilot.

Competency-based hiring process. Was seeing diversity in hiring process and questions.

Q: Wondered about the competency-based system and how that will work in a system that's been designed to move men forward and provide them with opportunities.

Merit Systems Protection Board

2016 Department of Defense Sexual Assault Report to Congress. Many positive metrics, but 62% reporting retaliation. Vermont developed its own policy in 2015 or 2016. Since then, DOD has done a better job.

Whistle-Blower Protection Act protects against retaliation or reprisal. They have not had anyone file about retaliation, but they do talk with survivors about this as it's a fear that comes up. Mandatory training is a platform for education on these rights. There are still perceptions that this is a problem, and this is part of the cultural shift that we need; that leaders are creating a climate where folks feel safe coming forward.

With the issues of retaliation and reporting, you want to see bystanders standing up. If someone reports to someone up to the next level up, is that sufficient, or does it need to go to the EO office. The reporting requirement does apply.

Q: How is the Vermont National Guard going to buck the national trend of rising sexual assaults? This is clearly contributing to the difficulty in recruiting women, and especially young women.

Third party reports are taken, referred to law enforcement. Victims don't need to consent to proceed if sexual assault by a leader.

Training includes conversations about jokes and comments providing cover for the 1% egregious behavior.

The Vermont National Guard offers tuition-free college, and access to a defined number of seats at West Point.

Q: Regarding the accountability tool, are you relying on leadership to push that out to folks? How does that get tracked?

Q: What is the training that you offer and who has to participate?

New policy that Commanders and First Sargent "will be present and will participate". Air Force stopped offering Green Dot; they are now using a similar program and added in prevention, alcohol abuse, EO, etc. Army gets "Engage" – plan, know how to react, react to react? Unit, Risk inventory.

Q: Are civilian contractors covered by all of these things?

Q: to Gloria – How is the culture? What would be helpful?

It's been a huge step for combat positions to be open to women because they are necessary for upward mobility. She has been with her unit over three years until she got her E5. Early on, she felt alienated, mostly because she felt like colleagues didn't know how to react to her. She has never personally felt unsafe or career in jeopardy. Some select individuals who don't want her there, but they've never threatened her.

Initially, she felt that the culture was edited in her presence, but over the last year and a half or so, has had open conversations with colleagues to discuss and acknowledge and it took time for her to integrate. Had to prove she was capable and deserved to be there.

Needs all of Vermont on board to support the Guard. Finding the audience to talk to is difficult.

### **Commission Discussion about presentation**

Can the military problems be solved without civilians?

How do we measure progress?

Advice about training, learning, expanding, could be a role for the Commission.

Military-focused H.707 work?

How do we follow-up and stay engaged? 6 months from now?

Accountability tool.

## **10. Announcements**

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Lisa Senecal will be speaking tonight at Ignite Burlington's event. She will present 20 slides for 15 seconds each on sexual harassment.

Change The Story's Commentary Series – Lisa Senecal will be writing the first one, staff will share when it comes out July 1.

7/21 Community Justice Network, Lisa Ryna is off to National Community Justice Conference in Denver.

Emilie is doing a story-telling hour in Brattleboro about the abortion debate and her abortion story.

Hannah has raffle tickets for sale to raise money for Safeline, the Orange County Vermont Network organization she serves on the board of.

**Meeting Adjourned at 12:30 p.m.**