

Vermont Commission on Women Meeting Minutes
Friday, October 20, 2023 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Asa Bloomer Building, 2nd Floor, #266, 88 Merchants Row, Rutland VT

Commissioners present:

In-person: Esther Charlestin (co-chair), Brenda Churchill, Hazel Brewster, Alex Hilliard, Nancy Kaplan, and Sarah Mell (co-chair).

Remotely: Heather Bouchey, Kellie Campbell, Wendy Knight, and Sophia Rabe.

Commissioners absent:

Annie Mackin, Ashley Messier, Kiah Morris, and Lisa Senecal.

Advisors present:

Remotely: Margaret Overman, Vermont Works for Women

Guests: Sarah Pelkey of West Rutland joined for the public forum at 12:00 pm

Staff: Cary Brown (in-person) and Ellie Lane (remotely)

Presiding: Esther Charlestin & Sarah Mell

Recording: Ellie Lane

1. Call to order

Meeting called to order at 10:08 a.m.

Sarah took a moment to do check-ins and to welcome Heather. Sarah asked the group to introduce themselves and to share a favorite costume they've worn in their life.

2. Approve agenda

Motion made by Nancy, seconded by Alex to approve the meeting agenda as submitted. Unanimously approved, agenda approved.

3. Review Group Agreements

Addressed under item #5.

4. Approval of June 21, 2023 and September 8, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Motion made by Hazel, seconded by Alex to approve the June 21, 2023 and September 8, 2023 meeting minutes as submitted. Unanimously approved, minutes approved.

Abstentions: Brenda, Esther, Heather, Nancy

5. Revisit and affirm VCW Group Agreements

Sarah asked the group to review the group agreements and to see if there is anything we want to edit or add.

Some points raised in the discussion included:

- adding meeting attendance
- this issue (meeting attendance) seems to be a theme. People are carrying a lot and people sometimes need to step away, but also how do we facilitate more dialogue when someone needs to step away?

- Sarah asked everyone to share their phone number with the staff. Staff will send out an email asking for this contact information.
- Commissioners who want a state email address should let Ellie know and she will set one up for you.

6. Commissioner roles

Cary talked about VCW's operating guidelines and the expectations of Commissioners, including attendance, abiding by group agreements, being engaged, staying informed, serving on a committee, promoting VCW, being aware of our financial needs and responsibilities, and serving as a liaison to advisory council members. Cary spent some time talking about expectations for Commissioners about engaging with the media. Karen is working on developing a formal written policy about media relations and will be in touch with that.

A question was asked about conflict of interests in this work and Cary gave a brief overview.

7. Committee Organization

Esther and Sarah distilled the outcomes of the September meeting into three core shared priorities:

- Public engagement
- Advocacy
- Amplification of voices

Points raised in the discussion included:

- There was a lot of interest in focusing on economics, caregiving, workplaces, and amplifying voices and stories of black and brown women and girls.
- We need more public engagement to build trust to engage in our shared priorities, and so Sarah and Esther are proposing we do all of our work through the lens of engagement, advocacy, and amplification.
- Brenda and Esther talked about attending the Women Can Do conference and Cary shared a document Karen put together compiling responses from students. There was a connection between the September 8 meeting conversation and this event in that there is a lot of energy around engaging youth voices.
- A commissioner asked about the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility and how this fits into our priorities.
- asked if the Commissioner of DOC could come in to talk to us.
- Equal Pay Compact work last year and there is some good momentum there and would like to continue that work
- Commissioners can get more involved in the work of advisors and bring it back to the Commission.
- What's the plan for Change The Story data and how Commissioners can be involved in that?

At the September meeting it was decided that we will keep the current committees, and the chairs and VCW will broadly give some umbrella priorities to committees to think about their work through, and committees will decide what the work of the group might be.

Commissioners at the meeting joined committees as follows:

Health Equity Committee

- Alex
- Nancy
- Hazel
- Sarah

Workplace Equity & Security Committee

- Kellie
- Wendy
- Brenda

Housing & Caregiving Committee

- Esther
- Heather
- Sophia

Sarah asked each committee to engage with an advisory group to attend our next in-person meeting.

8. Staff/commissioner/advisor updates

Cary gave an update about the Act 80 education project. We have been meeting with the Human Rights Commission and the Attorney General's office. Ellie is working on a joint fact sheet with the Human Rights Commission, and our Workplaces for All website needs some updating and strengthening. We do have a small amount of carry-forward money that we're hoping to use to hire an attorney to do some content work for that website.

Nancy shared about a cancer event on November 9th at the Essex Resort. Nancy shared some about a new project working on health needs assessments. She shared that lots of people are asking the same questions of the same people, and is thinking about a better way of coordinating these efforts where the same people aren't always being tapped.

VWW just released the [2024 Trailblazers program schedule](#). They will be in South Burlington, Newport, Brattleboro, and Rutland.

Hazel talked about the Declaration of Inclusion initiatives that many Vermont towns have already adopted. If your town hasn't yet, reach out to her.

Cary mentioned that there is a law that requires schools to provide menstrual products in bathrooms, and staff identified out of Women Can Do that maybe we need to do some education and outreach about this law.

Alex was running on the rail trail in Poultney and encountered writing with the n-word and swastikas. Alex notified the select board, who contacted the state and removed it. There is a select board meeting on Monday at 6:30 pm, there is a Zoom link to attend, and they asked for support. Especially if folks have ideas about how to navigate this.

9. Public forum

Sarah Pelkey of West Rutland shared about her experience and thoughts. Some of the points raised in the discussion included violence, housing issues, opioid use disorders.

She talked about Lakes Region Women in Business group Alex used to bring together.

The group talked about our work, changes at VCW in recent years, and our focus on public engagement.

Discussed women in trades, economic opportunity, Poultney economic development, and their transition toward an outdoor recreation-based economy. Rutland County broadly might be an interesting case study.

Talked about the idea of categorizing This Way Up data so it's easier to search for and find women-owned businesses.

There is a lot of great work going on, but we're not necessarily hearing about it. Maybe there is an opportunity to connect journalism students to get the word out.

8. Closing

Meeting Adjourned at 1:05 p.m.