

Land Access and Opportunity Board Meeting

Feb 5, 2024, 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Meeting Facilitator: Ornella Matta-Figueroa & Jean Hamilton, LAOB Staff

Attendee	Present	Not Present
Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Samantha Langevin, VT RELEAF Collective ● Dan Coutu, VT Commission on Native American Affairs ● Xusana Davis, Office of Racial Equity ● Susan Aranoff, Vermont DDC ● Ana Mejia, Vermont Every Town Project ● Pacifique Nsengiyumva, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) ● Brian Cina, National Association of Social Workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ● ● ● ● Britaney Watson, NAACP ● ● Arnold Thomas, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance ● ● Raheemah Madany, Pride Center of Vermont ● <i>Vermont Psychiatric Survivors (no active board member)</i>
Board Alternates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kirsten Murphy, Vermont DDC ● Mark Hughes, VRJA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Jennifer Morton-Dow, VT Releaf Collective ● ● ● Shingai Kagunda, Vermont Every Town Project ● Rich Holschuh, VCNAA ● Ashley Devereaux, NASW
Guests & Public	<p><u>Public:</u> <u>Guests:</u> Sarah Isham, Andy Wood, David Koeninger, Christine Hughes, Gus Seelig, Trey Martin, Wynston Longmore, Tonya Montgomery.</p>	

Agenda

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Convene the February 5th, 2024 virtual meeting of the LAOB at 5:30pm <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Welcome, Facilitator Team Introductions, and overview of meeting |
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<p>b. Touchstones</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Listen generously. Speak your truth from your heart & mind. ii. Make the way we work together an example of what's possible. iii. Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle & we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture <p>c. LAOB Board Member & Staff Introductions: Name, Identifiers, Board seat and location (county)</p>	
<p>2. Review & Approve Meeting Notes from January 22nd, 2024 meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● https://vhcb.org/sites/default/files/meeting-minutes/2024/LAOB/1-22-24%20LAOB%20Minutes.pdf <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Corrections: Kirsten not Kristen 	
<p>3. LAOB Introduction -</p>	<p>LAOB Presentation LAOB Presentation Board.pptx.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Slides presented ● Questions for LAOB - <i>None</i>
<p>4. Advisory Powers Learning Journey:VEDA / VACC Presentation</p> <p>a. <u>Presenters</u>: Sarah Isham and Andy Wood</p>	<p>Intro of Guests from Vermont Economic Development Authority / Vermont Agricultural Credit Corporation presentation</p> <p>Presentation for approx 20-30 mins</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sarah Isham, Director of Agricultural Lending, joined in 2000 ● Andy Wood, Deputy Director of Ag Lending, joined in 2013 ● VT Economic Development Authority is celebrating its 50th anniversary ● VEDA's mission: to contribute to Vermont's economic vitality by providing a broad array of financing programs to eligible businesses that create jobs and help advance Vermont's public policy goals ● VEDA is an instrumentality of the state ● VT Agricultural Credit Corp - formed in 1999: Provides an alternative source of sound and constructive credit to farmers and forest products businesses who are not having their credit needs fully met by conventional agricultural credit sources at reasonable rates and terms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loans to support farm ownership, farm operations, farm worker housing, farm lines of credit ○ Agriculture represents 32% of VEDA's loans ○ Portfolio has declined since 2019 from nearly \$20M in loans to around \$6M in approvals, but 2024 is starting to rebound ○ Dairy and Maple are the leading industries ● Types of loans

- Farm Ownership Loans: improve or acquire farm real estate
- Farm Operating Loans: purchasing livestock, machinery, working capital
- Energy Loans: most energy loans are on the commercial side, but some do happen on the ag side
- Special one time programs
 - 2009 Farm Operating Loan Program (FOLP): \$7.2M in loans to 125 farms
 - 2010 Debt Stabilization Program: \$45M in loans to 213 farms
 - 2016 Organic Dairy Transition Loan Program: \$75k grant empowered \$808k in loans to 6 farms
 - 2012-2022 SBA PPP to 242 loans to ag businesses
 - 2023 Forgivable Loan Program \$3.2M in 48 loans

Question & Answer

Samantha - as an alternative to other loans, what are the needs that aren't being met by other lenders?

- Traditional banks and lenders tend to not be comfortable lending to agriculture and forestry. At time Interest rates from conventional lenders have been significantly higher than what VEDA can offer. VACC staff have a real commitment and direct experience with agriculture to understand that culture.
- Do you collect demographic information about clients?
- We do not collect demographic data.
- What kind of outreach do you do to spread the word about these services?
- We do traditional marketing. We share information with the “technical assistance providers” who work in the agricultural space. We communicate through other lenders.

Ana - Thank you for filling out the survey in advance of the presentation. The survey helped give a background on how you've thought about barriers to access. With the prompt of “what are the barriers to accessing your services” you answered “we are a non-discriminatory lender”. Even if that is true, people likely face barriers to accessing your products What are you doing to address barriers? Do you offer 100% financing loans? Do you rely on credit scores?

- Down payments: down payments are standard unless there is another type of collateral. Sometimes we partner with Farm Services Agency that allow for 100% financing.
- Credit Scores: we do not utilize credit scores as a single score. We do manual underwriting and credit scores do not single handedly determine whether or not someone is eligible. It is considered.
- **Ana** - if someone is credit invisible or they don't have a credit score on file, would they still be eligible?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, being credit invisible or not having a credit score is not considered a negative. ● Ana - language access? Are your services advertised in different languages, do you have loan officers who can work with clients in languages other than english? - Would like to see VACC/VEDA lean on the LAOB to understand barriers. . <p>Pacificque - has VEDA/VACC reached out to new american communities to find out how your programs fit into the needs and programming of these communities. If you have not already reached out, what plans do you have to reach out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In our commercial dept we did some outreach, esp through the forgivable loan program.. Participated in some meetings with Opportunities Credit Union. This is likely an area that we can be more in tune with. - We have been on some calls with migrant justice. But we have not done any specific marketing in this regard. Maybe this is an area that the LAOB can help with. <p>Jean - Interesting to hear about your experience developing credit opportunities that speak to the specific needs of farmers. Can you tell us more about how you were successful in advocating for the need for services that specifically address this sector?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The State of VT and private banks were supportive and helped fund the launch of VACC because they recognized that agricultural is the backbone of VT and that they wanted to support agriculture but preferred to have lenders with specialized knowledge. Popularity of working lands and farming. Recommend checking out opportunities credit union. Also farm services agency, with is part of USDA. USDA Rural Development also intersects with agriculture. - Having the experience in farming is helpful, you end up in very sensitive conversations, where trust becomes important. A shared connection before the underwriting helps build trust which can help lead to a better outcome.
<p>BREAK - 5 mins from 6:30-6:35pm</p>	
<p>5. Public Comment & Board Responses - 15 mins (Ornella)</p>	<p>David Koeninger - VT Legal Aid: generational wealth preservation project. Looking forward to giving more of a detailed update in the future.</p>
<p>6. Board Function Discussion 15 mins (Jean)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What's the function of the board now that we have staff? (Conversation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Intro to discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How can board support staff and staff support board? ■ What decisions come before the board vs decided by staff?

- **Overview of current committee structure**

- Onboarding committee→Hearth Tending Committee: Dan, Samantha and Susan. Committee serves as the liaison between staff and board and provides staff supervision. Currently meet with Staff weekly on Wednesday morning with plan to move ot bi-weekly meetings in March.
- Advisory Powers Committee: Ana, Dan, Mark, Susan, Xusana, Brian. Committee discusses lessons learned and next steps from Learning Journey presentations. Currently meetings are scheduled for 10-11 am on Tuesdays. Meeting timing may need to be changed.
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- Budget Committee: Susan. Committee advises legislative communications strategy, especially relating to FY25 budget. Are other Board members interested in this committee? Meeting time needs to be scheduled.

Discussion

Brian - recommendation: we monitor all legislation related to housing and we request that LAOB staff testify and/or advisory powers committee give talking points/recommendations to be shared as part of the testimony. See Brian's comments from last meeting around funding for developers and how to make sure policy is being informed by LAOBs input to help improve equity.

Xusana - between bi-weekly board meetings and committee meetings LAOB represents a lot of meeting time. We need to make sure that our meeting time is productive. Lets be strategic in what committees we are creating and what committees are signing up to do. Lets be clear in what we assign to staff vs what we are signing up to do as Board members. We have a vision for what we see for VT. We have an understanding of what existing programs are there. We need a few people who can draw the line between the vision and those nuts and bolts (the existing programs). how can we really be smart about not just learning about the work of our sister boards (ambassadors?) and leveraging opportunities for us to share work.

Ana - wanting to move forward on the equity assessment. Helping put that RFP together could be committee work. Learning from these presentations that organizations are not doing a good job collecting data. LAOB can advise what data to collect. Hoping equity assessment will help the grant making. Might

	<p>have to be both at the same time. There is our grant making, but through our advisory powers we can inform other funding. excited to dig into this.</p> <p>Samantha - appreciate how the conversation is moving towards how can subcommittees support the work staff are doing. Proposal: move to monthly board meetings that allow for more subcommittee work. Create an annual work plan: governor budget, leg session, etc. how are we functioning and what is the timing of that functioning.</p> <p>Xusana - can help put a calendar together.</p> <p>Dan - great conversation. Looking at a timeline perspective makes sense. That would help dictate prioritization. We have a HUGE amount of stuff to deal with. This is a long term project and we need to find the bite size pieces. Might mesh well with Brian’s recommendation to be really tracking the bills. Might help guide decision making for the upcoming year , two years, etc. and we have our communities we can be activated.</p> <p>Kirsten - There seem to be several groups with work plans that want to do an ‘equity assessment’. Multiple equity assessments feel disrespectful to our communities. For example in the Health Equity council, disparities in health start upstream with housing and food security. It may be appealing to the legislature and be helpful to our communities to combine efforts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Next steps for developing the best opportunities for Board Members and Staff to work together <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Creating a model for Board members to serve as partners in Insight, Oversight, and Foresight, we will lead a discussion at the next board meeting. ○ Scheduling meetups with Jean and Ornella: we’re looking forward to meeting with each board member individually. ○ We will send you a survey to collect some guidance from you on the best way to communicate: phone numbers, meeting preferences, etc.
<p>7. Legislative Updates - 15 mins (Ornella)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What’s happening in the Statehouse related to LAOB? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Staff received message from Sen. Ram Hinsdale: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can the LAOB be the statewide entity that tracks statewide homeownership gap and recommendations on how to close the gap?

- **Brian** - we can assist with that, but does our staff including VHCB have the capability to do that? What structures are in place to assist. We can definitely make recommendations. It would be an appropriate role for us help tie it together and make recommendations.
- **Ana** - VHFA does a good job for tracking the baseline data. LAOB is well positioned to add the context: what are the actual barriers that are leading to the disparities. VHCB/VHFA have not made the effort to understand what the barriers are that are creating the disparities.
- **Xusana** - VHFA tracks homeownership gap. Does it make sense for the LAOB to take over that function? What would we need to do that technologically, etc? Is there a reason for LAOB to take this over from VHFA? Does recommendations mean “track recommendations” or put forward our own recommendations? We all suspected that the LAOB would be doing some kind of analysis at some point.
- Can LAOB contribute to an environmental justice analysis of tiered maps of development (equitable access to housing, open space, amenities, etc)?
 - **Ana** - yes!
 - **Xusana** - there are two EJ councils at the ANR. What is the contribution and timeline expected of the LAOB. Who would be our partners?
 - **Samantha** - why are we being asked to serve these roles?
 - **Dan** - look back at what the LAOB is for and do these requests fit in there.
- **Dan** - what is Environmental Justice?
 - **Gus** - aspects of the environment impact poor people differently,
 - **Brian** - housing, environmental toxins, food security/food insecurity, these issues impact disenfranchised and disempowered people disproportionately.
 - **From chat** - Environmental justice or eco-justice, is a social movement to address environmental injustice, which occurs when poor or marginalized communities are harmed by hazardous waste, resource extraction, and other land uses from which they do not benefit. [Wikipedia](#)
 - **From Chat** from Katherine R - Erin Brokovich is movie that highlights environmental justice, and its based on a true story.
- **Pacifique** - Do we have resources and can we undertake the work? Re: environmental justice, how do you start EJ when people don't have a house or a people to stay. The environment comes second, i need a place to put my head first.

- **Ornella** - still learning what the purview of our advisory powers are. Interesting to consider that we should be advising potential legislation in addition to what has already moved on to the agencies.
 - **Dan** - advising and reviewing new laws can help us understand opportunities to shift existing laws .
 - o What other bills that relate to LAOB priorities are on your mind?

Xusana - here are some headlines:

[State's shelter proposal for Waterbury armory draws 200 to select board meeting](#) – Waterbury RoundAbout – Lisa Scagliotti

[The latest windstorm mangled greenhouses and toppled trees, another blow to Vermont farmers](#) – Vermont Public – Lexi Krupp

[Bill would require more updates to endangered species list, restrict taking species from habitats](#) – VT Digger – Brooke Burns

[Thousands of Vermonters applied for FEMA assistance after last summer's floods. What became of them?](#) – VT Digger – Peter D'Auria

With equitable access to ownership of land, we want to think about who has access resilience.

[One year in, are Burlington's 'pods' a success?](#) – VT Digger – Patrick Crowley

Xusana - LAOB should be paying attention to and providing feedback on Act 250 reform bills.

Kirsten - DD council are working hard on housing issues this year. Not always about home ownerships but we are focused on permanency and the security of a home.

Samantha - housing access does not need to just be homeownership. Housing access and housing security is our focus.

LAOB Outreach 2-pager

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nCi2GfrscrORvOWC-kogt57EIEJLXg0o/view?usp=sharing>

8. Board Announcements - 10 mins (Ornella)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next Board meeting: 2/20 (Tuesday) - VT Sustainable Jobs Fund will present • Samantha - hearing from lots of organizations that they are hiring. One of the ways that Releaf serves the community is to post job opportunities on the listserv. We have posting criteria. Be in touch with Samantha if you would like to make a job post.
9. Meeting Adjourned 7:30pm	

ZOOM LINK - <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83566919017>

DOCUMENTS

- **January 8th Meeting Notes** (PDF) <https://vhcb.org/sites/default/files/meeting-minutes/2024/LAOB/1-22-24%20LAOB%20Minutes.pdf>
- **LAOB Outreach 2-pager** (PDF)- https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yr_1J-GKY14n_5DUHMQCXqL-68rIjMej/view?usp=drive_link