Land Access and Opportunity Board: Special: Policy Committee

Agenda

May 6, 2026 4:30PM- 6:00 PM

Meeting Facilitator: Jean Hamilton & Ornella Matta-Figueroa

Notetaker: Arealles Ortiz

Attendees	Not Present
Board • Andre Comandon, Office of Racial Equity • Brian Cina, National Association of Social Workers • Dan Coutu, VT Commission on Native American Affairs, VT Council on Native American Affairs • Jaada Longmore, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance • Susan Aranoff, Vermont Developmental Disability Council • Mark Hughes, Vermont Racial Justice Alliance **Staff:** Ornella Matta-Figueroa, Arealles Ortiz, Kiah Morris, Tay Margison	● Zack Hughes, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors *Tentative:* Survivors - Kirsten Murphy, Vermont Developmental Disability Council
Guests & Public: Mary White Summer Rae Carter Carlin Molander Mike Covey Ahn Lee	

Agenda

Meeting Convened by Facilitator at: 4:30PM

1. Introductions & Check-in	-Check Ins - Prompt: Why is land important to you? Why are you here? - LAOB Touchstones -Overview of Comprehensive Proposal -Discussion: Where do you want our Land Use Vision to go? What are next steps? How can we move forward?
2. Discussion/ Updates	LAOB has been deeply engaged in conversations with communities across Vermont including urban and rural areas. In particular, communities most impacted and affected by land use and environmental policy. They are the least reflected in how those policies were shaped. We were invited to numerous working groups since 2024. We noticed patterns of the structures in policy making processes not meaningfully shifting outcomes for our communities. We are bringing forward our response to what we've been hearing. It is a comprehensive proposal on how the LAOB can move forward with our communities and integrity with our values of centering impacted communities and deep listening. Consistent messaging we are hearing: -People are tired of being asked for feedback after decisions have already been made. -People are tired of being asked to respond to policy ideas and technical pathways. -People would like to be invited into spaces where the core questions are being asked and defined. -People describe engagement as extractive in the ways stories are shared or input is collected. -Reports that are produced and sit on a shelf. Power does not move. -Eroding trust in all of the civic processes, policy structures, and support systems. This is not resistance to environmental protection. We are asking for agency, dignity, and shared responsibilities in the decisions that shape the everyday life of rural Vermonters and Vermonters in general.

	When communities lead and influence where the resources are going, efficient policies can occur. Overview of Comprehensive Proposal: The agency of Agriculture had a community engagement where one of the consistent messages from community members was that they wanted the LAOB to help lead the next phase of planning. This is because of our relationship with communities, our composition, and our clarity. With our community feedback and observing repeated institutional failures we believed it was our responsibility to move with two feet. This is a first draft proposal. We know it will be improved in dialogue with you all. We want to build lasting capacity. There is always going to be a problem that needs to be solved. We need to figure out we can all do this better. LAOB in statute has advisory powers and we have the power to advise and influence all of the Vermont state agencies as an independent state board. Our community engagement is an essential tool to inform the system through our advisory powers. Feedback on A Comprehensive Community Engagement Strategy for Vermont Land Use Reform - Google Docs The group took some time to look at the proposal, budget items, operations plan and feedback that was shared from unaffiliated grassroots organizers to deputy commissions, and high-level leadership staff at Vermont agencies. Discussion: This proposal includes LAOB resourcing communities and coalitions to host community engagements that will help produce a final proposal through exploring with a deeper lens the impacts and what do we need to fix. Question: What is your timeline for refining the proposal and who is the ultimate audience of this proposal? Response: We imagine there would be a group that would self-select and show up as the core leadership of folks meeting together. There is room as its assembling. The actual proposal is much longer than this pared down version. As we are co-initiating, there is a piece of us deciding what these meetings are about and what our initial outreach is about. Response: I see this as a working document not intended to reach one milestone. We did put our proposal in front of the House Environment Committee and many lawmakers. We have positioned and suggested that if there is actually going to be a public engagement plan written into any legislation that our

	proposal is starting point. It's a fully formed proposal we could refine instead of starting from scratch. Comment: Love the idea of facilitating access to small grants for completely unaffiliated grassroots organizations. So much is possible when people come together. The 14K person Act 181 Facebook group is about to establish chapters around the state and they are trying to figure out how to organize. They will have financial constraints in terms of accessing funds. So, if there is way for groups like that focused on the work at their community level to access funds and give feedback to LAOB and then to the state that would be gold. Question: How do we support you to go about getting those funds? Response: We need more voices saying yes, we want this as a priority. There is also a tactical help of, do you know any fund sources that we should be going after? Response: VHCB can receive donation dollars. It would have to clearly name it's for the Land Access and Opportunity Board. If you know private donors that would be a way to get funds in our budgets specific for community engagements. Comment: I would be excited to pass along either proposal, contact info, with a brief description of why LOAB is relevant to peacebuilding organizations. There has been a big shift from international to domestic policy. A lot of it is around democracy work. The biggest funders internationally are looking to fund work domestically. Comment: Many practices of deep democracy framework are in our community engagement plan. Comment: Love the values showing up here, the awareness of power and centering of the tensions. It helps us get beyond the simplicity of trade-offs of land conservation versus building housing versus conserving farmland. Liked the question in this proposal of who is benefitting from the conflict flashpoints. Liked how this proposal is explicitly leading into a pilot. Question: Can you speak to the balance between linear process and iterative process here in the proposal? Response: At phase one there are a number of things happening at the same time. Community engagement will be hosted; information will come back to summarized and then back out again for feedback. We could create engagement at town meetings across the state as part of our process. Next meeting we could look together more closely at this longer proposal to readdress this question.

	Question: Do you use specific methods or tools for public engagement that is a good indicator of policy success? Response: We welcome always building our toolbox. Please send what you have our way. One of the webs in this proposal will look at and help define good indicators of policy success. Question: Do you all have plans to respond to legislation to keep this land use conversation going? Response: Mostly were reporting out and staying engaged with what's happening as well as developing education resources. At Rural Vermont, we are focused on the trade-offs for growing food land access. Acknowledging that there have been a lot of listening sessions over the years from land initiatives and a lot of those plans haven't reflected the will of the people. We could try to pull together those results and be clear on what was learned and who they learned from as a starting point. Response: Act 21 Rural Coalition is very engaged and excited to see this proposal and want to continue this work. This summer we are looking at what policy might look like with a grassroots lens. We agreed we were all together for the land. We want to bring legislature into this process and continue policy development behind the scenes. Response: People dealing with Act 59, perhaps at the high levels, may believe conservation means keeping people off land. Conservation has got to include mutual respect for the land. Response: The relationship to land has been completely missed by the state apparatus and yet the people of Vermont are re-centering that in the conversation. It's extraordinary. A lot of the energy with the 181 group will be hyper localized and priorities will shift from each town. Response: Grateful for your participation and input on how would like to see Vermont work for you. We are going to need your help and support.
3. Process Check-in, Next Steps	● Reflections ● Next Steps ● Gratitudes
Meeting Adjourned at: 6PM	