

Vermont Citizens Advisory Committee (VTCAC) on Lake Champlain's Future

April 10th, 2023

5:00 – 7:00 pm

APPROVED MEETING SUMMARY

Committee Members Present: Mark Naud (Chair), Denise Smith (Vice-chair), Sen. Randy Brock, Karina Dailey, Rep. Kari Dolan, Wayne Elliot, Bob Fischer, Lori Fisher, Rep. Carol Ode, Hilary Solomon

Committee Members Absent: Sen. Chris Bray, Eric Clifford

LCBP Staff in Attendance: Katie Darr

Public Guests: Kent Henderson, Ricky Laurin, Marli Rupe

Presenter: Abbey Willard (VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets)

Meeting summary prepared Katie Darr, Lake Champlain Basin Program

5:00 – 5:15 pm

1. Welcome and Introductions – Mark Naud

2. Public Comments

No public comments were made.

3. ACTION ITEM: Review and vote on Draft March 13th meeting summary – Mark Naud
Wayne Elliot moved to approve the meeting summary. Denise Smith seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

5:15 – 6:00 pm

4. Future of Agriculture Commission Action Plan Report Overview – Abbey Willard- Director of Agricultural Development, VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

Abbey provide an overview of the Commission's recommendations, available at <https://agriculture.vermont.gov/administration/governors-commission-future-vermont-agriculture>. Her presentation is available with the [meeting materials](#). The priorities of the Commission built upon recommendations in the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund's [Farm to Plate Strategic Plan](#). The work of the Commission is privileged until the Governor makes it public. The Commission met at least monthly and focused on engaging stakeholders in the process of identifying recommendations and priorities. Recommendations fell into two general categories: infrastructure investments and business assistance support. There are two clear overlaps between the Commission's recommendations and the CAC's Action Plan: (1) investing in infrastructure and practices that build community resilience (agriculture is key to achieving this) and (2) providing resources to farmers. The Commission is focused on building a network approach to achieving the priorities and recommendations in the report as resources are unlikely to come from exclusively the state budget and programming. In the final year of the Commission, they are looking to engage with other groups that have similar ideas to co-create strategies and approaches that can be presented to the governor's office. The Commission is tasked to submit a final plan by November 15, 2023.

Discussion

- Mark asked about appendix 3 which outlines the progress of the strategies relative to the FY23 budget outcomes and whether it was limited in FY24 to the big pulse into the Working Lands program and the additional \$10 million for infrastructure investment or if there was continued funding in the budget for the Commission's initiatives. Abbey shared that progress could be due to

appropriations and legislation passed by the legislature or other existing programs. ARPA and other initiatives taken up by other programs like the Dairy Innovation Center (federally funded with similar dairy innovation/diversification objectives). They have not yet done this exercise for FY24. There are some ARPA pulses continuing and the Dairy Innovation Center is continuing. Most of the work the Commission plans to do in the next 6 months will help build that table to identify what is being done on these priorities by other organizations.

- Mark asked what needs and opportunities the CAC can amplify to help advance the recommendations of the commission. Abbey noted the Commission has experienced an unusual legislative session. The budget passed by the House does not meet the budget projections the Governor proposed. The Governor proposed \$3M for the Working Lands Program and \$10M to provide competitively awarded grants to small and mid-sized agricultural producers and value-added processors in the meat, produce, and maple sectors. The House passed \$1M and \$5M respectively. If there was agreement by the VTCAC, full support for those two programs would be the first recommendation.
- Sen. Brock asked if the Commission has discussed S.102, a Labor Bill which has added agricultural workers to the group of people who could join unions under the State labor laws. Abbey confirmed workforce has been a conversation over the Commission's 2 years of work. The first plan addressed labor shortages and workforce strategies more than the second plan. This plan was submitted prior to the legislative session and S.102. She anticipates labor and S.102 will be part of the Commission's upcoming conversations.
- Rep. Ode noted that if Universal School Meals is passed, she hopes we could use as much of that \$27-30M/year to buy Vermont products to keep that money in Vermont. Abbey agreed with the value of increasing the amount of local food in school meals. Alongside that bill is funding to the Agency of Education for a local food purchasing initiative. Sourcing local food can be a challenge depending on price point, the amount of staff a school has, storage ability, and equipment. The Agency of Ag has a Farm-to-School grant program that provides grants to schools to purchase equipment, make kitchen modifications, build relationships with local producers, etc. to help schools be able to purchase more local food.
- Rep. Ode shared a vision for meals on wheels for children and box meals/ingredients for people facing hunger. How could that happen, what resources are needed? Abbey appreciated the vision and touched on some of the components required to achieve it. The Vermont Everyone Eats program just ended and that was focused on providing meals prepared by restaurant workers. There is lots of interest in finding ways to continue that program, it was a food security and workforce agenda to support communities during the pandemic. Health Care Shares is an initiative that enables an individual who meet a certain threshold of health concern to get a prescription from a primary care physician to access local food on a weekly basis to help achieve health outcomes. This is funded through a variety of state and federal initiatives. In recent years, there has been an effort to encourage large scale institutional buyers to do forward contracting with farmers to commit to buying from that producer for an entire season. There have been examples of those buyers offering infrastructure funding for farms to purchase a greenhouse or special pieces of equipment.
- Mark understood one of the gap opportunities to be the need for an enhanced distribution hub and storage facilities. Was any of that funding part of the Governor's \$10M request? Abbey confirmed that was the intent. The proposed \$10M would fund larger one-time infrastructure investments up to \$500K per grantee.
- Karina asked Abbey to speak to the overlap with the Action Plan and the Commission's recommendations. Abbey noted the CAC's recommendation for investment in infrastructure and practices to build community resilience can be linked to agriculture as a key to climate mitigation. The Commission was clear that there is not always the most effective relationship between agricultural and environmental partners and stakeholders, the Commission wants to focus efforts on improving relationship building, building trust and collaboration to be more effective. Recommendations that address relationship building don't have a budget, they require intention and

time to have conversations and build collaboration opportunities. There may be opportunities to invite members of the VTCAC to attend a Future of Agriculture meeting to figure out how to achieve this synergy between ag and the environment. The CAC could be a place to convene some of these conversations potentially. CAC members were interested and asked to be kept in mind for those opportunities.

- Rep. Dolan asked for Abbey's perspective on the challenges the organic dairy industry is facing. Abbey noted she is not a dairy expert. It was unusual to have the confluence of difficult circumstances that have led to where organic and conventional small dairy have found themselves. Prior to this year, they had not seen organic dairy come in looking for emergency support. The Dairy Margin Coverage Program does not exclude organic dairy and some have taken advantage of the premium payments support. If the Appropriations Committee would be interested in having someone speak to those support programs, Abbey can help arrange that.

6:00 – 6:20 pm

5. July Retreat Planning – Mark Naud, Denise Smith

The retreat will take place on Tuesday July 18th or 25th. The retreat will focus on Action Plan development and annual elections for chair/vice-chair will take place. The next few meetings will include a legislative wrap up, possibly from Jared Carpenter, to connect the dots on where the Legislature has moved on items connected to the Action Plan and where the CAC might target follow-up.

- Wayne noted that it would be good to follow the Future of Ag Commission's progress and priorities and incorporate some of those into the Action Plan.

6:20 – 6:45 pm

6. Membership & Governance Discussion – Mark Naud, Denise Smith

Six CAC members are operating with expired memberships, Sarah Coleman and Emily Bird are working on that with Secretary Moore and the Governor's Office. The Committee has 2 vacancies to fill. Mark would love to bring new people on in time for the July Retreat. Sarah shared some resources from the Office of Racial Equity and guidelines for consideration.

Once members complete the brief self-audit membership survey, Katie will share the results to help with more targeted recruitment efforts. Members discussed gaps on the committee: tourism and recreation, anglers, people who use the lake for recreation and food sources, forestry, large land mass owners/managers, representation from Addison County or the islands. Wayne noted it is important to maintain the expertise that is presently on the Committee as members transition.

Members discussed the process for filling vacancies, including developing a set of criteria for new members. The Governor and Secretary Moore are responsible for approving new members, the CAC has historically recommended applicants for approval.

If anyone is interested in the vice-chair or chair position, email Mark, Denise, and Katie.

6:45 – 7:00 pm

7. Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion – Mark Naud

Members revisited Abbey Willard's request that the CAC support the \$3M and \$10M requests for the Working Lands Program and Meat, Maple, Produce Infrastructure grant program.

- Rep. Dolan provided context on the House Appropriation's decision to support those programs at \$1M and \$5M. The demand for resources outweighs available dollars, so the committee must be careful when funding new initiatives especially with one-time funding. There were questions as to what the actual ask and justification was. It is hard to quantify the performance measures of some of the priorities, like those related to marketing.

- Mark is going to review testimony to see if he can make sense of the request in a way to come to consensus/proxy support by the committee.

The next VTCAC meeting is on **Monday, May 8th from 5:00-7:00 pm**. It will be a **hybrid meeting** hosted at the Gordon Center House (54 West Shore Road, Grand Isle, VT).