



**Executive Board Minutes
September 12, 2023**

Location: Remote meeting via Zoom.

Members Present: Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair; Steve Lembke, Bonnie North, Stephan Chait, Jack Cunningham

Absent: Jim Pinkerton, Tim Arsenault, Carolyn Partridge, Ann Golob

Staff present: Chris Company, Executive Director; Inessa Muse, Finance Manager

Public/Guests: none

Presenter: none

Call to Order: Commissioner Gabby Ciuffreda, Chair, called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Additions/Changes to Agenda: none

Secretary's Report: On a motion by Commissioner Lembke, seconded by Commissioner Cunningham, the August 8, 2023 minutes were approved by a unanimous vote.

Vermont Municipal Employee Retirement System (VMERS) Defined Benefit Proposal: The Board was asked by staff to consider providing existing employees with two options under the Vermont Municipal Employees Retirement System (VMERS) Defined Benefit program so employees can elect to participate in either Group A (which is offered now) or Group B (which would be offered if this proposal is approved). Should the action be taken, all future employees would only have the Group B Defined Benefit option. This proposal would only affect those employees participating in the Defined Benefit program, and would not affect those participating in the Defined Contribution program. The decision as to whether or not to move from Group A to Group B will be the decision of the employee, likely with counsel from VMERS staff. Similarly, if an employee is currently participating in the Defined Contribution program and would like to consider moving to the Defined Benefit program, they can also discuss that option with VMERS staff. Information comparing the costs and benefits for the program were presented by Chris and Inessa, as were budget options. Staff were asked to clarify the difference in benefits, and why this proposal was being brought now. It was explained that staff asked the Board to consider provision of the option when it was realized that the WRC was one of the last organizations participating exclusively in the lower benefit Group A option.

The Board was presented with the following resolution, which was brought forward as a motion by Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner North.

“The Windham Regional Commission presently participates in VMERS Group A for its qualifying employees. We elect to offer the higher Group B, effective 7/1/2024. VMERS will administer an election for existing employees to remain in their present Group A or to transfer to the higher Group B effective 7/1/2024. Any *newly hired* qualifying employee hired after the effective date not be given this election and will automatically be enrolled in Group B benefit plan effective 7/1/2024.”

The motion was passed by a unanimous vote.

The Board then discussed different FY2025 budget options so staff would understand what level of contribution towards the defined benefit program they'd be expected to make. The Board was presented with different options ranging from maintaining the same Group A level of employee and employer contribution going forward with staff picking up the difference between the employee Group A and Group B share, to having the WRC pay only the employer share and having staff pay the full employee share. Staff suggested the WRC continue the practice of paying both the employee and employer share of the Defined Benefit Group A program, using the VMERS Group A funding levels as the baseline funding assumption going forward, with employees who opt for Group B (and those new hires after 7/1/2024) paying the difference between the WRC Group A employee contribution and the employee contribution required under Group B. The increase to the budget would be about \$16,706.61, with the median employee contribution being \$72.68 per pay period. On a motion by Commissioner Lembke, seconded by Commissioner North, the staff suggested option was approved by a unanimous vote.

Windham Wood Heat Program Conclusion: The Board was asked to consider a recommendation from the Energy Committee in support of WRC closing out the Windham Wood Heat Program and using the remaining funds as a low to medium income adder for Windham County residents to the Small-Scale Renewable Energy Incentive Program (SSREIP) Advanced Wood Heating System (AWHS) administered by the Department of Public Service. On a motion by Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner North, the recommendation was approved by a unanimous vote.

Executive Director's Report: Chris updated the Board on state-level discussions he'd been asked to participate in, including Act 250 reform, the Building Energy Code Study Committee, and state designation reform. He also explained his ongoing role in coordinating between disaster response and recovery efforts and the RPCs in his role as chair of the Vermont Association of Planning and Development Agencies Emergency Management Committee. He noted that Senior Planner Alyssa Sabetto would be presenting the WRC role in emergency planning and disaster response for the September Full Commission meeting.

Committee Chair Updates: Commissioner Cunningham provided an update on the Mount Snow master plan and permit applications before the District 2 Environmental Commission. He noted the Windham Regional Plan policy that states permits for resorts should not be approved in the absence of a master plan. The Mount Snow master plan has expired, but it now has a stormwater permit before the District Environmental Commission. The Project Review Committee is submitting comments noting the WRC policy regarding master plans and permits and that it is technically in violation of Criterion 10, but recognizing the stormwater permit should go forward.

Review of Action Items: The intermunicipal services outreach will resume when capacity currently consumed by disaster response and recovery abates. The Personnel Committee will convene in autumn if necessary.

Public Comments: None.

Adjournment: On a motion by Commissioner Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner Lembke, the meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.