



STATE OF VERMONT
VERMONT INTERACTIVE WORKING GROUP
SEC. E.602.1 OF ACT 58 OF 2015

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Minutes

Members Present: Jim Porter, Chair; Rob Chapman, Paul Costello, Justin Johnson, Rep. Kathy Keenan, Marty Reid, John Sayles, Chad Wawrzyniak, Yasmine Ziesler

Absent: Kiersten Bourgeois

Additional Attendees: Annie Noonan, Commissioner, Department of Labor; Corey Chase, Department of Public Service; Michelle Hughes, Department of Public Service; Catherine Benham, Joint Fiscal Office; and Legislative Council staff; and various members of the public.

Agenda Topics/Minutes:

Convene Meeting and Approve Minutes

- The Chair, Jim Porter, Convened the meeting at 10:01am
- September 16 Minutes unanimously approved

Comments from the Chair

- New deadline to submit report moved to December 1st. There are 30 plus days to submit report.
- Goal of the committee is to present a system that could be operational by end of December.

Technology and equipment update:

John Sayles reported that VIT has contracted with Tilson Associates to conduct interviews with VIT staff, members of the Coordinating Council, and users and are in the process of completing a needs assessment report.

Jim Porter pointed out that the Vermont State Colleges represent 85 percent of VIT users and they are developing their own internal solution. Of the remaining 15 percent of users, many are one-time users and some are finding alternatives. Mr. Porter inquired whether the Working Group felt it was worth moving forward with a proposal to help serve the 15 percent. The Group answered in the affirmative.

Corey Chase presented an overview, with handout, of an option to move forward, which proposes to migrate existing VIT equipment to the 17 Career and Technical Education (CTE) sites across the State with the addition of new cameras at each site. The proposal, referred to as Vermont Video Connect (VVC), would provide a successor network to VIT. It envisions a modest annual stipend for the CTEs to host the technology and accommodate the public. The scope of the accommodation is not yet fully established. The expectation is that the annual stipend could cover user fees. The estimated upfront cost is \$220,000, and the annual ongoing cost is estimated at \$100,000

Discussion and questions followed which, among other things, addressed:

- The lifecycle of the system and maintenance fund
- CTE agreement and whether alternatives exist if not all CTEs want to participate
- Stipend amount
- Libraries as alternative; with stipend possibly
- Scheduling and onsite level of service
- Setting realistic expectations
- Process and procedures for users; criteria for service
- User fees, if any, based on categories of users
- Governance of new system
- Source of funding

Jim Porter indicated the DPS could take on supervision without additional staff. The expectation is that the service would be available December 31 on a limited basis, with expansion going forward. Not having a complete gap in service was important both for the integrity of the equipment and for maintaining the user base. If this proposal moved forward, the CTEs would provide the framework, but there also would be an opportunity to involve libraries and the access media organizations (AMOs) serving Vermont communities

John Sayles spoke to the fact that VIT spent time and effort “drumming up business.” There are business customers with high expectations of customer service. The new entity will not be able to fill the niche and provide such high-end service if it is free. The new entity will need to be clear what it will offer; it’s a great re-use of equipment and service, but will be very different from what had been offered.

Secretary Johnson spoke to the limitations on what can be done and agreed that we market as a “different thing.” Businesses that are looking for a full conference service may have to go elsewhere, as it won’t have the same level of service.

Rep. Keenan asked that the VSC direct VIT-related questions to Barbara Grimes.

Yasmine Ziesler apologized for any confusion and stated that the VSC’s staff is also thinking about how they can shift classes sooner to the new system, as they also are feeling pressure.

Michelle Hughes presented a SWOT Analysis of CTE videoconferencing and Vermont Tech/VSC videoconferencing, with handouts.

Next steps:

General discussion was had about the proposal, including the timeframe, costs, and presenting a report and proposal to the General Assembly.

John Sayles indicated the challenge would be staying robust without anyone in charge and that the \$100,000.00 annual fee is very bare bones. He inquired whether this really was the best investment for the State given that we do not know what the benefits will be and it looks under resourced.

Rep. Keenan stated that if it were done right it could generate income.

Marty Reid inquired about restrictions and indicated the understanding that it needs to be a free service.

Secretary Johnson asked about where VIT staff were going. He acknowledged that Mr. Sayles raised important questions. He suggested that the numbers be further vetted. He asked whether it made sense to create an advisory board; revisit in a year, and conduct a pilot program. He also indicated that Fiscal Year 2016 funding through budget adjustment would be available no earlier than February.

Corey Chase commented that all the equipment needs to be moved by the end of the year by the Department of Buildings and General Services. Jim Porter is meeting with Commissioner Obuchowski to discuss costs, etc.

Upon motion, John Sayles made the motion to move forward with the Department's VVC proposal, which was unanimously approved.

Rep. Keenan noted that the libraries could play a significant role going forward and should provide relevant information.

Public comments were heard from Stephen Whitaker.

Report due: December 1

Next meeting date: Tuesday, November 24th at 1:00 p.m. at the State House

Meeting adjourned: 11:44 a.m.

Meetings recorded by Chrissy Gilhuly, Legislative Council