

**NAMING STATE BUILDING AND FACILITIES REPORT  
CAPITOL COMPLEX COMMISSION  
DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES**

Prepared by:

Vermont Department of Libraries

**January 15, 2021**

## **NAMING STATE BUILDING AND FACILITIES; REPORT**

### **CAPITOL COMPLEX COMMISSION; DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES**

(a) Intent. The General Assembly intends to establish a plan for naming State buildings and facilities in the Capitol Complex in Montpelier and Statewide.

(b) Capitol Complex Commission. On or before January 15, 2021, the Capitol Complex Commission shall submit a report to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate Committee on Institutions with recommendations for a process to name State buildings and facilities in the Capitol Complex, as defined in 29 V.S.A. § 182.

(c) Department of Libraries. On or before January 15, 2021, the Department of Libraries shall submit a report to the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions and the Senate Committee on Institutions with recommendations for a process to name all State buildings and facilities, except for buildings and facilities located in the Capitol Complex, as defined in 29 V.S.A. § 182.

## **The Vermont State Board of Libraries Statues**

### **Title 10: Conservation and Development**

#### **Chapter 009: Geographic Names**

**(Cite as 10 V.S.A. § 152)**

- **§ 152. Authority to name geographic locations.**

The Board of Libraries is hereby designated the State agency to name geographic locations, including mountains, streams, lakes, and ponds, upon petition signed by not less than 25 interested persons or by petition of an administrative department of the State. (Added 1961, No. 139, § 3, eff. May 24, 1961; amended 1969, No. 226 (Adj. Sess.), § 2, eff. March 31, 1970; 2015, No. 40, § 25, eff. March 1, 2016; 2017, No. 74, § 16.)

### **Title 10: Conservation and Development**

#### **Chapter 009: Geographic Names**

**(Cite as 10 V.S.A. § 154)**

- **§ 154. Standards**

The Board in choosing names shall give preference to historical events, historic persons, and flora and fauna native to Vermont; names characteristic to Vermont; and its traditions and local place-names where long usage has made them appropriate and useful. (1961, No. 139, § 5, eff. May 24, 1961.)

### **Title 10: Conservation and Development**

#### **Chapter 009: Geographic Names**

**(Cite as 10 V.S.A. § 151)**

- **§ 151. Terminology and spelling**

(a) The State Librarian is authorized to furnish for any federal or state publication the proper terminology and spelling of any geographic name in Vermont and may advise the U.S. Postal service regarding the proper selection and spelling of the name of a Vermont post office or any railroad company regarding the use and spelling of the name of a Vermont station. The State Librarian is authorized to function in collaboration with the U.S. board on geographic names and to conduct his or her operations similarly.

(b) The names used in the topographic maps of the State now being prepared by the U.S. Geological Survey in cooperation with the State shall be spelled following the recommendations of the State Librarian. (Amended 1959, No. 329 (Adj. Sess.), § 45, eff. March 1, 1961.)

## IMPORTANT

### Title 29: Public Property and Supplies

#### Chapter 017: **Names of State Facilities**

(Cite as 29 V.S.A. § 820)

- **§ 820. The naming of State buildings and facilities**

Except for State transportation buildings and facilities named by the Transportation Board per 19 V.S.A. § 5, the name by which a State building or facility is to be known shall be authorized by the General Assembly. (Added 1993, No. 233 (Adj. Sess.), § 78, eff. June 21, 1994; amended 2015, No. 40, § 26a, eff. March 1, 2016.)

### **Vermont Board of Libraries Geographic Naming Policies**

The Board of Libraries is the statutorily designated body to name geographic locations, including mountains, streams, lakes, and ponds. (10 V.S.A. § 151-154). To meet its statutory responsibilities, the Board will adhere to the following policies:

I. The Board will rely on 10 V.S.A. § 154 in making decisions: "...give preference to historical events, historic persons and flora and fauna native to Vermont, names characteristic to Vermont and its traditions and local place-names where long usage has made them appropriate and useful."

II. The Board will not approve more than one name for any geographic feature or location.

III. The Board will not name any geographic feature or location that commemorates or may be construed to commemorate living persons. **A person must have been deceased for at least five years before a commemorative proposal will be considered.** A person in whose honor a naming is being proposed must have had strong ties to the feature in keeping with 10 V.S.A. § 154 or have made a significant contribution to the area of Vermont. Commemorative names for individuals with outstanding national or international reputations will be considered even if those individuals were not directly associated with the geographic feature or location.

**IV. The Board will not name state roads, highways, bridges, or other transportation-related entities. These come under the jurisdiction of the Vermont Transportation Board.**

V. The Board will not name city streets or town roads. These come under the jurisdiction of the municipalities.

VI. The Board will recommend to the U. S. Board on Geographic Names that it did not make official for use in or on any Federal publication any Vermont name or name change for geographic features or locations which should come to the Vermont Board of Libraries for such action.

VII. The Board will consider no petition from an administrative department of State government unless that administrative department's governing board has voted to initiate the petition and a copy of the minutes pertaining thereto accompany the petition.

VIII. The Board has the authority to determine whether it will take any action on a petition when no one appears at the public hearing to testify either on behalf of or against the proposed naming. (This was a telephone opinion by Louis Peck, Assistant Attorney General, April 28, 1978.)

## **Things to consider for starting a process of State Building and Facility Naming**

### **1. Who can and how do you request a building or facility to be named or renamed?**

For the Board of Libraries, any interested person can submit a petition for the board to review. If it meets all the requirements the board will review and vote upon the matter, after a 30-day public notice. However, the vague nature of "*interested persons*" can present issues and conflicts. Previous State Librarians have in practice, required that the primary petitioner be a resident in the town the feature is located and that all signatories (25 signatures required) were Vermont residents. However, the state statute does not currently specify this, unless the Board can vote on a definition of 'interested parties' and submit it through the APA process.

What can potentially happen is conflicts between local and state control, rural villages and major cities or other regional conflicts. Vermont has a strong base for local control, and when entities not from the immediate area intervene with no consideration to the local town or its residents it can create unnecessary conflicts. One way the Board works to mitigate this is to request any petitioners talk to the local select boards, historical societies, or other relevant agencies in the area. If they can foster a sense of local buy-in, the petition has more support.

The main reason this is done is that this is for the benefit of the residents who live and work in the area. *Is their business named after the location? Will this affect tourism? Is it historically accurate?* Another good reason to connect petitioners to towns is for the valuable research and insight they can provide into local history, names, and common associations with either the current name, the proposed name or the feature itself.

## **2. Will, there be a public comment or How will you provide a public comment?**

As Vermont representatives and senators, it is always best to work to hear all sides to a story, both in favor and disfavor of the proposed name, or its current name. Part of the Board of Libraries' process is to send notice to town clerks, with requests to have the item discussed at the next Selectboard hearing. Notice is also posted to the State Calendar, the town's newspaper of record where the feature is located, and the Department of Libraries website. During the meeting itself, every Board of Libraries meeting has a section at the beginning of every hearing for public comment, as well as requests for comments from the petitioners and why the name is proposed and requests for comments of public support or rejection. The Board of Libraries then continues to discuss the pros and cons of the petition considering these concerns.

This process truly allows for all Vermonters to be heard, the pros and cons of any petition proposal, the pros, and cons of the current name (if there is one). This also allows the Board to make the best decision and successfully navigate any issues that arrive.

### **3. What guidelines do you want to put in place for naming state buildings and facilities?**

To provide a thoughtful process on geographic naming, procedures and policies are a must, as are standards. Per state statute, the Board has guidelines to give preference to historical events, historic persons and flora and fauna native to Vermont, names characteristic to Vermont and its traditions, and local place-names where long usage has made them appropriate and useful. (1961, No. 139, § 5, eff. May 24, 1961.) But how does one determine importance and relevance? How does one consider when to name something after fauna and flora? One of the ways we address this is by working alongside the United States Board on Geographic Names (USBGN) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS). They, along with our team of researchers, will investigate the history of the feature, any events or persons associated with it, and the history of its current name (if there is one) and of the name being proposed.

From there, we also have consolidated our process to be in line with USBGN regarding commemorative naming policies, as well as for the standardization of names. Our goal is to have names be consistent on local, state, and federal maps. Ensuring standardization means that emergency dispatch services, local colloquialism, and federal agencies can all locate a specific feature or agency consistently. This ensures emergency response time is as efficient as possible, regardless of which maps are utilized.

Additionally, consolidating the commemorative naming policy with USBGN has allowed for better handling of timing issues. For example, a petition passed by the board before the 5-year waiting period could be held until the requirements are met, if agreed upon by the board. Additionally, the decision to not name any features after anyone living is enforced.

There are a few important points regarding commemorative naming that must be considered. First, the Board and USBGN do not consider land ownership enough to have a place named after you. Homes, lands, properties change hands consistently, a home in a hundred years may have owned by 1 family or by 50. Secondly, if they are still alive, controversy is still to be had. Having a waiting period also mitigates this issue. Additionally, the waiting period also ensures that the feature is not constantly changing names every time a new person owns the land or recently dies.

If they meet the five-year waiting period on a commemorative naming request, the question then becomes: *are they considered to be a historic person? How have they contributed to the founding, the creation, the development, the culture of Vermont? Many notable Vermonters live and work and are important to their immediate family, but how involved were they with the community? The State?*

These are brutal questions that must be asked and considered. Going through and selecting these names, reviewing the history, reviewing the context, allows for a thoughtful, intentional process. While slow to move, it also ensures consistency and care.

Please note, the USBGN will not approve any commercial name requests, and the Board is inclined to side with this as well. Businesses do not represent Vermont, its people, its history, its culture does.

#### **4. Will you review proposals for names or renaming? How and who will you review proposals?**

Currently, both the Board and USBGN send notice to several agencies, including towns, the petitioners, and assisting agencies. USBGN also gives notice to local federally recognized tribes, fish and wildlife departments, and a few other agencies. We give notice to Forests, Parks, and Rec, towns, local stakeholders, and anyone else that requests to be part of the distribution list.

*But how do you incorporate all the people that will need to have a voice or say in the petition or proposal? How do you solicit feedback from these agencies? How long will you provide staff to research and talk to interested persons or agencies? Will you require a written summary and history from staff? How long of public notice will you provide? How will you structure the final review?*

Both USBGN and the Board of Libraries have multiple members with varied backgrounds to vote and review the petitions. It is generally recommended when there is a state law involved, someone with experience in geographic naming, someone that understands mapping.



## 5. What steps can you take to mitigate controversy?

Controversy will happen at some point. Naming can be a very complex and emotionally charged issue. *How will you slow the process down so that tensions do not rise, or are mitigated? How can you ensure the name chosen or the person you are naming a place after does not come under controversy later or during the process?*

## 6. How will you implement the decision and send a notice?

*Once a decision is made, how will you notify all the relevant agencies? Will you post a public notice? Decision orders? A distribution list? How will the agencies that need to be updated receive word that a name has changed?*

## Recommendations

In response to the legislative request for recommendations on naming state buildings and facilities, the recommendations below represent the conversations, review, examination, and research by the Vermont Department of Libraries staff and the State Librarian. Conversations included discussions with the Capitol Complex Commission and a request to have the recommendations be part of the report that was being requested for the Capitol Complex Commission. This was approved by the State Librarian. The information below are considerations for the Capitol Complex Commission to also consider for its naming of buildings or locations within the Capitol Complex.

- A. The authority for naming state buildings and facilities is the Vermont General Assembly per Title **29 V.S.A. § 820. This should remain so.**
- B. The Commissioner of the Department of Buildings and General Services should take an active role in conversations and in supporting the process of naming state buildings and facilities should a new one be developed. Both the Executive and Legislative Branches of Vermont State Government will have adequate and needed input into this process. Building and General Services are continually involved in the construction, design, renovation, and management of State buildings.
- C. The Building and General Services Commissioner should work closely with the Administration and General Assembly to have a transparent, fair, and consistent practice and policy for naming state buildings and facilities.
- D. There should be Public Comment and Submissions period.

- E. Solicit input from interested and/or affected parties.
- F. Commemorative naming guidelines creation
- G. Names of deceased persons should have a waiting period of 5 years or more. A petition, completed request, the proposal could be kept until the appropriate time to act upon the request. Or the General Assembly may require all petitions to be complete and new for any naming request each year.
- H. No naming or renaming for living persons.
- I. Sort out how to distribute notice of the decision to emergency personnel, towns, cities, and all other associated entities that will need to know the new name.
- J. A name whose honor is being proposed should have strong connections or ties to the building or the work for Vermonters that is conducted or associated with the building or have made a significant contribution to the area.
- K. Commemorative names for individuals with an outstanding national or intergenerational reputation could be considered even if those individuals were not directly associated with the geographic feature or location or building.
- L. Defining specific terminology that is deliberate will mitigate confusion.... Terms or associated terms such as “significant contribution” ... “direct long-term association” ...
- M. The naming of a building is not normally associated with the individual’s death, associated trauma/emergency, or injury near or at the building itself.
- N. Create a well-rounded board to consider and process petitions or name changes.
- O. Ensure there is a clear understanding of any groups or parties that are rejected for a naming request to understand why the request was not approved. Many naming entities find many rejections occur because the request does not meet or comply with the process and requirements. The policies and requirements will limit commemorative naming requests. This should be part of a failure to meet the process requirements and not an indication of disapproving or negative reflection of a person’s achievements.
- P. One name, one “agreed upon” spelling, and one proposal/application/petition for a facility or entity.

- Q. There should be a period once the name is approved that will allow it to remain in place for a duration of time. Most considerations are to have a name last at least 50 years. This is to avoid constant and or continual changes.
- R. If a name is to be reconsidered after being approved there should be standards that are clear and transparent to ensure discussions and reviews. Having guidelines or policies that provide context and details as to how to remove a recently approved name due to specific actions or circumstances will assist lawmakers and the public.
- S. Duplicate names within a local political jurisdiction are not normally items that many municipalities and states approve. While many examples can be listed where this does occur, for most of the country it is not seen as favorable.
- T. Ownership of land by itself is not generally sufficient grounds to have the approval of a commemorative name.
- U. There will be an absorbent amount of research needed to examine the life, work, contribution, and review of a name if it is a person. The department has 1.5 FTE persons working on research and review of the process. Considerations should be made to examine tasks and research associated with tasks such as handling documents, connecting with researchers, communicating with the public, answering questions and queries, and providing decisions to all applicable entities across state government, the state of Vermont, and if needed national entities.
- V. Contract with a researcher and reviewer of historical and current information that will examine based upon the history of the name, work, experiences, and contributions for the commemorative name. Another suggestion is to contract with the Vermont Historical Society or other historical entity to examine the historical information and provide a report.
- W. Avoid naming policies that may create decisions that may be considered fraught, emotional, or political on the naming process.
- X. There are considerations across the country to name a building and public interior space. Public Interior spaces should be held to the same standards of naming state buildings and facilities.
- Y. Some states in the past have named items or a process after deceased persons. Stamps and coinage are examples. These items or processes should be held to the same standard of naming a state-building and facility.

Z. IMPORTANT – Across the country, some jurisdictions or states require a supermajority vote by the governing body in favor of the name.

AA. HIGHLY Recommended: Amend Title 29 VSA 820 to be specific and clear on how names will be chosen, selected, and decided upon.

## WORKS CITED

- Broughton, Jason M. “State Board of Libraries Geographic Naming Policies.” *Vermont State Board of Libraries Geographic Naming Policies*, Vermont Department of Libraries, 2021, [libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/AboutUs/Board/2020\\_Geographic\\_Naming\\_Packet.pdf](https://libraries.vermont.gov/sites/libraries/files/AboutUs/Board/2020_Geographic_Naming_Packet.pdf).
- “Conservation and Development.” *State House Dome*, State of Vermont, 2021, [legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/10/009](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/chapter/10/009).
- “Public Property and Supplies.” *State House Dome*, Vermont General Assembly, 2021, [legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/title/29](https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/title/29).
- “USGS Science for a Changing World, Commemorative Naming in the United States.” *Commemorative Naming in the United States*, USGS, Nov. 1999, [pubs.usgs.gov/fs/1999/0158/report.pdf](https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/1999/0158/report.pdf).
- “Vermont State Board of Libraries; Department of Libraries, Agency of Administration.” *State of Vermont Board of Libraries | Department of Libraries*, A Vermont Government Website, State of Vermont, 2021, [libraries.vermont.gov/about\\_us/board](https://libraries.vermont.gov/about_us/board).