

The Vermont Business Portal

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James Condos, Secretary of State

Michael Schirling, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

John Quinn, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Digital Services

A REPORT ON THE DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF AN ENTERPRISE SOLUTION THAT SIMPLIFIES BUSINESS
INTERACTIONS WITH THE STATE OF VERMONT

The Charge

Pursuant to § 85 of Act 196 (2018), *An act relating to simplifying government for small businesses*:

“A steering committee composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce and Community Development, and the Secretary of Digital Services shall review and consider the necessary procedural and substantive steps to enhance the Secretary of State’s one-stop business portal for businesses, entrepreneurs, and citizens to provide information about starting and operating a business in Vermont; and

Submit a design proposal that includes a project scope, timeline, roadmap, cost projections, and any statutory or regulatory changes needed to implement the proposal.”

The Goal

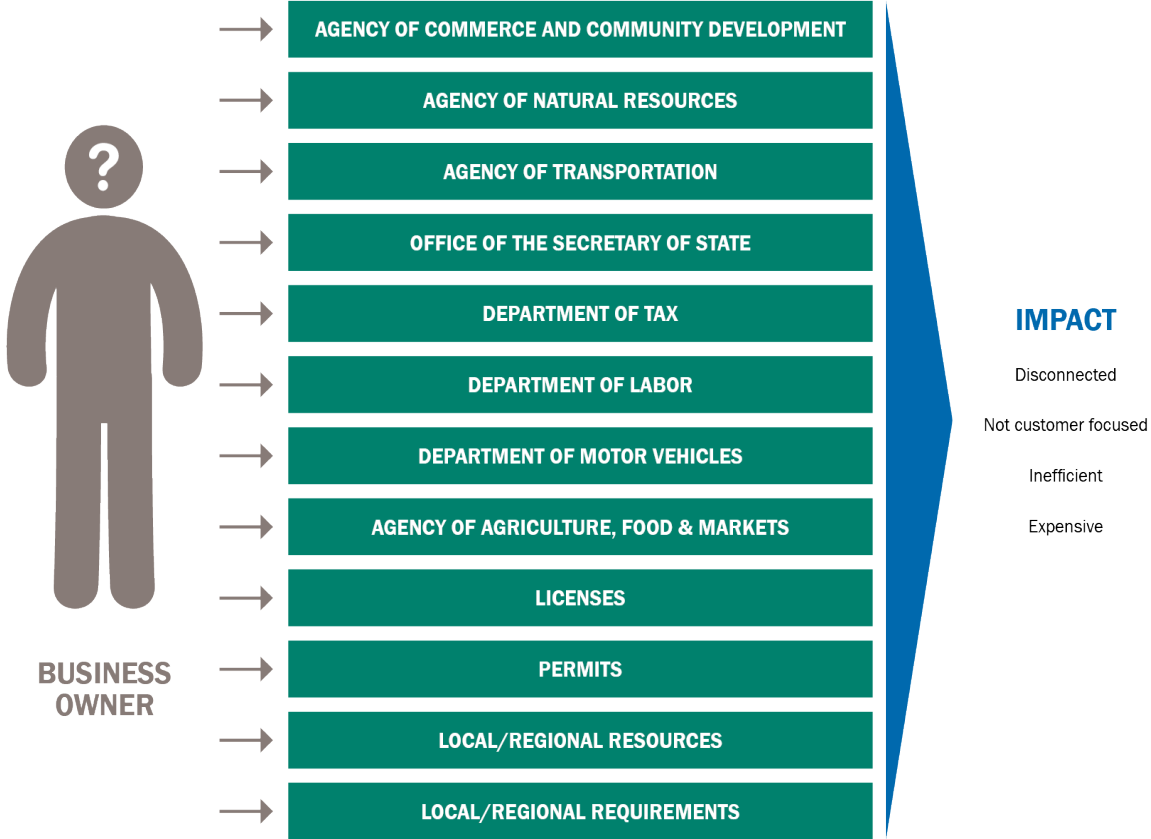
To simplify the business registration process by:

- Delivering a **single point-of-entry**
- Providing an easy-to-use, **customer-focused interface** that will **unify government systems**
- Enabling **one-time data entry** that will pre-populate across agency forms
- Providing a **guided walkthrough of requirements**
- Allowing **one payment** to be submitted to the state
- Accessing **support** when it's needed the most
- **Ongoing work** with agencies and the business community to **enhance and add functionality** over the course of many years.

The Problem

- Registering and operating a business can be a cumbersome process
- Business owners say this process is often too complicated and takes too much time
- Vermont businesses want to be compliant with state and local regulations, but often don't understand what is required of them
- Too much time is spent filling out forms, rather than operating and growing a business
- There is often no estimated time frame given for decisions on forms and applications
- Agencies do not have the ability to efficiently gain access to another agency's information or data, and efforts are not coordinated
- Resources and information for businesses are scattered, inconsistent and hard to find

Current State



The General Store Example

Annual Licenses	Agency/Department	Food Retail W/O Gas	Food Retail W/ Gas
License to Operate Food Establishment	Agriculture, Food & Markets		
Small Commercial Bakery License	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$200	\$200
Food Processor License	Agriculture Food & Markets	\$275	\$275
Seafood Vendor License	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$200	\$200
Shellfish Shipper/Re-packer	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$375	\$375
Retail Pricing Scanning Points Registration	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$10/Scale	\$10/Scale
Class C Pesticides License (Flea Collars, Ant Cups, OFF)	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$75	\$75
Frozen Desert (Ice Cream, Slushies, Etc.)	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$75	\$75
Milk License	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$20	\$20
Pre-packaged Meats	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$15	\$15
Meat Processing – Small Store	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$50	\$50
Meat Processing – Large Store	Agriculture, Food & Markets	\$100	\$100
1 st Class Liquor License	Liquor Control		
2 nd Class Liquor License	Liquor Control		
Motor Fuels License	Transportation		
Motor Fuels Inspection	Transportation	\$25/Per Tank	
Small Scales Registration	Transportation	\$10/Scale	\$10/Scale

How Can We Help?

“I can’t plan to start my business if the state doesn’t get back to me – even if it’s not the answer I wanted, I need an answer. I need certainty.”

“There’s so much to starting a business that I don’t know where to start. It’s overwhelming.”

“I have multiple state staff calling and visiting me. They have no idea that another person visited me the prior week.”

“With licenses and permits, I’m told to expect a certain outcome and then the next week the outcome is something different with no notice of any changes.”

Responsible Business Owners

“I need to remember multiple usernames and passwords for multiple state government systems.”

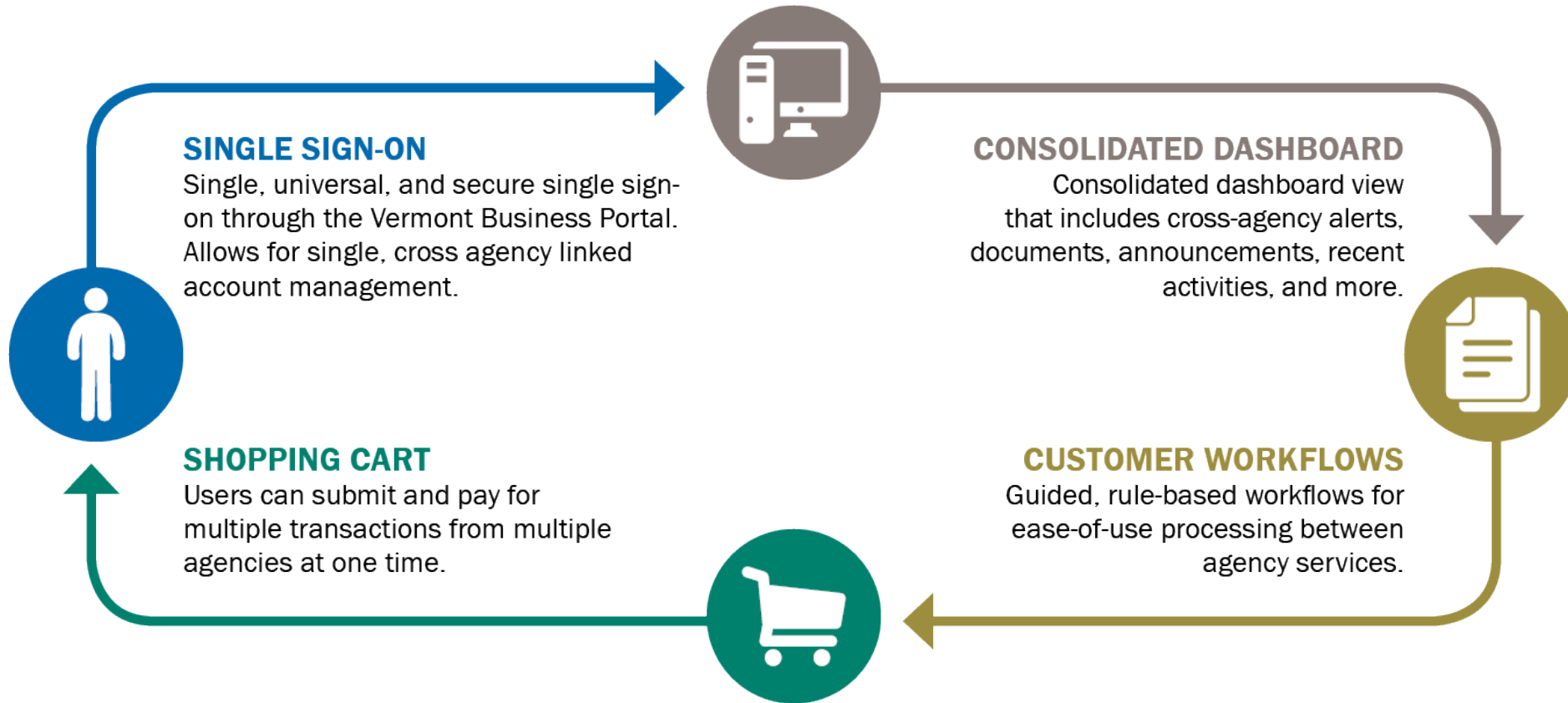
“I don’t know what is required of me. Just let me know and I’ll do it.”

“The information I need is scattered and inconsistent. It would be great to organize it in one place.”

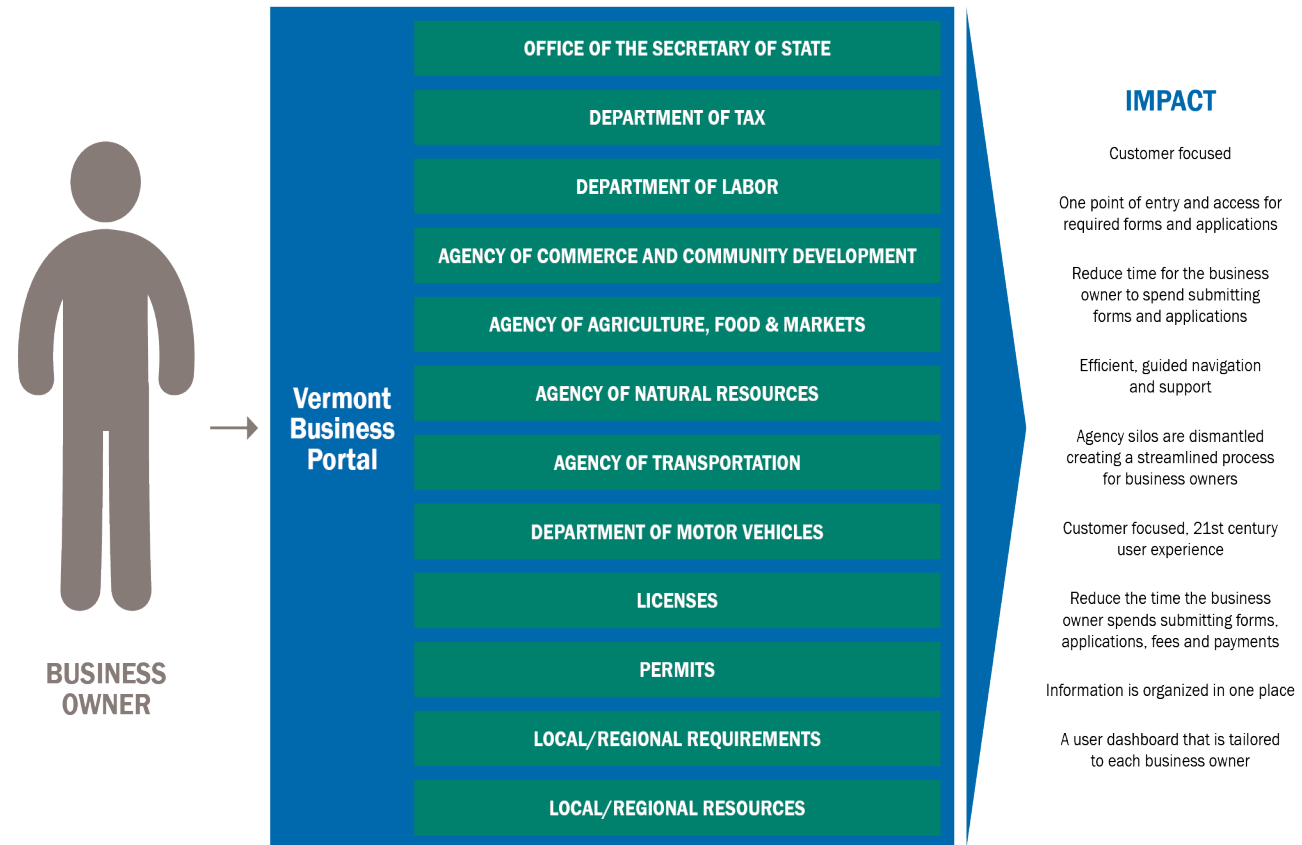
“I’m constantly entering the same information repeatedly with different agencies and departments.”

“I do not know if there are licenses and permits I must obtain when I’m starting my business. Is there a checklist somewhere?”

Planned Features



Future State



Other State/City Implementations

During each presentation, the most important lesson learned was the need for a **strong governance structure and leadership from the top level of government**. Other lessons gleaned from state successes and failures:

- A **phased, agile approach** was most effective, with quick wins garnering buy-in
- Stay focused on **the doable**
- **Do not let the technology dictate the requirements** – establish the vision and stick to it
- Robust, **shared governance is key**
- The project **must be fully supported and resourced**
- Focus on the **business/customer needs**, not the agency/state needs
- Pay close attention to **data governance**: sensitivity vs. transparency
- **Allow the agencies to drive the scope and come along at their pace** – the goal isn't replacing their systems – just the way they gather data, share information, and present themselves to customers



CONNECTICUT
portal.ct.gov/services/business



INDIANA
inbiz.in.gov/BOS/Home/Index



MARYLAND
egov.maryland.gov/businessexpress



NEVADA
nvsilverflume.gov/home



SAN FRANCISCO
businessportal.sfgov.org/

Other Benefits

The project team has done a lot of work to understand the needs of businesses, as well as state agencies. A new and improved portal could align with the efforts of other visionary teams and state initiatives.

Some of that work includes:

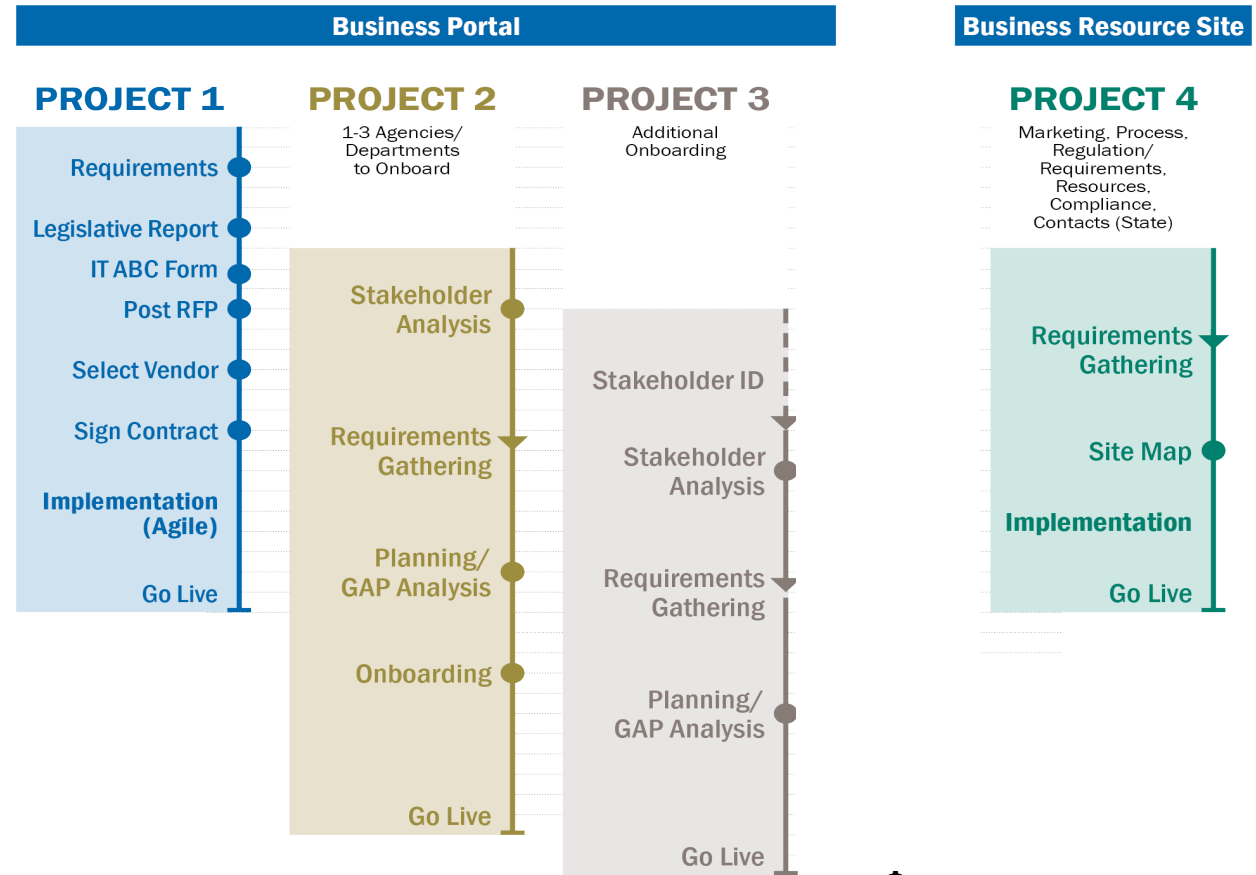
- Improved Agency Coordination and data/information sharing amongst state staff;
- Permit process improvement with the Permit Performance Improvement (PIVOT) team;
- Understanding how a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) solution could work for the entire state and for individuals beyond just businesses so that each agency may access information that is relevant to their specific work;

Other Benefits (cont.)

- A Data Portal on the horizon to harness the power of information: understanding how each agency collects and utilizes data, determining what data can and needs to be shared amongst agencies, and coordinating work with the Chief Data Officer within ADS to build a data governance structure around those use cases;
- A unified and thoughtful web presence for the State of Vermont: cleaning, updating and organizing Vermont.gov and other partner agency websites;
- Agency efficiency: improving and coordinating processes, reducing data entry efforts, improving accuracy, creating greater revenue capture and regulatory compliance, and eliminating the duplication of efforts; and
- Connecting businesses to resources: providing responsive and effective customer service, understanding what is available through the state and from outside partners and looking at ways to consolidate those resources and better share information and services.

Program Roadmap

- The Future Vermont Business Portal will be broken up into multiple projects. Project 1 will include the procurement and implementation of the technology solution – The Foundation
- Future projects will include repeatable onboarding of agencies and services determined by the Steering Committee
- A separate, concurrent project would compile business resources in one place.



Personnel Cost

FY'

Position	Hourly Rate of Pay	Average # of Hours Per Month	State Estimates
Project Manager	\$88.00	100	\$59,840.00
Business Analyst	\$100.00	120	\$72,000.00
Enterprise Architect	\$88.00	40	\$14,080.00
Chief Data Officer	\$84.00	20	\$8,400.00
Total			\$154,320.00

FY'

Position	Hourly Rate of Pay	Average # of Hours Per Month	State Estimates
Project Manager	\$88.00	120	\$124,960.00
Business Analyst	\$100.00	120	\$144,000.00
Enterprise Architect	\$84.00	40	\$37,800.00
Chief Data Officer	\$84.00	16	\$16,380.00
Total			\$323,140.00

System Costs

General Requirements Description	Cost
System Development	Foundation and then one time / new onboarding
Project Management Services	Ongoing
Hosting	Monthly
Licensing	Annually
Maintenance (includes SLA's)	Annually

Conclusion (2018)

The Vermont Business Portal Steering Committee recommends an investment in a new Business Portal **making it easier to start, maintain and grow a small business in the State of Vermont.**

For such a venture to be successful, the State should take steps toward this goal by:

- Showing strong **leadership from the top levels of state government** and **mandating agency participation**
- Agreeing upon a **robust governance structure**
- Setting forth a **solid project management plan**
- Committing to a significant **funding allocation** to make the project a success

Business Portal 2019

- Project manager position continued, funded by SOS Special Funds surplus retained (\$200K)
- Requirements gathering continued
- RFP initiated and competitive bids reviewed
- RFP awarded (MTX, Inc.)
- Prototype built on good faith / no contract
- Contracting process begins
- Project still seeking funding

Business Portal 2020

- Funding for project included in Governor's budget (\$1M)
- Additional finding proposed through revolving IT fund in House Appropriations (\$500K)
- Still seeking another \$500K for anticipated \$2.15M cost
- Proposed July start date, December completion
- COVID-19!**
- Priorities shift, budgets get scrapped – project stalls
- Contracting and requirements gathering work continues

Business Portal 2020 (continued)

- CRF funding materializes (\$2M):
 - Create a critically important business database and avenue for communication with all registered businesses and business types;
 - Bring more transactions online to facilitate remote work;
 - Create employee and agency efficiency at a time of concerning revenue loss;
 - Promote small business development by simplifying interactions with the state in a difficult economy and at a time when relief is so desperately needed;
 - Make much-needed state, federal, private and nonprofit resources and information more readily available; and
 - House business relief applications and tracking of CRF grants as they are awarded.
- September: Funding released

Business Portal 2020 (continued)

- With funding secured, project team sprints for end of CY20 CRF deadline
- More complexity than anticipated with Business Registration requirements
- Team decides to create a “bridge” between business registration and the portal instead of full replacement to meet the deadline
- CRF spending deadline extended to end of CY21
- Team resets, deciding not to rush an incomplete system to Go Live
- Go Live TBD, Phase One work well under way
- Decisions needed on: program creation, location within state government, dedicated director and/or staff, additional funding, and sustainable funding model

Coming Soon: Vermont Business Express

James Condos, Secretary of State

Lindsay Kurrle, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development

John Quinn, Secretary, Vermont Agency of Digital Services

A ONE STOP ENTERPRISE SOLUTION THAT SIMPLIFIES BUSINESS
INTERACTIONS WITH THE STATE OF VERMONT