



# **Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House Report**

Report to the Vermont General Assembly  
Pursuant to 2021 Acts and Resolves No. 50, Section 32

Prepared by the Office of Legislative Counsel

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## **A. Introduction**

The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House has met weekly for almost two months and members have had robust and productive discussions about how best to return to the State House in January. We have benefited greatly from the support from legislative staff who work in the State House and from staff at BGS.

Our task was to make recommendations on how to return to work in the State House, recognizing that the State House is the proper place for us to conduct legislative business, while also a workplace and a living museum. In light of the global pandemic, these different roles may conflict, and we have done our best to make recommendations to resolve these conflicts or to identify issues that should be resolved in other venues or at a later time.

The recommendations in this report were made at a point in time. The COVID-19 situation is fluid and decisions pertaining to the General Assembly's return to the State House should be made as the year progresses.

We have not agreed on everything and our report reflects our debate and decisions, but we are all in agreement that meeting in the State House next January will require flexibility and a willingness to adapt.

In ordinary times, the building buzzes with energy and conversation and people. Members of the public, legislative staff, members of the administration, school groups, tourists, press, lobbyists, advocates and, of course, legislators all contribute to that energy. To a greater or lesser extent, each of these groups is interested in or supports our core mission which is to legislate on behalf of the people of the state.

But these are extraordinary times. The usual buzz of energy and people will inevitably be affected. We believe our recommendations, which are based on what we know today, will allow us to return to the State House in January. But these recommendations will only work if every one of the groups with an interest or need to be present in the building is willing to accommodate some level of change.

**B. Statutory Charge of the Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House**

2021 Acts and Resolves No. 50, Sec. 32

Sec. 32. LEGISLATIVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE STATE HOUSE; STATE  
HOUSE LEGISLATIVE SPACE AND DESIGN; REPORT

(a)(1) The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House shall review and make recommendations on any space and design proposals for the State House. The review shall take into account the Freeman, French, and Freeman, Legislative Space Study, 2021–2022, dated April 26, 2021. Prior to making any recommendations, the Committee shall consult with legislators, legislative staff, and relevant stakeholders on space needs.

(2) The Committee shall have the assistance of a planning architect from the Department of Buildings and General Services.

(b) On or before August 15, 2021, the Committee shall submit a report with its recommendations to the Joint Legislative Management Committee, the Joint Rules Committee, the House Committee on Corrections and Institutions, and the Senate Committee on Institutions.

### **C. Functions of the Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House**

#### 2 V.S.A. § 653. FUNCTIONS

(a)(1) The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House shall be consulted on all activities relating to the acquisition and care of paintings and historic artifacts and furnishings, and the refurbishing, renovation, preservation, and expansion of the building and its interior.

(2) The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House shall develop a plan for the acquisition or commission of artwork for the State House collection that represents Vermont's diverse people and history, including diversity of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability status.

(b) The Sergeant at Arms and the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services, in discharging responsibilities under subdivision 62(a)(6) of this title and 29 V.S.A. §§ 154(a) and 154a, respectively, shall consider the recommendations of the Committee. The Committee's recommendations shall be advisory only.

**D. Members of the Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House**

The Legislative Advisory Committee shall be composed of the following 13 members:

Four members of the House of Representatives:.....Rep. Alice Emmons (Chair)

Rep. Janet Ancel

Rep. John Bartholomew

Rep. Butch Shaw

Four members of the Senate:.....Sen. Joe Benning

Sen. Alison Clarkson

Sen. Ruth Hardy

Sen. Anthony Pollina

The Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Friends of the Vermont State House.....John Dumville

The Director of the Vermont Historical Society.....Stephen Perkins

The Director of the Vermont Council on the Arts.....Karen Mittelman

The Commissioner of Buildings and General Services.....Jennifer Fitch

The Sergeant at Arms.....Janet Miller

## **E. Summary of Advisory Committee Proceedings**

### **1. Testimony and Committee Deliberation**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vermont General Assembly ceased operations within its State House in March 2020. The Vermont General Assembly continued its work remotely for 16 months. Now that 85 percent of Vermonters are vaccinated, the Legislature hopes to move back into the State House to conduct its business. The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House has been charged with recommending ways in which the General Assembly, its staff, and the public can return to work in person. This is an extraordinary time with lots of challenges. Returning to the State House will require flexibility and a willingness to adapt from all who work in and visit the State House. The recommendations of the Committee are intended to be temporary, not permanent, solutions.

The Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House met nine times between June 22, 2021, and August 18, 2021, to review proposals for the use of space at the State House and other buildings or facilities within the Capitol Complex. The Committee heard testimony from multiple members of the legislative staff, including the Sergeant at Arms, the Chief of the Capitol Police Department, the Director of Legislative Information Technology, the Director of Legislative Operations, the Director of Human Resources, Joint Fiscal Office Staff, Committee Services Staff, Legal and Drafting Operations Staff from the Office of Legislative Counsel, the Secretary of the Senate, and the Clerk of the House of Representatives. The Committee also received testimony from staff from the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS), including Joseph Aja, the Director for Design and Construction, and Stephen Frey, a Senior Facility Architect and Planner. The research and documents provided by Stephen Frey are posted on the Committee's web page and can be found at the following link:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/committee/document/2022/71/Witness/Stephen%20Frey#documents-section>

The Committee discussed multiple standards or proposals for use of the space available to the Vermont General Assembly for the 2022 legislative session. The Committee discussed whether and how to require COVID-19 vaccination for entry into the Vermont State House and whether proof of vaccination or personal protective equipment should be required for use of the State House. The Committee also discussed the use of certain air quality performance standards as a metric for determining capacity or recommended use of committee rooms and other spaces in the State House. The Committee learned that air flow and air quality are not the same metric and that air flow does not guarantee air quality. Multiple witnesses testified to recommend that the committee hearings during the 2022 legislative session should continue to be livestreamed and that legislators, staff, and witnesses continue to have access to committee proceedings through video conferencing tools.

The Committee had multiple discussions regarding the use of space within the State House and how that space could best be used to meet legislative needs at this time. Discussions included whether certain smaller committee rooms in the State House should be used for committee proceedings during the 2022 session. The Committee also discussed whether other spaces in the State House should be converted to committee rooms to allow for an improved work environment. In addition, the Committee addressed whether the General Assembly should establish and enforce capacity limits for legislative spaces. Similarly, the Committee considered how to use spaces outside of the State House during the 2022 legislative session.

The Committee also discussed whether to move certain staff and legislative workspaces within the State House or to other buildings or facilities within the Capitol Complex. When



considering additional workspaces, the Committee discussed the use of 2 Governor Aiken Avenue, 4 Governor Aiken Avenue, 133 State Street, and 109 State Street.

## 2. Overview of Committee Recommendations

After significant deliberation and debate on testimony and multiple proposals, the Committee recommends 28 measures be reviewed, considered, and acted on by the Joint Legislative Management Committee (JLMC) or the relevant committee on Rules so that the General Assembly returns to physical use of the State House for most legislative activities. Specifically, the recommendations of the Committee will allow for floor proceedings of the Senate and House to be conducted within the State House. Similarly, standing committees of the General Assembly would return to physical meetings within the State House. In addition, the media and the public would be granted physical access to legislative proceedings, subject to potential measures to mitigate health risks.

### **F. Advisory Committee Recommendations**

While the Committee recognizes that it is not possible to completely protect people from exposure to infectious diseases, the Committee puts forth these recommendations in hopes of reducing the risk and providing for the comfort and safety of everyone using the State House. The Committee recommends implementation of the following:

1. The decision to resume legislative work in the State House should be evaluated by JLMC, the Rules Committees, and legislative leadership later in the year because the pandemic situation is fluid.
2. Persons entering the State House, including legislators, staff, advocates, media, and the public, should be strongly encouraged to be vaccinated for the COVID-19 virus but should not be required to be vaccinated to physically access the Vermont State House

during the 2022 legislative session. However, this vote was taken on June 29, 2021 and was based on the best information available at the time.

3. The JLMC and the relevant Rules committees should assess whether masks or other personal health measures should be required for the 2022 legislative session based on State health orders and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidance issued between submission of this report and the convening of the 2022 legislative session.
4. The standing committees of the Vermont General Assembly should meet physically within the State House during the 2022 legislative session.
5. Capacity within each room should be limited to the number of seats available in the room. Capacity limits should be enforced by committee leadership within each committee. Committee staff should not be required to enforce capacity limits.
6. Regularly scheduled caucuses of the political parties should meet within the State House. Subject to approval by the relevant Rules committees, regularly scheduled caucuses of the political parties should use the House Chamber, the Senate Chamber, or an appropriately sized committee room. Unscheduled or occasional caucuses of the political parties should use the House Chamber, the Senate chamber, the cafeteria, Room 11, or Room 24 (Legislative Lounge) when available.
7. Subject to approval of the relevant Rule committees, the House Chamber or the Senate Chamber should be used as a potential meeting space for joint standing committee meetings and certain non-standing committee meetings.
8. Standing Committees, joint committee meetings, and public hearings should have priority use of legislative spaces through standard scheduling processes administered by the Sergeant at Arms' office. Specialty and issue caucuses should meet in 109 or 133 State

Street when appropriate space in the State House is not available. The Sergeant at Arms' office should coordinate a unified scheduling process for spaces.

9. Use of the Card Room for presentations by advocates or special interests should be paused for the 2022 legislative session to prevent congestion and allow for greater air flow in the hallways of the third floor of the State House.
10. "Side bars" and receptions during the 2022 legislative session should be held in the cafeteria with a limit of one in the morning and one in the afternoon.
11. The Cedar Creek Room should not be used for presentations, large press conferences, or receptions during the 2022 legislative session because of issues with congestion and air flow in that room.
12. Those press conferences scheduled through the Sergeant at Arms' office should be based on space available within the Capitol Complex.
13. Large press conferences should be held primarily in 109 State Street. The Committee was split on the use of the Cedar Creek Room for small press conferences.
14. During the 2022 legislative session, school tours or group tours, including sports teams subject to a congratulatory resolution, should be limited to no more than two tours a day and no more than 25 participants per tour group. Schools and legislators should be informed prior to the 2022 legislative session that group tours should only be allowed with the prior authorization of the Sergeant at Arms.
15. The Sergeant at Arms should be authorized to spend up to \$750,000 from the \$2,500,000 appropriated to the General Assembly in Act 74 of 2021 to retrofit or fit up the State House to meet the public health and space needs of the General Assembly during the

2022 legislative session. A full summary of the proposed expenditures can be found in the memo the Sergeant at Arms submitted to the Advisory Committee on August 3, 2021, which can be found here:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2022/WorkGroups/StHouse/Documents%20and%20Testimony/W~Janet%20Miller~Funding%20Request%20from%20Sgt%20at%20Arms%20to%20Meet%20Pre-session%20Facility%20Needs~8-3-2021.pdf>.<sup>1</sup>

16. Video conferencing and livestreaming tools used by standing committees during the 2021 legislation session should continue to be available for use by standing committees. However, the Committee recommends that JLMC or the House and Senate Rules Committees develop protocols or rules for the appropriate use of the tools, including protocols on when to use the tools, when to allow persons to participate through video conferencing, and how to police inappropriate use of the tools. Key questions that JLMC or the Rules committees should address are whether and how floor proceedings in the House and Senate should be livestreamed or recorded; whether YouTube is the best tool for use of livestreaming or recording; and how long recordings of floor proceedings and committee hearings should be retained on the Internet or, alternatively, in the Vermont State Archives and Records Administration's records center.
17. Approve the request of the Office of Legislative Information Technology to expend funds to prepare or retrofit the House and Senate chamber, committee rooms, and other legislative spaces for livestreaming, video conferencing, and improved audio systems. The total funds proposed for expenditure are \$900,000 of federal Coronavirus Relief Funds. Of those funds, \$400,000 would be used to fit up committee rooms with A/V

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<sup>1</sup> The Joint Legislative Management Committee approved this expenditure on August 5, 2021. See Joint Legislative Management Committee, Meeting August 5, 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBjfZJ5jdBE>

technology to enable video conference and livestreaming in all committee rooms. The remaining \$500,000 would be used to fit up the House and Senate Chambers with A/V technology, enabling videoconference and livestreaming as determined by standards established by the relevant Rules committee.<sup>2</sup> These funds will come out of the \$2,500,000 appropriated to the legislature in Act 74 of 2021.

18. Room 26 (Senate Committee on Agriculture) should not be used for a legislative standing committee, and the Senate Committee on Agriculture should meet in Room 13 (Office of Senate President Pro Tempore). The Senate Pro Tem would use Room 26 as an office. The rooms should be used as recommended during the 2022 legislative session and until determined otherwise by the Senate Committee on Rules.
19. The following five existing rooms used by legislative standing committees should not be used during the 2022 legislative session for committee meetings: Room 32 (House Committee on Agriculture and Forestry), Room 33 (House Committee on Corrections and Institutions), Room 41 (House Committee on Energy and Technology), Room 42 (House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs), and Room 47 (House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife). These rooms should be reserved for use by the legislators.
20. To allow all House of Representatives standing committees to meet within the State House during the 2022 legislative session, the following rooms should be converted from their traditional legislative use for use by those House of Representatives standing committees moved out of their traditional rooms: Room 9 (the Coat Room), Room 10, Room 11, Room 24 (the Legislative Lounge), and the Ethan Allen Room. The Advisory

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<sup>2</sup> The Joint Legislative Management Committee approved this expenditure on August 5, 2021. See Joint Legislative Management Committee, Meeting August 5, 2021, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBjfZJ5jdBE>

Committee recommends that these rooms return to their traditional use after the 2022 legislative session as soon as public health risks allow.

21. The House Rules Committee should assign standing committees to the State House rooms converted into legislative committee rooms based on the perceived need of legislative standing committees for physical space during the 2022 legislative session.
22. Two Legislative Operations staff, the Operations Coordinator and the Administrative Assistant, who are currently located on the first floor of the State House Annex should be moved temporarily to 2 Governor Aiken Avenue for the 2022 legislative session.
23. The Director of Legislative Operations and the Supervisor of Committee Services should remain in the State House but should be moved to a different location. There are two options to relocate these employees. The preferred space is in a new temporary space constructed in the Card Room with temporary walls. An alternative is in the open space of the second floor of the Mezzanine in the State House Annex.
24. The space vacated by the Legislative Operations staff should be converted into a coat room for legislators and the public.
25. Human Resources staff should be moved to the office space previously used by the State Curator on the first floor of 2 Governor Aiken Avenue.
26. Legislative leadership and BGS should initiate planning, construction, and installation of a new heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system for the State House as soon as practicable. The Committee reviewed application of air standards to the current State House heating and cooling system. Most specifically, the Committee reviewed whether and how the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning

Engineers (ASHRAE) Standard 62.1 for Ventilation of Acceptable Air Quality could be required for the current heating and cooling system or could be used as a standard for air quality or air flow in the State House. The Advisory Committee determined that ASHRAE 62.1 was not feasible for implementation under the current State House system. However, updating the HVAC system as soon as practicable so that the State House can meet ASHRAE standards will improve air flow and help improve the overall public health environment within the building.

27. JLMC or the Sergeant at Arms should review use of portable air purifier units in legislative committee rooms and other spaces used by legislators and staff. Review should include evaluation of the efficacy of portable air purifier units, the noise generated by such units, and an overall determination of the benefits and detriments of the units.
28. Future expansion of the State House is needed to meet the needs of the General Assembly.

## **G. Conclusion**

The Vermont Constitution guarantees Vermonters the rights of freedom and liberty, and the Vermont State House awards the State's citizens with the gift of a place and presence where freedom and liberty are exercised as the framers of the Vermont Constitution intended. The Vermont General Assembly has demonstrated that it can operate successfully outside of the confines of the State House, but when it did, all involved readily perceived how meeting remotely stripped the legislative process of desired, if not integral, functions, values, and interactions. A physical return to the State House should reinstate the functioning of the Vermont General Assembly to its intended and expected standards.

However, the Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House believes that the Vermont General Assembly should not return to the State House without implementing practical common-sense solutions to mitigate the public health concerns that arise when large groups of people gather together to exercise democracy. The Committee took meaningful testimony and engaged in significant debate regarding multiple measures that the Vermont General Assembly could implement to address COVID-19 and other public health concerns. Based on this testimony and debate, the Committee offers these 28 recommended measures to implement prior to and during the 2022 legislative session.