

Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, & General Affairs

Tuesday 1/20

Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB)

Gus Seelig, Executive Director, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Pollaidh Major, Director of Policy and Special Projects, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Measuring Impact

- Chair Clarkson asked about methods of tracking and measuring the impact
 - VHCB noted no good method for tracking or measuring impact
 - VHCB expressed confidence in its impactful without the clear data
 - Committee also expressed this confidence, but would like to see it quantified

Wages and Housing Affordability

- Questions focused on relationship between wage growth and rising housing prices
 - VHCB highlighted gap between the adequate wages earned vs. needed to afford a 2 bedroom apartment
 - **\$17.67** (actual wage earned) → **\$29.73** (wage needed to afford apartment)

Federal Considerations

- What is VHCB monitoring on federal level
 - Biggest consideration is interest rate uncertainty
 - Federal contributions are still having a strong impact
- VHCB requested to the committee to continue supporting housing voucher program
 - Vouchers have been especially impactful to housing development

The committee was optimistic about the potential impact of increased investment in large apartment buildings.

Chamber of Commerce

Megan Sullivan, Vice President of Government Affairs, Vermont Chamber of Commerce

Housing Update

HOME Act Proposal

- Application for state housing funds would ‘lose points’ if their municipality has restrictive zoning laws, relative to other applicants
- Committee very positive about this proposal

Act 181

- Concern that towns are not opting into Tier 1A because they would have to take on administration act 250 permitting requirements
- Discussed moving from an opt-in system to an opt-out of tier 1A

Lets Build Homes

Miro Weinberger, Executive Chairperson, Let's Build Homes

General presentation and Updates (already received by HCED)

Committee discussion topics

- Act 181
 - Same concerns regarding lack of towns opting in to tier 1A
- Proposals
 - Waive sales tax on residential construction materials
 - Remove cap on downtown and village tax credits
 - One time investment in housing acceleration fund

Wednesday 1/21

Outdoor recreation

Kelly Ault, Executive Director, Vermont Outdoor Business Alliance

- Reviewed performance and use of grant funds, with focus on workforce development initiatives

- Requested committee support for allocation of \$500,000 to Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC)

ROI Measurement

- Senator Weeks asked how ROI is measured
 - VOBA stated that it does use metrics to measure ROI, though did not specify what they were and will provide them to the committee later on
 - Qualitative methods to assess outcomes were also discussed, asking community members how they were impacted

Public Assets Institute

Julie Lowell, Economic Security Policy and Outreach Director, Public Assets Institute

- Presented data primarily focused on housing and healthcare
 - Healthcare in Vermont is most expensive in the country
 - Housing prices are rising faster than income in Vermont
 - Vermont has seen more productivity growth than income growth

Regional Development Corporation

Andy Julow, Executive Director, Lake Champlain Islands Economic Development Corporation

Legislative priorities

- VEGI
- ACT 181
- Brownsfield (requesting state money)

Building Standards

- Senator Chittenden noted that Vermont's standards are state-specific and advocated for greater regional consistency
- Discussion regarding the standards for building in Vermont being more stringent than neighboring states. Senator Chittenden questioning
- Senator Hinsdale requested more concrete data on the building backlog before making changes to standards or increasing funding

Vermont Downtown Program

Nate Formalarie, Deputy Commissioner, Agency of Housing and Community Development

Caitlin Corkins, Tax Credit and Grants Coordinator, Department of Housing and Community Development

Chris Cochran, Director of Community Planning Revitalization, Department of Housing and Community Development

Ben Doyle, President, Preservation Trust of Vermont

Downtown and Village Center Tax Credit Program.

- Reported **25:1 ROI**
- Questions raised about the history and necessity for a \$3 million cap on tax credits
 - Demand for credits always exceeds cap
- Strong support from committee on removing cap

Program Administration

- Discussion on whether application process poses barriers
- Program administrators noted ongoing efforts to improve application process through annual revisions

Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility

Johanna de Graffenreid, Public Policy Manager, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility

Chelsea Bardot Lewis, Executive Director, Vermont Business for Social Responsibility (VBSR)

- General overview and update
 - No notable questions or comments from Committee
- Healthcare affordability
 - Some discussion about concerns pirate employers are having affording group coverage for employees vs. sending them to marketplace

Thursday 1/22

S. 230 - An act relating to flexible working arrangement

Sen. Andrew Perchlik, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

Sophie Zdatny, Legislative Counsel, Office of Legislative Counsel

- Bill originated in response to Governor's order to state employees to return to office
- The bill would require employers to grant employee requests for flexible working arrangements unless the request is inconsistent with legal, contractual, or business operational requirements.
- **Scope of bill**
 - Clarified that bill intends to cover all workers, not just public sector employees
- Discussed current process for employee refusal to comply with employer work-location demands
 - Some legal challenges have already been taking place, but not many

S. 270 - An act relating to the right to charge electric vehicles at home

Sen. Andrew Perchlik, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

- Provides homeowners in HOAs the right to charge electric vehicles in their designated parking spaces
 - Addresses situations where this ability has been previously denied
- This is to be included in the Committee's broader housing legislation