

Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

Draft Quarterly Meeting Minutes ~ October 10, 2024

via Microsoft Teams and In-Person

Waterbury State Office Complex  
Agency of Human Services, Red Oak room A283  
280 State Drive, Waterbury, Vermont 05676

**In Person:** Amanda Bianchi, Danielle Brier, Silas Callison, Kate Daly, Justin T. Bear Deth, Anastasia Douglas, Michelle John, Lindsey Owen, Adam Poulin, Erika Smith, Jenn Townley, Collins Twing.

**MS Teams:** Scarlett Duncan, Randy Lizotte, Melanie Feddersen, Jesse Suter.

**Absent:** Kele Bourdeau, Betsy Choquette, Johnathan Gardner, Beth Sightler, John Spinney.

**Support:** David Frye

**Guests:** Edward Willard, Representative Theresa Wood, Commissioner Jill Bowen from DAIL, Director Jennifer Garabedian from DDS.

**VTDDC Staff:** Kirsten Murphy, Susan Aranoff, Chelsea Hayward.

1. **Welcome:**

Anastasia called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM. She welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. There was a quorum.

○ **Ice Breaker: “What is making you feel hopeful?”**

Attendees took turns replying to the ice breaker. Some of the things people said were “an accessible home,” “Halloween,” “a warm fall,” “independence,” “storytelling,” “family,” and “staff training for Hireability.”

○ **Assigned roles:**

- Timekeeper was Amanda
- MS Teams Chat Monitor and “Room Muter” was Michelle
- Processor was Jesse
- Jargon Buster was Lindsey
- Equalizer was Justin

- **Adopt Meeting Minutes from June 27, 2024**

**Motion:** Collins made the motion to adopt the meeting minutes from June 27, 2024 as presented. Justin seconded. There was no discussion.

**Motion passed unanimously with 2 abstentions.**

## 2. Chair's Report, Anastasia Douglas

- **Council leadership roles -**

Anastasia reminded everyone that next spring there will be an election for Chair and Vice Chair. She said the role has been rewarding. She receives a lot of support for VTDDC staff which makes committing to this role manageable.

Kate said she would like to Chair or Vice Chair for 2025.

Randy asked if there is a timeline for the role. Anastasia said it's usually two years, but there was no set number of years. The only barrier for how long someone is a Chair or Vice Chair is how long their term is on the Council.

- **Buddies -**

Anastasia said that she would like to re-assign "buddies." Council buddies help each other to understand Council work. They call each other, ask questions, email, and sometimes travel together. The new pairs are:

- Silas and Collins
- Michelle and Justin
- Kele and Jonathan
- Jenn and Kate
- Scarlett and Randy
- Anastasia, Amanda, and Erika

### 3. Program Committee Report

Yesterday the Green Mountain Self-Advocates (GMSA) presented to the Program Committee.

#### Self-Advocacy Project (SAP) Grant –

Karen Topper and Max Barrows from GMSA showed the Program Committee how their work supports many of the DD Council’s Five-Year Plan Objectives. Michelle said the committee agreed that GMSA does a lot of the heavy lifting. They are nationally known and consulted by groups from across the country. GMSA would like the DD Council to provide \$60,000 for activities that strengthen self-advocacy in Vermont.

Kirsten agreed that many of VTDDC’s objectives in the Five-Year State Plan are fulfilled by the SAP grant. Randy and Scarlett praised GMSA.

Michelle said the policy committee recommended to award the full amount.

**Motion:** Amanda made the motion to award the \$60,000 to the Self-Advocacy Project grant. Justin seconded. There was a 5-minute break.

**Motion passed: 15-0-0.**

- **Introduce David Frye in his new role.**

David was a Council member for 6 years. He was hired recently as a Peer Support Specialist for VTDDC self-advocates. Council members were happy to see him and welcomed him to his new role.

### 4. Executive Director’s Report

- **The White House... Again -**

VTDDC had a second invitation to visit the White House. Kirsten Murphy, David Frye, Thomas Caswell, and Green Mountain Self-Advocates celebrated the Americans with Disabilities Act on the White House lawn. There were 250+people.

President Joe Biden gave a speech. Kirsten and everyone who attended with her had front-row seats!

Kirsten said the event made her feel hopeful. The Biden Administration knows how important it is to build what they call the “care infrastructure.” This means the workers and the agencies that support people with disabilities, people who are aging, and others who need help with daily living.

- **The Pathways to Partnership Grant -**

The Council helped to write the Pathways to Partnership grant. Many of VTDDC’s network partners are involved. VTDDC will receive \$350,000 to help fund our work. Because of this funding, VTDDC will focus on three parts of our current Five-Year Plan

- Supported Decision Making with trainings for transition-aged adults.
- An Accessible Library with Independent Information to empower families to make decisions alongside the loved ones they support.
- Customized Employment to match people’s skills to careers they can be excited about.

- **Our next 5 Year State Plan -**

It’s almost time to begin planning the next Five-Year State-Plan. Council members and members of the public will share their biggest concerns within the DD community. Kirsten described the different ways Council members could come together and begin planning.

Kate said she was passionate about housing.

Randy asked how VTDDC decides what projects to work on. Kirsten said that nothing is decided without a lot of group discussion. “The Council decides what VTDDC works on; staff decide how we will get that work done,” Kirsten explained.

The way the Council sets priorities is through the Five-Year Plan. First, staff gather lots of information about the current state of services for people with I/DD in Vermont. They do this by reading reports, holding town halls, and interviewing key decision-makers. Staff then write a summary of this information that is called the “comprehensive needs assessment.”

Next fall, staff present the information in the needs assessment to Council members. Members then talk about they think are the most important issues to address. Members write goals for the Five-Year Plan based on these priorities.

The Five-Year Plan goals must be posted for public comment in Spring, 2026. The Plan must be submitted to the federal Administration on Community Living (ACL) by August, 2026. ACL must approve the Plan.

## **5. Prepare for Guests, Led by Susan Aranoff**

Susan suggested that members answer the following questions when introducing themselves to our next guest: Say your name, where you’re from, and what matters to you most.

Council members practiced introducing themselves. Michelle gave an example to help inspire people. She described herself as a mom and a champion for change.

Kate planned to share her vision with Theresa Wood. She was going to live independently. And she was going to be paid to be a leader with camera’s flashing and everything! “I can see it in my mind,” she said.

Council members took a break for lunch at 11:45 am.

## **6. Lunch:**

Representative Theresa Wood joined the Council at 12:05 pm. Council members introduced themselves. Self-advocate and family members of the Council said,

“It’s great to be a part of this,” said Silas. “It’s great to see you again.”

“I want a place to live. It’s just really hard right now,” said Justin Thunder-bear.

“Kids shouldn’t be harmed to get the supports that are legally theirs. Right now, my son isn’t getting what’s on his IEP. We’ve been told that until there is physical harm we cannot file an administrative complaint,” said Anastasia.

“I want to be a leader,” said Kate. “And I want to live on my own without my family. I’ve been ready for a long time. I want to get married.”

“I want services streamlined to make them more accessible. I want fewer complications and adequate staffing with workers who are paid well,” said Erika.

“Parents are qualified caregivers and should be paid as such,” said Michelle.

“I am concerned that the only job placement options for students with disabilities is restocking shelves and similar. Everyone should have a career they like,” said Scarlett.

“I’m a professional peer advocate,” said Randy. “I do trainings for how people with disabilities want to be treated.”

“Services [direct support staff] need to be paid better. I think there should be more funding without having to ask for it every year,” said David.

Representative Theresa Wood thanked everyone for inviting her. Representative Wood is the Chair for the House of Human Services Committee. She is concerned about rates and what direct support providers are paid. She described her “jaw dropping” when she learned that direct support professionals working as independent contractors are only paid \$14.50 an hour. (These are DSPs who do not work for a Designated or Specialized Services Agency).

A few years ago, there was a bill introduced to give yearly pay increases to direct support staff. Unfortunately, the bill did not move “due to politics,” but Representative Wood is confident that the timing may be right this biennium.

**Note: A biennium is the two-year stretch that legislators write and pass bills.** If a bill is not passed into an Act at the end of the biennium, the bill dies. Legislators must re-introduce the bill in the next biennium if they want to “give it another shot.”

Representative Wood talked about how other legislators in the State House have approached her and asked about the housing crises for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. She was encouraged to how much the culture has changed over 9 years.

Agencies cannot submit budgets larger than 3% to the Governors yearly budget. The cost of healthcare and the labor agreement are more than 3%. “People’s fears are justified,” Representative Wood said. “We need to make sure that people with intellectual/developmental disabilities remain a priority population.” There are several housing projects taking place in Vermont.

Representative Wood urged everyone to keep pushing for accessible housing. She said, **“We need your advocacy to go after the 100’s of units being built right now! A portion of them can be dedicated to people with developmental disabilities. They [the new units] generally come with supportive staff. Get in touch with your designated agency and find out if there’s a housing project going on.”**

Susan talked about the forensic facility that the Agency of Human Services wanted to build. She asked Representative Wood what is happening now that the facility has been stopped? Representative Wood noted the recent high-profile crimes that were committed by folks with disabilities. She made it very clear that she was not interested in re-inventing institutional services.

Council members and Representative Wood talked about the bad decisions people make and how those decisions could have been avoided if we put more funding into preventative care. “It’s an investment, but I know it can be done,” said Representative Wood.

## **7. Special Guest, DAIL Commissioner Dr. Jill Bowen**

Kirsten introduced the Commissioner for the Department of Disability, Aging, and Independent Living (DAIL), Dr. Jill Bowen. Council members introduced themselves to the commissioner in a similar way they had introduced themselves an hour before.

Commissioner Bowen was certain that she and the Council would continue to cross paths. She said it was important to pay attention to people’s stress and shifting the systems we have in place to ease that stress. In the five months since she was

hired, she has visited more than 30 programs across many systems of care and met with different communities, people, and services.

She talked about the social determinants health and the importance of affordable housing. “There isn’t a once-size fits-all,” she said. “We need to move towards choice and give more opportunities to folks.”

Justin said that he wants to move to a new home where he can be more independent. His service budget does not have enough money for this. He and the Commissioner chatted about how individuals need more flexibility. They agreed that it’s hard to make a choice when there are no options.

Erika was concerned for how few affordable housing options there are that are physically accessible.

Commissioner Bowen agreed that prevention is the key. She mentioned it was hard for people to invest in a system when they can’t see the outcome for 20+ years. Meeting guest, Edward Willard, wants to see a self-directed service waiver just like what Maryland has. Guest Jennifer Garabedian explained that self-direction is an option for people in the Choices for Care program and for those receiving Developmental Disability Services.

## **NOTE**

Susan announced that there would be in-person Policy Committee meetings twice a month. On days that they meet in Montpelier they would go to the State House. She also invited people to “Make a Date” with her to meet their legislators and possibly testify to committees.

## **8. ACTIVITY: What do you bring to the DD Council?**

Kirsten Murphy shared a power point slide. On the slide it said, “What experience will you bring to the Five-Year Plan?” The slide had an example of what Anastasia “brings to the table.” It listed all the many ways she describes herself and highlights her experience. For example, Council Alumni Mike Gruteke was an expert of “Vermont’s terrible transportation.”



Instead of breaking into small groups, Council Members wrote down the many experiences they bring to the Council. After a brief break many members shared what they wrote and drew.

## **9. Public Comment:**

Edward Willard typed, “Working on system change work in Vermont. I am ready.”

## **10. Summarize Meeting:**

The meeting processor, Jesse, shared his impressions of the meeting. He said, “I can hear everyone very well. Chelsea and Michelle are doing a great job managing the tech. The meeting is accessible. Good engagement and participation.” Council members agreed that the guests were impressive. Kate wants to contact the Commissioner and talk to her again.

## **11. Adjourn:**

The meeting adjourned 2:23 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chelsea Hayward

Attachment A – Vote Roster

Name	Vote 1		
	Yes	A.	No
<b>Kele Bourdeau</b>			
<b>Amanda Bianchi</b>	y		
<b>Danielle Brier</b>	y		
<b>Betsy Choquette</b>			
<b>Silas Callison</b>	y		
<b>Kate Daly</b>	y		
<b>Justin T.Bear Deth</b>	y		
<b>Anastasia Douglas</b>	y		
<b>Scarlett Duncan</b>	y		
<b>Melanie Feddersen</b>	y		
<b>Johnathan Gardner</b>			
<b>Michelle John</b>	y		
<b>Randy Lizotte</b>	y		
<b>Lindsey Owen, Esq.</b>	y		
<b>Adam Poulin</b>	y		
<b>Beth Sightler</b>			
<b>Erika Smith</b>	y		
<b>John Spinney</b>			
<b>Jesse Suter</b>			
<b>Jennifer Townley</b>	y		
<b>Collins Twing</b>	y		

Those in grey did not attend the meeting, were not present to vote, or passed their vote along to another Council member to share with the Council.