

Draft Minutes
Virginia Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired
Virtual
May 11, 2021 at 11:00 AM

Board Attendees

Bonnie Atwood; Mazen Basrawi, *Chair*; Paul D’Addario; Deborah Helms; Dr. Leo Kim; Barbara McCarthy; Ken Jessup.

Members Absent

None.

Members of the Public

Craig Fifer, State and Local Liaison, Vaccinate Virginia.

DBVI Staff to the Board

Pam Cato, Director of Workforce Services, DBVI; Jessica Collette, Staff Assistant, DBVI; Wallica Gaines, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, DBVI; Raymond Hopkins, Commissioner, DBVI; Matt Koch, Deputy Commissioner for Enterprises, DBVI; Dr. Rick Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner for Services, DBVI.

Call to Order & Welcome

Chairman Basrawi called the meeting to order and welcomed the members in attendance.

Business Items

Introductions

Chairman Basrawi commenced the roll call.

Consent of Agenda

Mr. Jessup moved to approve agenda; motion passed unanimously.

Consent of Minutes

Chairman Basrawi asked for a slight change in the minutes to reflect each member’s last name versus first name. Chairman Basrawi moved to approve the Minutes from the September 2020 meeting and December 2020 meeting; motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

None.

Agency Reports

Commissioner Hopkins presented an update regarding the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

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In addition to the Agency update, Ms. Pam Cato shared with the Board regarding new Vocational Rehabilitation Program Initiatives.

Chairman Basrawi asked for an update on the budget. Commissioner Hopkins mentioned that the budget is level at its “pre-pandemic” limit. There is an increase for the Independent Living budget, but the suggested increase for the VR program is not included. The Chairman suggested offering legislators the option to join our September meeting about the Agency and financial needs. Mr. Jessup suggested pinpointing a Delegate and a State Senator and invite them to the meeting. Mr. Jessup and Ms. Atwood will work together to identify which legislators to invite to the Board’s September meeting. The Commissioner mentioned the Disability Commission, <http://dls.virginia.gov/commissions/vdc.htm>.

Chairman Basrawi questioned the policy around vaccination of DBVI employees and if there is any policy around this subject matter. The Commissioner shared that employees are encouraged to receive vaccinations, but there is not a mandate from the Commonwealth of Virginia that employees must take the vaccine. In regional offices, there is a high level of vaccinations, with some offices having all employees vaccinated. Guidance has been provided by the Commonwealth to not ask employees regarding private medical information, such as if they received a vaccine. Employees can offer this information voluntarily and most have. Regarding in-person training at the VRCBVI, vaccinations are not required, but those currently receiving training, only one is not vaccinated.

Ms. Wallica Gaines provided an update around the construction projects that are taking place on the Azalea Campus in Richmond. The most prominent is the Headquarters renovation. It is currently 90-95% complete. The next project will be the renovation of the LRC. The Stone House renovation was completed and staff have moved into this building.

Program Spotlight: Vaccinate Virginia

Craig Fifer, State and Local Liaison

Mr. Craig Fifer shared on the Commonwealth’s work on vaccinating citizen’s against the COVID-19 virus since December 2020. Individuals are able to sign up and receive a partner update: <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/vaccinate-virginia-partner-updates/>. Board members had the ability to pose questions to Mr. Fifer regarding the work that Vaccinate Virginia has accomplished.

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Unfinished Business

Update on an Investment Advisor

Dr. Leo Kim provided a higher view of identifying an investment advisor. A RFP went out for an advisor to manage the Board's funds. Two entities responded to the RFP and the Finance Committee reviewed the submissions and scored each. It is the suggestion of the Committee to use Optimum Services Group, which is connected to Wells Fargo. The Procurement Department is ready to make the award with the start date of July 1, 2021. Mr. Paul D'Addario moved to accept the recommendation to move forward with Optimum Services Group as an investment advisor; motion passed unanimously. Chairman Basrawi entertained a conversation regarding when the Board will communicate with the new advisor. The Board decided to add time to the June meeting for this discussion.

Update on Memorial Resolution for Jim Wark

Senator Jennifer McClellan passed State Resolution 115 for Jim Wark. The Resolution can be found online: <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?211+ful+SR115+hil>. Ms. Bonnie Atwood shared that the Board received three copies of the Resolution and the decision needed to be made who receives these copies. The Board agrees with Ms. Atwood's suggestion of sending a copy to Mr. Wark's family, Virginia Voice and Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Also, the decision needed to be made whether if these need to be framed. The Board agreed these do not need to be framed. In addition, a thank you letter needs to be sent to the Senator's office. This letter has been drafted and is awaiting signature from the Chairman. Lastly, Ms. Atwood asked for a press release to be sent to at least Style Weekly and Richmond Times Dispatch. She will work with DBVI staff to send this out.

New Business

Discussion about Grant Requests and Deadline for Grant Proposals

Ms. Wallica Gaines shared with the Board that the grant proposal information is still online for individuals to submit a grant proposal. The first question is to determine a deadline for proposals or if the Board wanted to entertain these year round. Chairman Basrawi suggested a deadline before the June meeting. June 1, 2021 was determined as the deadline that the Board will accept grant proposals. Mr. Paul D'Addario moved to set the deadline to accept grant proposals as June 1, 2021; motion passed unanimously. Chairman Basrawi requested the guideline document be updated to include the deadline and add information on the website, too. The Board has requested for the awardees to submit a summary report to the Board regarding how the grant was used and feedback on how the grant award was used. It was also asked for guidelines to be amended to include a representative to be available at the June meeting. This request is strongly encouraged to answer any questions that might arise.

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The next meeting will begin at 11am with the grant proposals and then the afternoon will be with the financial advisor. Along with these items, the Board will confirm the next year of Board meetings, officers and approval of any new VIB Advisory Board members.

Meeting Dates

June 22, 2021

Adjournment

Mr. Paul D'Addario moved to adjourn the meeting at 1:45 pm; motion passed unanimously.

Next Meeting: June 22, 2021

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Reports

Agency Report – *Commissioner Ray Hopkins*

Written report provided. Additional comments are as follows:

Ms. Pam Cato shared how the Vocational Rehabilitation program adjusted during the beginning of the Pandemic. One of the biggest initiatives started with the Business Relations team. They launched the Career Connections meeting. This brings together career seekers, students, DBVI staff and business connections. Coupled with these meetings, there have also been explore sector chats that look at specific sectors that have been identified as an area of interest by career seekers.

DBVI has continued its focused on pre-employment transition services. Through virtual meetings students have been able to participate in ACE Academies, credential fairs and even have 14 DBVI students now labeled as STEM Warriors. These programs are not specific to the pandemic and will continue in the future.

Commissioner Hopkins specifically mentioned Executive Order 77 regarding the elimination of single use plastics. This affects the Enterprise Division and the vending program.