

Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority Advisory Board

Present:

Remote: Elaine Miller, Tisbury; Robert Mackay, Oak Bluffs; *Leonard Jason, Chilmark; Mark Snider, Edgartown.

In-Person: Bob Wasserman, West Tisbury; Angela Gompert, VTA; Lauren Thomas, VTA.

Absent: Kim Leaird, Disabled Rider Representative (West Tisbury); Tina Hook, Aquinnah.

Mrs. Miller called the meeting to order at 9:35 am.

Public Comments: None. One member of the public, "Heather" joined remotely, but did not identify themselves when asked and left the meeting.

*Mr. Jason joined the meeting remotely at 9:42am.

Minutes:

Mrs. Miller asked for a motion to approve the minutes of February 23, 2023. Mr. Wasserman made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Snider 2nd. [MSC]

Mrs. Miller asked for a motion to approve the minutes of March 16, 2023. Mr. Wasserman made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Mackay 2nd. [MSC]

FY 2023 – Draft Financials through June 23:

The Board reviewed the draft financial statements through June 2023. Mrs. Miller asked Ms. Gompert to address the line items that showed increased costs over the previous fiscal year.

Purchased Transportation: Ms. Gompert stated FY23 was the first full year of the Vehicle Operator starting wage increasing from \$20.00/hour to \$25.00/hour, which is why the cost of Purchased Transportation is up; additionally, senior Vehicle Operators received a \$1.50/hour pay increase.

Fringe Benefits: For FY23 both the Dukes County Retirement (DCR) and Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) conducted actuarial studies, which resulted in required pension related adjustments to Fringe Benefits. Mrs. Miller inquired if going forward these actuarial valuations should be included in the budget – Ms. Gompert responded it will be, but is difficult to budget for because these valuations can fluctuate greatly between years. Ms. Gompert stated that all the information pertaining to the current valuations are contained in the VTA's FY23 audit. Ms. Gompert informed the Board that the FY23 Audit is still in draft form, with her just receiving it for review yesterday and her immediately passing it on to the Board; she further explained the tardiness of the audit was due in large part to the VTA's long time accountant becoming seriously ill in May, and additional accountants from another firm had to be brought in to finish.

Outside Services: Ms. Gompert explained that the increase was due to expenses related to Technical Assistance for electric bus infrastructure, work that was done at Lobster Alley for employee housing and plumbing issues at the VTA Administrative/Operations Facility.

Reimbursable Cost: Ms. Gompert explained that Depreciation is not a reimbursable expense, which makes the bottom line look skewed.

Mrs. Miller asked Ms. Gompert going forward to provide written explanations of the increases for each line item when financial statements are sent to the Board for review.

Ms. Gompert reminded the Board that VTA had been using “relief funds” since 2021 and not program funds. Meaning the VTA has 3 years of unused Federal money to comfortably use \$2M per year for the next several years; VTA also saw an increase of \$1.3M in State Contract Assistance Fair Share funds for State FY24/25.

Mr. Snider commented that the draft Statement of Net Assets says there was \$13,000 in cash on hand at 6/30/23. Ms. Gompert responded that she had also noticed that discrepancy and has an inquiry into the accountant and auditor. Ms. Gompert assured the Board that VTA has approximately \$2.2M on hand and all vendor and payroll obligations were met. Concerning the draft audited financial statements; Mr. Snider suggested that meeting to go over draft financials with mistakes in them is a waste of time. Ms. Gompert responded that some Board Members were pushing for a meeting. Ms. Gompert assured the Board that the Authority is financially sound – the issue will be in finding an accounting firm who is familiar with governmental accounting to take due to the illness of the VTA’s long time accountant.

FY 2023 Ridership:

Fiscal Year 2023 ridership showed a 16.51% increase over Fiscal Year 2022. Ms. Gompert shared that a percentage of VTA’s funding is based on ridership, using a 60/30/10 rule as follows: Ridership -60%, population- 30% and geographic size-10%. Ms. Gompert is hopeful that FY24 ridership will break the 1 million mark.

Mr. Snider inquired whether the VTA has the drivers and vehicle capacity to reach pre-COVID ridership numbers. Ms. Gompert responded that the new starting rate of \$26/hour for Vehicle Operators that took effect on 8/1/23 has helped attract employees, but not enough, as driver overtime is significantly up.

Fare Free-Black Friday through March 31, 2024:

Ms. Gompert explained that the FY24 State budget included \$15M in funding to support a fare free program for the 15 Massachusetts RTA’s for up to 6 months. Based on this, and with hopes of encouraging and increasing ridership, Ms. Gompert suggested to the Board that the VTA go fare free from November 24, 2023 through March 31, 2024; with the State paying the VTA for the lost revenues during this period.

Mrs. Miller inquired whether there would be any funds available to provide no cost annual passes for Island students. Ms. Gompert responded she is hoping to get a program like that in place.

Summer Review:

Ms. Gompert reported that the past summer had the most consistent service levels since the pandemic with only a few un-anticipated service cuts needed in mid-August when the college students began to leave. Ms. Gompert also reported having more drivers this past summer than the previous few years, but finding labor will always be an issue. After having catastrophic mechanical issues downing several buses, the MBTA gave VTA three 40’ buses to help meet demand on Route 13.

Ms. Gompert reported the service on the street was improved, but staffing in the operations office was a struggle – additionally president of TCI, Ed Pigman, passed away. TCI is actively working to recruit more staff for Dispatch.

Capital Projects Update:

West Tisbury Town Hall:

Ms. Gompert updated the Board that the inductive chargers at the West Tisbury Town Hall are fully functional. The permanent switch gear is expected to ship in late February 2024.

Church St., Edgartown:

The battery back-up for the Church St. inductive chargers is expected to arrive in late spring 2024.

Lobster Alley:

Ms. Gompert stated that renovations are currently underway on the existing house to bring it up to code. The existing house is being updated to a 3 bedroom, 3.5 bath residence. In addition, Island Housing Trust (IHT) is working to develop the rest of the property into additional housing units through a 40B process. Ms. Gompert reminded the Board that this housing is limited to year round employees.

*Mrs. Miller left the meeting at 11:17am. Mr. Wasserman assumed role of Chair.

Staffing & Compensation Report:

Concerning the Staffing & Compensation report that was sent out previously for Board review, Ms. Gompert suggested a sub-committee be formed to discuss in detail; Mr. Wasserman asked for volunteers, in addition to himself, for the sub-committee. Ms. Miller had previously stated she would like to be part of it, and Mr. Mackay volunteered as well.

State Ethics Training:

Ms. Thomas stated that the required State Ethics training had moved to an online platform and that each Board Member would receive a link via email to complete. Ms. Thomas asked that the training be completed by 12/31/23.

Mr. Wasserman asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Jason made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mackay 2nd.
[MSC]

Mrs. Wasserman declared the meeting adjourned at 11:30 AM.

*Indicates joined late or left early

Date

Signed