

March 5, 2021 Meeting Minutes – Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority Advisory Board

Ms. Gompert stated in accordance with Governor Baker's emergency modification of the Open Meeting Law this meeting will be held virtually. Remote participation only via Zoom Communications.

Present: Alice Butler, Oak Bluffs; Mark Snider, Edgartown; Elaine Miller, Tisbury; Lenny Jason, Chilmark; Susanna Sturgis, West Tisbury; June Manning, Aquinnah; Anne Sylvester, Disabled Community Rider Rep., Edgartown; Kelly McCarron, Rider Rep.*, Edgartown; Angela Gompert, VTA; Lauren Thomas, VTA; Colin Ouderkirk, VTA.

*Joined via Zoom at 10:05 AM.

9:31 AM -Ms. Butler called the meeting to order.

Public Comments: None, no members of the public present.

Minutes: Ms. Miller made a motion to accept the minutes from December 10, 2020. Ms. Manning 2nd.
[MSC]

Ms. Gompert explained that the three VTA employees in attendance were working remotely, due to multiple renovation projects occurring at the VTA building. These projects were possible due to MassDOT allowing capital grant funding flexibility because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This enabled the VTA to have repairs and upgrades to make the building viable for the next 20 years.

Ridership through January 2021: Ms. Gompert presented and Ms. Thomas explained a chart showing VTA ridership numbers of 15,242, a decrease of almost 29% from January 2020, but month-to-month numbers show the gap closing. This number included the ridership of 60 from the newly-implemented Microtransit Program. Current data had the February Microtransit number at 82. Mr. Snider inquired whether this was an accurate comparison regardless of the pandemic, due to the reduction of up-island service that occurred two years prior and the current increase due to Microtransit. Ms. Gompert stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had decimated any traditional pattern the VTA previously had, so it was difficult to know either way. Ms. Miller inquired since the Microtransit Program was new, was the increase from January to February a good analysis of the success of the program. Ms. Gompert stated there would be more data in the future that should give an accurate account of the Microtransit Program.

Ms. Gompert presented a line graph showing the rolling 7-day average ridership for Winter 2020-2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic and the daily ridership totals for the same period. There was discussion about the comparison of these numbers pre-and during COVID as affected by change in service. Ms. Miller inquired if these downward changes in ridership had affected the state audit. Ms. Gompert replied that the state had granted a reprieve on performance metrics for the present.

Audit & Finance Subcommittee update:

1. Financials through January 2021: Ms. Gompert stated the revenue was down 41.16%, expenses down 25.38% from the prior seven months. She said that once March hits, numbers from last year wouldn't be comparable, as spring of 2020 remained at limited/winter service due to the pandemic, whereas this year the VTA was gearing up for a "traditional season."
2. FY 2022 Budget: Ms. Gompert presented the Fiscal Year 2022 Budget to the Board for comparison and discussion. She illustrated the differences in the FY21 and FY22, explaining that COVID-19 was the cause for the discrepancies in the numbers, as both service and ridership levels were different. She stated she expected FY22 to "return to as normal an operating season as we've had." She stated that spacing passengers on buses would therefore be an issue. Ms. Miller stated that she and Mr. Jason, as the Audit & Finance Subcommittee, had reviewed and discussed the budget and found it acceptable. She suggested this was the time for anyone on the Board with questions or concerns to voice them. Mr. Snider brought up the subject of the Martha's Vineyard Airport land lease being up for renewal and had it been negotiated yet. Ms. Gompert replied it had not, it was due to end in June, no one else on the street had renewed theirs yet, and she was working on negotiating the new lease. Ms. Miller followed up that the issue of the leases had been a hot topic until the arrival of COVID, and had then become less of an issue. Mr. Snider inquired how the Edgartown Church Street charging station project vote would affect the budget. Ms. Gompert stated it impacts the capital budget more than anything, and would affect the Purchased Transportation line item in the budget. Ms. Sturgis stated Alan Strahler gave a "wonderful presentation" re: the Church Street project that was being circulated. She also stated the VTA website had good documentation of the Church Street Committee's thorough response to objections to the project.

Mr. Jason moved to accept the proposed Fiscal Year 2022 Operating Budget of \$6,627,000. Ms. Manning 2nd. [MSC]

3. Personnel Policy Update: Ms. Gompert stated she and Ms. Thomas had revised the VTA Personnel Policies to comply with updated federal and state regulations, as well as to reflect employee title/responsibility changes. She stated these revisions had been presented to and approved by the Audit & Finance Subcommittee, as required. Ms. Miller confirmed her review of and agreement with the revisions. Ms. Miller moved the revised VTA Personnel Policies be approved as presented. Ms. Sturgis 2nd. [MSC]
4. Administrator's Review: Ms. Gompert stated per contractual requirements, there is an annual January review for her performance. This year it had been completed in February and Ms. Miller had sent the draft to the members of the Board for their review. Ms. Sturgis stated the draft didn't indicate who did the review; Ms. Miller explained the review was a separate topic from the Audit & Finance Subcommittee report and had been done by her and Mr. Jason only. Mr. Snider inquired if the Administrator should leave the meeting while the Board discussed the review; Ms. Gompert replied this was a public, municipal meeting, different from the executive

session for her contract negotiation, therefore a public session. Ms. Miller stated this review was just a draft and it was important for board members to openly discuss their questions and comments. (*Ms. Gompert stated for the record that Ms. McCarron had joined the meeting at 10:05 AM.) Ms. Sturgis stated moving forward she'd like to see a performance category of "relationship with the Advisory Board" added to the Administrator's review. Ms. Miller made a motion to adjust the review process as presented to include the category of "relationship with the Advisory Board." Mr. Jason 2nd. **[MSC]**

Ms. Gompert introduced the wage discussion as part of the Advisory Board's review of the Administrator. Ms. Miller stated the wage review hadn't been done in 5 years and explained the discussion the Audit & Finance Subcommittee had concerning why this hadn't been done on a regular/annual basis, resulting in their recommendation of a \$10,000 salary increase to reflect a \$2,000 per year annual raise that hadn't occurred due to lack of budget in the past. She stated moving forward, the Board needed to establish a yearly system or salary increase percentage. There was discussion as to why this hadn't happened since 2016, the answer mainly that there hadn't been the budgetary funds to give raises to Ms. Gompert, Ms. Thomas, and Mr. Grant during that time. Ms. Gompert stated it was the responsibility of the Advisory Board to determine her salary, and her responsibility to oversee the salaries of the rest of the administration. She stated there would be a survey of comparable municipal job wages to be used as a guideline to set the standard for the VTA Administration starting the following January. Mr. Snider inquired as to why this hadn't been addressed during the previous contract negotiation, and stated having a retroactive raise was not common business practice. Ms. Gompert replied this wasn't retroactive, as the previous years' books were closed, and that this increase was starting now and only moving forward. Mr. Snider opined about the negative optics of the Board giving a retroactive raise, though stating Ms. Gompert deserved it. Mr. Jason reiterated it wasn't retroactive, it was bringing Ms. Gompert's salary and the VTA current to what should've been done all along but was not due to lack of funds. Ms. Sturgis agreed with Mr. Snider's point about the negative optics of such a wage increase. Ms. Miller stated she'd been a part of the writing of the Administrator's contract and believed the current topic of the wage increase was a separate issue. She said this was the reason for the discussion. Ms. Manning stated at the time of the previous negotiation she and other members of the Board hadn't received a copy of the contract for review, and that the current discussion could've already been resolved if they had. There was further discussion about optics, analysis of comparable wage increases, the fiscal/financial effects of COVID-19, justifying a current wage increase, and the importance of the Board's responsibility and input on decision-making. Ms. Miller motioned for a \$10,000 increase for Ms. Gompert, effective immediately. Mr. Jason 2nd. All voted in favor except Ms. Sturgis, who abstained. **[MSC]**

Ms. Miller recommended that information re: other local comparable positions be gathered and presented to the Board in advance of next year's Administrator review; Ms. Gompert stated that was the goal.

5. Advisory Board Bylaws: Ms. Gompert stated this had been tabled at the previous meeting and the Audit & Finance Subcommittee approved the revisions in November and had received no feedback from the Advisory Board. Ms. Miller pointed out a typographic error in Article 5 that needed correcting. Ms. Sturgis stated there's no reason the Audit & Finance Subcommittee should be in charge of revising bylaws and she had a problem with the "power" the Audit & Finance Subcommittee had given itself, therefore a separate bylaw committee should be formed to review and compare the VTA's bylaws to other comparable RTAs. She said she was "totally not in favor of approving these bylaws." Mr. Jason asked why Ms. Sturgis wasn't in favor of approving the bylaws; Ms. Sturgis repeated that there's no reason the Audit & Finance Subcommittee should be in charge of revising bylaws and she had a problem with the power the Audit & Finance Subcommittee had given itself in revising the bylaws, therefore a separate bylaw committee should be formed. Ms. Gompert explained that a state legislative change to MGL 161B had been made which required an Audit & Finance Subcommittee be formed for the purpose of looking at the financials and bylaws of MA RTAs. Ms. Miller reiterated that the bylaw revisions in question were drafts and had been disseminated in advance to the Board for their review and input as part of their role as board members. Ms. Sturgis again recommended the Board create a separate bylaws committee. Ms. Gompert said she would share a link to the Cape Cod RTA's Bylaws for reference. Ms. Miller agreed with the formation of a bylaws committee and asked who on the Board would be on it. Ms. Sturgis stated she would volunteer to be the chair of a bylaws committee. Mr. Jason motioned to table voting on the revised bylaws; Ms. Miller 2nd. [MSC]

Old/New Business:

1. Operations Update: Ms. Gompert stated that the February numbers for the Microtransit Program were higher, with a lot of repeat riders. She said Woodside Village is using subsidies for taxicabs and not Microtransit, thus negatively affecting the numbers. She stated the numbers would likely increase as the season approached and the weekend customers became more aware of the service. She said she was pleased with the outcome so far.
Ms. Miller thanked the Board and left the meeting with Ms. Gompert noting the time as 11:28 AM.
2. Public Relations Update: Ms. Gompert introduced Colin Ouderkirk as the VTA's new Office Manager/Program Coordinator. Mr. Ouderkirk explained the free bus rides during school vacation and for COVID-19 vaccinations programs. He stated the VTA was working on various other programs, also partnering with community organizations. He believed that these programs would be more successful moving forward with increasing public awareness. Ms. McCarron stated the free rides for vaccinations program had garnered more attention on MVCS's social media than any other program to date. She mentioned future programs such as Earth Day Cleanup and highlighting employee transportation for Island businesses as important to the economy. Mr. Snider asked how these programs were being promoted to the community; Ms. McCarron explained by working with other community organizations and cross-promoting on social media and developing other media promotion such as newspapers and radio. Mr. Snider

recommended email as a powerful marketing tool and suggested a proprietary Wi-Fi system on the buses that required users to sign in using their email. Ms. Thomas stated the VTA website has "e-alerts" that also went out to subscribers. Mr. Snider suggested Constant Contact as a platform for tracking emails and promotional data. Ms. Gompert stated this tied in with the VTA's new project of "e-ticketing," to be rolled out June/July. Ms. Thomas asked Mr. Ouderkirk to explain the new free ride program with the Island Food Pantry. Mr. Ouderkirk also stated the VTA would be running ads in newspapers promoting current and upcoming programs. Ms. Gompert clarified that these free ride programs also included using Microtransit.

3. Financial Outlook: Ms. Gompert stated the VTA had received the first of its CARES grant during Fiscal Year 2020, and after much discussion with MassDOT, would be receiving adequate CARES funding to help alleviate revenue gaps for the next 3 or 4 fiscal years. She expects the economic recovery process from COVID-19 to be long and difficult to predict. Ms. Manning asked when Aquinnah would be back on a regular service schedule; Ms. Gompert said around the end of May it would be back to hourly service. Ms. Gompert stated that some H2B employees were being permitted which would help improve ridership. She stated David (Zeilinger, Operations Manager) was recruiting drivers for the season, having been instructed to gear up for a full, regular season.

Mr. Jason made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Manning 2nd. **[MSC]**

Ms. Butler declared the meeting closed at 11:50 AM.

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Date

Signed