

## AGENDA

AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING  
CITY OF VERGENNES, VERMONT  
**FRIDAY, June 6, 2025**  
**8:30 AM – 9:00 AM**

*In July 2024, the City Council appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to develop a draft agreement between the City and State of Vermont for its proposed juvenile facility – called the Green Mountain Youth Campus -- that ensures the city benefits from the proposed project, if the proposed project is permitted and then built.*

**Attend the meeting in person at Vergennes City Hall or via Zoom:**

<https://zoom.us/j/561577976>

Join by Computer: <https://zoom.us/j/561577976>

Join by Phone: Dial: 1 (312) 626-6799

Meeting ID: 561 577 976

Meeting Password: 1234

1. Microphone Check
2. ZOOM Recording Feature Activated?
3. Call to Order
4. Amendments to Agenda
5. PUBLIC FORUM – Before speaking, please state your name and town/city of residence.  
Address remarks to the Committee Chair and limit comments to three minutes.
6. Committee Business
  - a. Review and approve draft letter from the Ad Hoc Committee to the Vergennes City Council. \*
  - b. If the committee determines it needs to go into executive session to discuss details of the draft agreement between the City of Vergennes and State of Vermont, it will take the following steps:
    1. Request for a motion to find that premature general public knowledge of information concerning contract negotiations with the State of Vermont would clearly place the city at a substantial disadvantage with such negotiations. \*
    2. Based upon that finding, request for a motion that the committee go into executive session to receive an update on contract negotiations, under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A). \*
7. Adjournment

\*Decision Item \*\*Possible Decision Item \*\*\*Discussion Item

Note: The Committee Chair will determine if there is to be public comment on each item under the “Committee Business” section of the agenda, following discussion by Committee members and before a vote is taken. This Committee is adhering to the Vermont Open Meeting Law <https://sos.vermont.gov/municipal-division/open-meetings/> and adhering to rules for Executive Sessions “after making a specific finding that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage” as it relates to the negotiation of contracts.

DATE: June 6, 2025  
TO: Vergennes City Council  
cc: Ad Hoc Committee Members  
FROM: Mark Koenig, Ad Hoc Committee Chair  
RE: **Status on the Green Mountain Youth Campus**

I am writing to the Vergennes City Council on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee for the Green Mountain Youth Campus to provide an overview of what the Committee has done since its formation, an update on the current state of affairs, and the Committee's thoughts on how the City Council should move forward.

In early 2024, the Vermont Buildings & General Services Department (BGS) and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) reached out informally to the City of Vergennes to discuss their intention to build a juvenile detention facility in either South Burlington or Vergennes.

On February 5, 2024, Seven Days published an article stating GMYC might be built in either South Burlington or Vergennes. On April 15, 2024, Seven Days followed up that story with another stating that the South Burlington site was no longer an option and the facility would be built in Vergennes.

On June 5, 2024, BGS and DCF hosted a community public forum at the Vergennes Opera House to provide details for their proposed 14-bed, juvenile short-term detention and counseling facility to serve youth ages 12 to 18, to be called the Green Mountain Youth Campus (GMYC). These two departments were strongly considering building this facility in Vergennes on land currently owned by the State.

#### **CITY FORMS AD HOC COMMITTEE**

In July 2024, the Vergennes City Council formed an Ad Hoc Committee (Committee) to consider what offerings the State could provide to Vergennes in exchange for Vergennes' willingness to host the GMYC. For the record, the Committee has met fifteen times since its inception.

At the suggestion of BGS, the Ad Hoc Committee invited Representative Alice Emmons (Chair, House Committee on Corrections and Institutions) to meet via Zoom at the Committee's second meeting. Emmons was Town Clerk in 1999 when the Town of Springfield and the State of Vermont negotiated an agreement regarding the construction of a men's correctional facility to be located in Springfield. Referring to the 1999 agreement made between the State and the Town of Springfield, the Committee drafted an initial term sheet as a starting point for negotiations (see, Appendix A). Using the same approach taken

by the Town of Springfield prior to the construction of a 300-bed men's prison, the Committee's list was intended to address the concerns of Vergennes' residents in ways that could benefit both the City and the State. These concerns included the financial and safety impacts that would be felt by the City.

### **STATE SUBMITS REQUEST TO VERGENNES PLANNING COMMISSION**

Also in July, the State submitted a request to the Vergennes Planning Commission to build a state-owned or leased facility under the jurisdiction of the BGS Commissioner providing therapeutic treatment to individuals under State care. At that time, both BGS and the Planning Commission agreed that changes to the land use map, municipal development plan, and zoning and subdivision regulations would need to be made for this project to move forward. To increase the State's understanding of this process, the city provided a PowerPoint slide with a graphic representation of the process, the Vergennes Zoning Administrator provided a written step-by-step guide, and the Chair of the Vergennes Planning Commission provided guidance and potential timelines (see, Appendix B). To date, State officials still seem unaware or misinformed about how the planning and zoning process works in a Vermont municipality – which is driven primarily by State statute – especially with regard to the amount of time needed to implement changes.

### **EFFORTS MADE BY CITY TO SEEK PUBLIC VOTE**

Per the State's assurance that the GMYC would only be built in a community where it was wanted, Vergennes offered to put the question to its voters in the form of a non-binding resolution. Initially, the intent was to present the issue to Vergennes voters in November 2024, but negotiations between the State and the City were not undertaken in time to meet that date. Vergennes offered to hold a special election in December 2024, but again no serious discussions occurred. During the December 6, 2024 meeting with Commissioners Wanda Minoli and Chris Winters, the possibility that the issue could be put before the voters in March 2025 was discussed, while clearly letting them know that in order to legally warn the issue, negotiations would have to conclude before the end of January 2025. And again, nothing.

On November 24, 2024, VT Digger published a story that DCF officials were considering expanding the facility to 22 beds and increasing the maximum age of potentially housed youth from 18 to 19 pursuant to the *Raise the Age* law passed in 2018 (see, Appendix C).

Because these were significant changes from what had been presented during the June 5 public forum, the Ad Hoc Committee sent a letter to Commissioner Minoli on December 12, 2024 asking for specific details on physical and structural information about the building, operational requirements, and proposed population and eligibility criteria (see, Appendix D).

Although a response to this letter was not received, the Committee did learn from a March 10, 2025, VT Digger article that the age increase would not move forward for at least another year and the original intent for a 14-bed facility for 12- to 18-year-olds was still the plan.

After running into Addison-2 Representative Matt Birong in the halls of the State House in late March 2025, Commissioner Minoli proposed that she meet with a small group of Vergennes representatives to “reset” and get the discussion moving again. On April 6, 2025, Commissioner Minoli held a meeting in her office, which included myself, Commissioner Winters, Representative Birong, City Manager Ron Redmond, Chief of Police Jason Ouellette, and Chair of the Vergennes Planning Committee Shannon Haggett.

### **OVERVIEW OF APRIL 6, 2025 MEETING**

One of the major concerns facing Vermont is a serious lack of affordable housing. To that end, the Committee believed requesting that the State transfer ownership of approximately 180 acres of unused land to Vergennes for the purpose of developing affordable housing along the proposed truck route would be seen as a “win-win” for all concerned. However, during the meeting, Commissioner Minoli's position seemed, at best, disinterested in this potential arrangement.

A second major concern of Vergennes residents is the history and experience the community has had with similar facilities. The only use the State has made with the land it controls within the City's borders was the operation of the Vermont Industrial / Weeks School built in 1874, which at the end of the day was a failure as well as a black mark on Vergennes' reputation. Similarly, a drug rehabilitation center licensed by Vermont has been a significant drain on resources, both in money and police time. Therefore, bringing another facility to house a challenging population into Vergennes is of reasonable concern to our residents.

During the meeting, Chief Ouellette explained his concerns regarding how his department would unquestionably be involved in issues that will occur at the facility. Commissioner Winters assured our group that local police involvement would be very minimal and that the service provider which would oversee day-to-day operations would handle any possible problems in a professional and competent manner. Less than an hour after the meeting, Seven Days published a story regarding the investigation into the more than 100 lawsuits currently filed against the Sentinal Group ([see](#), Appendix E). Commissioner Winters was well aware of this investigation given that he was quoted in the Seven Days article, yet failed to mention the issue during our meeting and instead painted a rosy picture to Chief Ouellette about how the facility would operate without problem and without any local police intervention needed. Lying by omission is still a form of lying.

## IN CONCLUSION

Since this process began, Vergennes' concerns and requests have been dismissed or trivialized by State officials. We also note that, although the State says it needs this facility operational as soon as possible, State agencies have done very little over the past year to move it forward. Despite the City's ongoing good-faith efforts, key questions remain unanswered and our input has too often been overlooked or downplayed. We urge the City Council to consider these facts carefully before taking any further action or making any decisions regarding the Green Mountain Youth Campus.

One consideration the Committee does recommend the City Council spend some time working on is the idea of requesting that the State Legislature transfer ownership of a significant portion of its Vergennes land holdings to Vergennes. As has been made clear during the current legislative session, our state is faced with three major cost drivers that are negatively impacting our economy and tax base – healthcare, education, and housing. The City Council has no ability to directly affect the first two, but could help to address the lack of affordable workforce housing by developing a large tract of undeveloped land. Governor Scott has stated that he is committed to increasing Vermont's housing supply and H.50 related to identifying State real property suitable for conversion into affordable housing is still under consideration. We urge the City Council to the Vermont Legislature and the Governor's Office to move this plan forward.

Attachments:

**[1999 Agreement: Springfield, VT and State of Vermont](#)**

**[Term Sheet as of 12 06 24](#)**

**[Communication between Vergennes & State, December 2024 to April 2025](#)**

Relevant News Articles

- <https://vtdigger.org/2024/05/17/state-intends-to-build-new-secure-juvenile-facility-in-vergenne>
- <https://vtdigger.org/2025/03/10/proposed-vergennes-youth-facility-will-not-include-18-and-19-year-olds-officials-say/>
- <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/state-officials-pitch-juvenile-facility-to-vergennes-residents-41073230>
- <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/state-considers-secure-juvenile-facility-in-south-burlington-or-vergennes-40134069>

- <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/state-will-build-secure-juvenile-treatment-center-in-vergennes-40671207>
- <https://www.sevendaysvt.com/news/state-officials-pitch-juvenile-facility-to-vergennes-residents-41073230>
- <https://vtdigger.org/2024/11/24/vermonts-goals-for-a-new-residential-center-for-justice-involved-youth-remain-murky/>

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