

Rep. Kimbell called the meeting to order at 8:02am.

1. **Bill Updates.**

- Rep. Kimbell recently presented to the House Committee on Agriculture & Forestry about the **Accessory On-Farm Businesses** bill, a short-form version of that element of the Rural Omnibus Bill. Rep. Norris indicated that the committee would likely take some action on it, though whether to the full extent of the bill as proposed by Representative Kimbell is uncertain.
- Rep. Sims gave an update on the **Forest Futures** bill. She's been working with the VT Sustainable Jobs Fund, Commissioner Snyder, and House Ag. to gather testimony related to the bill, and make revisions. Rep. Norris reported that it's currently on the wall in House Ag. and that they will likely take it up soon.
- Rep Sims relayed that members of Senate Natural were debating many components of Act 250 reform, including those related to **operating hours for forest sector operators**, a piece that had been in the Rural Omnibus Bill.
- Reps Sims and Rogers have been working to gather testimony related to the revision of **trucking weight permits** from the Rural Omnibus Bill. It seems possible that the revision may be included in the miscellaneous transportation bill to be taken up after Town Meeting.
- Rep. Sibilia gave an update on the **Municipal Heating** bill. The House Committee on Energy & Technology is hoping to get it out by next week. The bill proposes to add staff capacity at regional planning commissions to help connect with municipalities and VGS, to help them access ARPA-related funding available to support comprehensive community resiliency assessments, with the goal of reducing emissions in municipal buildings. According to VLCT, there are over 2,000 municipal buildings across the state, and given that the maximum grant award would be \$200,000, if the program were to be funded at \$40 million (which is the current request), not all buildings would be able to be served. The committee also feels it's important to guarantee that resources are distributed to RPCs equitably according to their size, poverty rates in their catchment, and availability or lack of technical resources locally.
- Rep Austin shared that the House Committee on Education recently heard testimony from an individual who had been working across the state to conduct energy assessments of school facilities.
- Rep. Kimbell asked Rep. Harrison for an update on the **Working Lands Enterprise Fund**. Rep. Harrison indicated that the Governor has increased the base budget for the program to \$1 million annually, and that House Ag has heard testimony from a number of entities and stakeholders advocating for a much higher allocation.

2. **Regional Dispatch.** Rep. Sibilia posited the idea of having someone present to the caucus around the issue of regional dispatch, which she understands to be on the brink

of serious crisis. There are about 100 agencies across the state that are currently dispatched by the State, though there is a bill under discussion that proposes to fund a permanent restructuring into geographically dispersed dispatch hubs that would be run by non-state operators. Several constituents have voiced concern about the lack of ongoing funding for such a shift, as well as the potential to increase financial and logistical burden on the municipal level and therefore on the property tax. Karen Horn from VLCT indicated that it would be a helpful conversation for the caucus to have, and a number of caucus members voiced their support for the idea of hearing from Commissioner Schirling at a future meeting.

3. A proposal was made to invite the chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, Fish & Wildlife to give an **update on pieces of Act 250 legislation** that they are considering, particularly those related to the Rural Omnibus bill, and housing.

4. Letters of Support.

- Several caucus members supported the idea of circulating to the full caucus a letter of support for H.697, the Use Value Appraisal bill that would modify the definition of reserve forestry and expand eligibility for old forest growth management for certain parcels. Brain Lowe from VCRD offered to help draft a letter to share with caucus leadership that could then be circulated among members.
 - Other letters of support will be considered at future meetings.
5. The group adjourned at 8:51am. **The next meeting will be Thursday, February 17th, at 8:00am.** Rep. Sims will be in touch with the link and an agenda next week.