

***VITAL RECORDS IMPROVEMENT FUND  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE***

*To The New Hampshire Department of State*

***-MINUTES-***

***Friday  
March 6, 2009***

# Approved Minutes

## **-MINUTES-**

### **Vital Records Improvement Fund Advisory Committee Meeting**

March 6, 2009

Archives Building  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room  
71 South Fruit Street  
Concord, New Hampshire 03301

#### ***COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:***

Joanne Linxweiler, Auburn Town Clerk, NHC&TC Association Appointment  
Stephen M. Wurtz, Acting State Registrar  
Nelson Allan, Public Member, SOS Appointment  
Dr. David Laflamme, Data User, DHHS Appointment  
Theresa Pare-Curtis, OIT CIO Appointment  
Joe Gray, Rochester City Clerk, NHC&TC Association Appointment  
Patricia Little, Keene City Clerk, NHC&TC Association Appointment  
David Scanlan, Deputy Secretary of State, SOS Appointment  
Debra Clark, Town Clerk, NHC&TC Association Appointment  
Robert Carrier, Funeral Director Association Appointment

#### ***COMMITTEE MEMBERS EXCUSED:***

Thomas A. Andrew, MD, Medical Examiner Appointment  
Dr. Frank Mevers, State Archivist  
Anna Thomas, Municipal Data User, DHHS Appointment  
Stephen Norton, Vital Records User, DHHS Appointment

#### ***GUESTS:***

Chris Bentzler, DOIT

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## Vital Records Improvement Fund Advisory Committee Meeting

### **1. Meeting Called to Order:**

- Mr. Wurtz called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

### **2. Introduction of New Members/Election of Chair:**

- Mr. Wurtz advised the committee that the New Hampshire Hospital Association and the Department of Health & Human Service's new appointees were not in attendance. He introduced the newest clerk appointee, Joanne Linxweiler and asked her to introduce herself to the committee. Mr. Wurtz then explained that as the Acting Director & State Registrar, he was the new Division of Vital Records Administration appointee.
- Mr. Wurtz stated that since Ms. Hadaway left the committee there was a need to elect a new Chairperson. Mr. Gray nominated Ms. Little. Ms. Pare-Curtis seconded the nomination. There was no discussion. The committee voted unanimously to approve Ms. Little as Chair of the Vital Records Improvement Fund Advisory Committee. Ms. Little introduced herself and explained her long history with the committee and passion for the initiative.

### **3. Approval of Minutes:**

- Ms. Little asked if members had taken the opportunity to read the minutes and if they had any corrections or comments before the vote. She added that she had noted an error on page 4 of the minutes. A statement was attributed to her that had been made by Ms. Hadaway. Ms. Little explained that she had not attended the meeting.
- Mr. Gray explained to the committee that he had gone through a change of heart following the last meeting in regard to raising fees to help support the development of the next generation of vital records software. He had supported the increase initially, but thought better of it later. Mr. Gray felt that the committee had acted prematurely. Investigating what the project was going to cost would be the better way to start before beginning to raise funds. He felt it was a multi-year project and there would be time later to begin raising fees if that became necessary. He reported that the clerk's association had decided to put the issue on hold for now.
- Ms. Pare-Curtis made a motion to accept the minutes as corrected. Mr. Allan seconded the motion. The committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes of the November meeting as corrected.

### **4. Financial Reporting:**

- Mr. Wurtz distributed a budget handout to the committee listing expenses to the fund from July 1, 2008 to March 1, 2009. He reported that the fund had gained \$686,000 in the last eight months, an average of \$85,000 per month. Expenses had eaten up half of that amount. Mr. Wurtz stated that a more detailed report might be available if he gave more advance notice to the Business Administrator.

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- Mr. Scanlan added that he would be reporting for Mr. Manning and had a more detailed budget document to share with the committee. The balance of the fund at the end of FY08 was \$2,471,000 and the revenue to date was \$686,205. Expenses to date were showing as \$342,000 and did not reflect some pretty substantial payments (approx. \$300,000) to DOIT. That left approximately \$2.5 million in the fund.
- Mr. Wurtz stated that revenue was down about 12%. Ms. Little replied that in Keene they had noticed a decline in the sales of death certificates.
- Ms. Little asked if the committee historically had run through the funds coming in as quickly. Mr. Scanlan replied that originally the fund grew and grew because there were no funds being expended, but with the automation projects that have developed over the last four or five years, more and more of the fund is being used to support it. The OIT costs have gone up rather dramatically in the last few years.
- The audit uncovered \$157,000 annually that was going into the general fund instead of the VRIF and that has now been corrected. Ms. Little stated that she preferred the format of Mr. Manning's report over the one Mr. Wurtz distributed. She felt it was easier to read and understand.

### **5. Preservation Grants Discussion:**

- Standing in for Mr. Manning, Mr. Scanlan reported that there were 179 cities and towns that qualified for the grants. If they had all applied for and received the maximum \$10,000 grant amounts the fund would be responsible for nearly \$1.8 million.
- To date the fund has paid \$735,000 in grants to communities. The outstanding obligation if the committee wants to continue to fund the potential projects out there is approximately \$1 million.
- Mr. Scanlan asked for guidance as to whether the committee wanted to close up the grants or to follow through and spend the \$1 million. He wanted to know how much time they should be given to close out grants. Mr. Gray asked if the money appropriated in the beginning was removed from the fund and was in addition to the total. Mr. Scanlan replied that it was not. Mr. Gray felt that the money should have been appropriated and felt the plan had been to appropriate the \$1 million and then appropriate a smaller amount each year thereafter.
- Ms. Pare-Curtis asked how long the program had been open and did the towns have a reasonable expectation of being accepted at this point. Committee members replied that it had been approximately two years. Ms. Orman explained that the committee had previously instructed Mr. Teschner to stop accepting new applications as the deadline had been extended already. Any cities or towns expressing interest would be told to watch for the next grant offering.
- Ms. Little stated that it seemed that the committee needed a better idea of who was in the hopper and where they stood in the process. She asked Mr. Scanlan if he had any idea how many cities or towns were closed out versus how many were still waiting for funding. Mr. Scanlan replied that it might be worthwhile to make that discussion

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part of the agenda for the next meeting. Ms. Little agreed that the discussion should be tabled until the next meeting.

### **6. SOSKB Rollout/NHVRIN Reconciliation:**

- Mr. Wurtz explained that in the past there had been several issues with the state not receiving the revenue they were supposed to from cities and towns. An invoicing project was introduced in 2008 and they had just completed the rollout to all NH cities and towns in January.
- As clerks generate monies using the NHVRIN application a monthly report is sent to the town outlining the balance due the state. There is a reconciliation process the town can do to account for any errors. This system allows us to see the monies coming in and will alert us to who is not sending in their funds so they can be followed up with.
- Ms. Little added that she felt that this system could work as a protection for the clerk.

### **7. STEVE Project:**

- Mr. Wurtz explained that the State & Territorial Electronic Vital Exchange of data is a NAPHSIS project. They have come up with a way to electronically share information from state to state. Up until this point most have used the U.S. Postal Service to send notification to another state when one of their residents has a vital event in New Hampshire. This system will make the process more efficient and timely.
- NH ran into difficulty from the beginning. Despite initially agreeing to pilot the program, none of the other New England states were prepared to participate in the pilot program which left NH without a trading partner. A shortage of IT staff also played a part in our no longer being considered a pilot state. Ms. Pare-Curtis reported that DOIT has had no qualified applicants for our posted positions and they are down to one developer dedicated to NHVRIN. She stated that she planned to discuss downgrading the positions so they could at least find qualified staff.

### **8. Pan Flu Grant:**

- Vital Records has teamed up with DHHS on a project to transmit death data to the CDC. This grant is one of just three grants in the country. It is not a lot of money, but there are a lot of benefits to it. Much of it runs parallel to STEVE. We are using the same files and transmission issues. Mr. Wurtz hoped that this project would help pull the STEVE project along. The grant amount is \$41,000. All deaths in NH would be reported daily to the CDC so they can do surveillance for hot spots.
- Vital Records has contracted with Root Learning to prepare a training module for physicians to improve the quality of our data. Mr. Wurtz reported that the monies were accepted at the January 16, 2009 Governor & Council meeting and the end date for the project is May 31, 2009. In that time frame we have to gather the information and transmit it to the CDC on a daily basis and concurrently work with Root Learning to complete the training module by May 31.

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### 9. It Update:

- Ms. Pare-Curtis distributed a handout and reported that some of her other IT teams were shorthanded and they were looking at possibly cross-training some of the staff to meet some critical deadlines. Not for ongoing support, but for time sensitive issues.
- She directed committee members to the handout, explaining that in the future this report would be provided quarterly to the committee by Ms. Barton. The report shows all the activity (releases, fixes, etc.) that has taken place since the last meeting. The report will also detail the projects they are actively involved in.
- Ms. Pare-Curtis reported that the security audit of NHVRIN was complete and DOIT had provided the results and their recommendations to Mr. Wurtz. She felt that moving the application behind the proxy would mitigate a lot of the concerns.
- The quarterly reports would also go into detail on change requests (CRs). The number of CRs often seems unchanged but that is not the case. There are constantly CRs being closed and new ones opened. The second handout goes into greater detail what those CRs entail. The CRs are rated in order of priority by Mr. Wurtz and his staff.
- Mr. Gray suggested cutting all the old CRs from the list. Mr. Wurtz explained that CRs are prioritized and everyone recognized the likelihood and most will never be completed, but the issues have been identified and when a new system is designed they can be taken into consideration. Many of the older items are important, but work-arounds have been established so they have been placed on the back burner. Because of legislative changes many things have been placed further down the priority list.
- Mr. Allan reminded the committee that they had voted to implement a code freeze on NHVRIN. He asked how the Pandemic Flu project had been added despite this. Mr. Wurtz replied that this was beyond NHVRIN. Mr. Allan asked if this was a new addition to the list and if there had been other additions. Ms. Pare-Curtis replied that she did not think they could or should refuse to add new CRs to the list. The information they provide would be extremely helpful when designing the new NHVRIN application.
- Mr. Allan asked if this was in the committee's purview. Ms. Little replied that the committee needed to think globally and this change would probably be considered an improvement to vital records. Mr. Wurtz replied that even though the grant was just accepted he would have preferred to have gotten it in the beginning rather than months later after losing all but one developer. Despite the hold up there was a great deal of support for the project.
- Mr. Gray stated that he did not see the Pan Flu as a problem because it came with funding. His concern was with how much money would be spent to make NHVRIN work with STEVE when the goal was to design a new application. Mr. Wurtz deferred to Ms. Pare-Curtis. She explained that they were not really altering NHVRIN. The project involved imports and exports of NHVRIN data, not alteration of its code to make it work with STEVE.

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- Mr. Gray stated that he was not in favor of the STEVE project if it involved funding coming from the Improvement fund. Mr. Wurtz replied that when other states are on board with STEVE it would be beneficial for NH to also be on board. Vital Records staff currently spend a great deal of time sending out death reports manually to other states. STEVE would eliminate the need for this manual procedure. Ms. Little felt it was a good idea to relieve his staff of an onerous process.
- Dr. Laflamme stated that STEVE is very important. Not only for improved data quality, but in terms of saving lives. He asked to be corrected if he was wrong, but he believed that any code used for extracting data could be used in the new system, so it would not be wasted effort. Ms. Pare-Curtis agreed.

### AUDIO TAPE ENDED. MINUTES CONTINUE FROM NOTES

- Ms. Linxweiler reported that it is very frustrating waiting for a call back from Seneca when she encounters problems with NHVRIN and calls them to report it. It is especially troublesome when she has customers in the office waiting. She has begun calling Vital Records directly when she has a problem. That sentiment was echoed by other committee members. Mr. Wurtz added that he felt it important that clerks be reminded that Seneca is only intended to be a resource when there is a software issue. They are not intended nor equipped to assist with a hardware or business issue.
- Ms. Little asked how difficult it would be to get out of the contract with Seneca if the majority of issues were resolved through calling the business office. She questioned if the expense was worth it if they were only creating tickets for Mr. Bentzler or Vital Records staff to respond to. Ms. Pare-Curtis was unsure of the exact details of the contract with Seneca. She was under the impression that they ran from three to five years on a calendar year basis. She stated that she would find out the particulars and report them to the committee.
- Mr. Wurtz felt that Vital Records staff could triage the phone calls and start tickets if the contract was ended. Mr. Bentzler suggested that there might still be a charge for using the internal helpdesk. Ms. Pare-Curtis replied that those expenses were figured into the PC count, so she did not think there would be an additional charge if Seneca were taken out of the loop. Ms. Little asked Mr. Pare-Curtis how difficult it would be to get out of the contract. Ms. Pare-Curtis replied that she was unsure but would inquire and get back to the committee. Mr. Wurtz added that he would be interested in seeing an example of the internal ticket system.
- Mr. Allan suggested and put forward a motion to table the Seneca discussion until the committee had enough information to make an educated decision on whether to discontinue the contract. Mr. Gray seconded and the committee unanimously agreed to table the discussion.

### **10. Other Business:**

- Dr. Laflamme asked if it would be possible to receive copies of all the handouts received at meetings along with the minutes. Ms. Orman replied that she would be happy to include them if she had electronic copies. Mr. Wurtz added that he could get handouts scanned if there were not electronic copies provided.

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### 11. Next Scheduled Meeting:

- Because the next meeting was scheduled the week of the Memorial Day holiday, the committee elected to reschedule it to Friday, May 15, 2009.

### 12. ACTION ITEMS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING:

- **Seneca:** Tabled
- **Code Freeze:** Discussed
- **Hiring Business Analyst:** Mr. Scanlan advised the committee that he would take it under advisement. At the moment the Secretary of State is focused on maintaining the positions they already have, rather than adding new ones. There could be staff already on board in the department that could take on this role.
- **MRI RFP:** Mr. Scanlan suggested a subcommittee that could be tasked with working on the RFP and be given decision making authority. Ms. Little agreed and asked for volunteers. The subcommittee members will be: Mr. Scanlan, Mr. Wurtz, Mr. Allan, Dr. Laflamme, and Mr. Pare-Curtis. Mr. Gray asked how long it would take the committee to come up with an RFP. Ms. Pare-Curtis explained that she could not hazard a guess, but that DOIT has a Contracts team that may have a boiler plate RFP that would fit the bill. Mr. Wurtz suggested looking the RFP created for NHVRIN and Dr. Laflamme suggested looking at other state's RFPs for ideas. It was unanimous that the language has to be explicit and the oversight needs to be there. Mr. Wurtz added that Vital Records staff thought they had covered all of that with the NHVRIN RFP but the oversight never materialized.
- **Fee Change Legislation:** Ms. Little reported that the LSR to raise fees was drafted, sponsored and then pulled back. She explained that the Clerk Executive Committee was anxious to discuss the matter with Secretary Gardner and Mr. Scanlan.
- **Security Test:** Ms. Pare-Curtis reported that DOIT was working to put NHVRIN behind a proxy server to add an additional layer of security.
- **Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU):** Mr. Wurtz stated that he was pleased to announce that the division and DHHS had finally agreed on the MOU.
- **Annual Report:** Ms. Little referred to RSA 5C:18 that indicates that Vital Records should be providing the committee with an annual report on accomplishments, etc. Mr. Scanlan felt that in addition to one for 2009, any information from a 2008 report might be helpful to the committee.
- **Appropriations:** Mr. Gray felt that all future monies appropriated/budgeted by the committee should be removed from the fund balance. He felt that would help to protect the fund from raiding by the legislature. He asked Mr. Scanlan if the SOS negotiates its interest regularly, explaining that Rochester negotiates all their accounts every five years.



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- **Budget:** Mr. Scanlan asked if the budget subcommittee would be revived in 2009 to propose a budget.