

AIAVT PUBLIC POLICY MEETING MINUTES: DEC. 16 MEETING AT DFS OFFICES, BARRE/BERLIN

Attending from our AIAVT: Keith Dewey, AIA; John Alden, AIA, Alan Berry, AIA; Carol Miklos, Executive Director

Attending from the VT DFS: Joe Bernard, Landon Wheeler, Bob Sponable, Stan Baranowski, and Michael Desrochers.

Topics discussed

1. AIAVT suggested changes to the VT DFS Construction Permit Application to include the name of the architect/engineer used in the design process similar to text used by other states. Also, a suggestion was made that the application includes a brief description of the Statute Chapter 124 requirements in order to make applicants aware of the statute requirements. These comments were rejected by the DFS attendees, saying the DFS has no Vermont Statute enforcement authority and will therefore not include any such text in their form.
2. The DFS attendees freely admitted that although the Guidelines for Requiring a VT Licensed Design Professional chart has been pulled from the DFS website, the DFS staff continues to use the chart in all of their project valuations. DFS staff asked the AIAVT attendees how we would like to change the VT Statute Chapter 124 and how we would like to change the Guidelines chart to suit everyone's needs. AIAVT attendees stated that they had no desire to change the Statute Chapter 124 text and although the AIAVT is open to evaluate and consider alterations to the Guidelines chart, the AIAVT could not formally endorse any changes to the Guidelines chart which would be in direct violation or conflict with the Statute Chapter 124.
3. The AIAVT attendees suggested that, although many smaller projects find it hard to justify the cost of an architect or engineer, professionals can offer abbreviated services which might include stamped reports, evaluations, feasibility studies and other options which are less costly than comprehensive documents. This would allow professionals to do many of the initial project evaluations which the DFS staff is now doing without professional involvement. It was pointed out that the professionals could reduce some of the DFS workload and help our profession find more work. It was suggested that professional involvement can also bring other assets to even a small project, such as bigger picture considerations to improve projects (improved functionality, energy conservation, aesthetics, etc.).
4. DFS staff suggested the new Phil Scott Commissioner appointment will be Tom Anderson and he will be pressed to make changes to "expedite the permit approval process".
5. AIAVT attendees suggested that a standard practice of sketch plan reviews at the schematic design project phase should be adopted in order to save time, increase collaboration and reduce disastrous code violation problems late in the process. This could not only reduce the

total project review time for DFS staff, but also regularly educate professionals as to current code requirements. DFS staff was in full agreement.

- 6) Several DFS attendees made negative comments about professionals who submit plans yet these individuals “do not even own current code books” as a reason why they do code reviews with small scale project owners without involving professionals. The AIAVT attendees mentioned that we are making an effort to increase member code competency, but many registered architects in Vermont are not AIAVT members. AIAVT also suggested that most AIAVT members would not have a problem with some of our annual continuing education requirements being tied to code education.
 - a) Upon being questioned about the architects who do not know the current code, DFS indicated that there are half a dozen such architects. DFS must take the time to correct the work from these architects. DFS declined to provide the names of these architects, although they agreed, passing the names on to the registration/licensing board might be appropriate. AIAVT stressed that we do not want these architects to give our profession a bad name and that DFS should not enable them with code review and redesign assistance.
 - b) AIAVT suggested that a member of the licensing board might be invited to participate in AIAVT-DFS talks about codes; DFS staff seemed amenable.
7. AIAVT did not show up with a comprehensive list of non-compliant projects across Vermont, but DFS’ Plan Review Valuations list was a good start in recording those projects which do comply. If projects observed in our regions and towns do not show up on these lists, there may be a problem. Projects listed do not necessarily have a professional involved, but those which are not exempted by Statute Chapter 124 should. We still need to compile our list of non-complying projects and these DFS lists should help.
8. AIAVT attendees suggested additional staff be added to the DFS in order to handle their workload, including an architect. DFS staff suggested that the current state budget problems will likely mean more and faster work demand (30-day turnaround, or less) with less money and possibly less staff. DFS said they may be working to develop computer applications which speed the code review process. These might include BlueBeam programs and increased usage of PDF drawing/document exchanges with applicants. We suggested the AIAVT may be able to help with such development if the efforts might be mutually beneficial.
9. Continued meetings and collaborative progress between our groups was highly desired by everyone. Carol will coordinate with DFS to set up our next meeting in early February.