Legislative Advisory Committee on the State House – Minutes Meeting Record

Date: August 18, 2026

Minutes record keeper: Cole Barney, Communications & Legislative Affairs Manager, Department of Buildings & General Services

Present:

- **Attendance: Members**
  - Sen. Ruth Hardy, Chair
  - Sen. Alison Clarkson (virtual)
  - Rep. Alice Emmons (virtual)
  - Agatha Kessler, Sargeant-at-Arms
  - Emily Kisicki, BGS Deputy Commissioner
  - David Schutz, State Curator
  - Susan McClure, Vermont Arts Council Executive Director
  - Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
  - Eileen Corcoran, Vermont Historical Society Director of Service & Outreach
- **Other Attendees**
  - Jon Gray, Legislative Council
  - Joe Aja, BGS Design & Construction Director
  - Shawn Brennan, Freeman French Freeman Vice President
  - Scott Moore, Joint Fiscal Office
  - Michele Bailey, Vermont Arts Council Sr. Program Manager, ADA Coordinator
  - Sherilyn Lafley, BGS Program Manager
  - Cole Barney, BGS Communications & Legislative Affairs Manager
  - Tricia Harper, Legislative Facilities Coordinator
  - Michael Chernick, Legislative Counsel
  - Matt Levine, Lobbyist
- **Members absent**
  - Rep. Mollie Burke
  - Rep. James Gregoire
  - Sen. Wendy Harrison

Discussion:

1. Call to order and election of Chair.
    - Jon Gray (Legislative Counsel) opened the meeting and noted that the committee did not yet have a chair. Senator Alison Clarkson nominated Senator Ruth Hardy as chair of the committee. The nomination was seconded, and no other nominations were offered. The committee voted unanimously by voice vote to elect Senator Hardy as chair.
    - Senator Hardy assumed the position of chair.
2. Introductions
    - Participants introduced themselves. Attendees included members of the committee, legislative staff, representatives from the Department of Buildings & General Services, the design team, preservation and arts stakeholders, and members of the public as noted in the 'Present' section of the minutes
3. Committee Role Jurisdiction
    - Jon Gray reviewed the statutory role of the committee under 2 VSA § 653, explaining that the committee is advisory in nature and is charged with reviewing, coordinating, and making recommendations regarding activities related to:
        i. Collections and care of art, historic artifacts, and furnishings;
        ii. Refurnishing, renovation, preservation, and expansion of the State House and its interior;
        iii. Related matters involving the State House collection and preservation.
    - Mr. Gray noted that the Committee's recommendations are directed to the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Commissioner of Buildings and General Services as they carry out responsibilities for maintaining and preserving the State House.
    - Agatha Kessler clarified that separate formal oversight of the project rests with the Joint Legislative Management Committee, together with the chairs of the House and Senate Institutions Committees. The present Committee's role is to provide advisory feedback to inform the design process.
4. Project Overview
    - Agatha Kessler and the project team provided background on the State House entry and life-safety renovation project.
    - The project was described as a Buildings and General Services project authorized in prior legislation, with the design team including:

i. Freeman French Freeman;
ii. BGS staff;
iii. Sergeant-at-Arms staff;
iv. State Curator;
v. State Historic Preservation Office;
vi. Legislative facilities staff;
vii. Additional consultants, including landscape, structural, civil, code, and historic preservation consultants.

- The project has moved through schematic design and is nearing the end of the design development phase.

5. Project Purposes
    - The Committee discussed the multiple purposes of the project, including:
        i. Improved accessibility and creation of a more equitable entrance;
        ii. Security screening during the legislative session;
        iii. Capacity for health or emergency screening, including lessons learned from COVID-19;
        iv. Life-safety and code improvements, especially regarding egress;
        v. Better visitor orientation and wayfinding;
        vi. Improved student and educational visitor experience;
        vii. Separation of visitor traffic from deliveries and service access;
        viii. Maintaining flexibility for future State House needs.
    - Senator Clarkson emphasized the importance of visitor orientation and educational programming, especially given the large number of students and visitors who come to the State House each year.
6. Design Presentation
    - Shawn Brennan of Freeman French Freeman and Joe Aja of BGS presented the current design direction.
    - Historic context
        i. The design team reviewed the history of additions and alterations to the State House, noting that the building has evolved over time. The proposed project continues that evolution while attempting to respect the historic character of the building.
    - Proposed Entryway Design
        i. The preferred design concept includes a new rounded, glass-forward entry on the west/northwest side of the State House, near the current loading dock entrance.
        ii. The design team explained that this option was selected from several concepts because it:

        - Creates a recognizable and welcoming entrance;
        - Supports wayfinding;
        - Differentiates the new entrance without competing with the historic State House;
        - Uses geometry and transparency to signal public access;
        - Allows visitors to see more clearly how to proceed through the building.
    iii. Several members commented favorably on the rounded design and its relationship to the State House dome.
- Wayfinding and Interior Circulation
    i. The design team described the proposed circulation path from the new entry through the building to the Lincoln hallway. The intent is to create a clear visual path so that visitors can understand where to go upon entering, rather than navigating indirectly through existing corridors.
    ii. The Committee discussed the importance of serving school groups and public visitors, including whether a flexible orientation space could support student groups and general visitors at different times.
- Accessibility
    i. Accessibility was a major topic of discussion.
    ii. Michelle Bailey noted that early renderings appeared to emphasize stairs and encouraged future drawings to clearly show accessible routes and no-step access.
    iii. Shawn Brennan stated that:
        - A landscape architect has now been brought onto the project;
        - The exterior approach will be studied further;
        - The goal is to have all visitors use the same accessible path where possible;
        - Sloped walks may be used instead of ramps where grades allow;
        - The project team has engaged or plans to engage accessibility stakeholders, including the Vermont Center for Independent Living.
    iv. The committee requested more information at a future meeting regarding:
        - Landscape design;
        - No-step thresholds;

- Accessible parking;
- Accessible pedestrian routes;
- The relationship between accessibility and the proposed single-point-of-entry model.

- Elevators
  i. Several members asked if the project includes a new elevator or full replacement of existing elevators. Committee members noted that visibility and dignity of elevator access are important accessibility considerations.
  ii. Shawn Brennan shared that the project does not currently include a new/replacement elevator. He did share that the elevator serving the entry area would become much more visible and easier to find, certain elevator finishes and controls may be upgraded, and that the elevator and nearby fire stair area would be improved because they will become prominent public spaces
- Glass, Security, Heat, and Light
  i. The committee discussed the glass included in the proposed entryway design. Members raised questions about:
     - Security implications;
     - Ballistic glass;
     - Explosive-force impacts;
     - Heat gain and heat loss;
     - Glare;
     - Effects on collections and interior spaces;
     - Maintenance and long-term performance.
  ii. The design team responded to questions as they came up and explained that:
     - The intent is to secure the building, not fortify it;
     - Capital Police and BGS security staff are being consulted;
     - Glass can be selected and tuned for heat, visibility, and performance;
     - Ballistic glass is not currently included in the budget and would require further analysis;
     - Ballistic glass can have trade-offs, including potential issues involving blast pressure;
     - Materials and glass specifications will be considered in upcoming design work.

iii. The committee noted the need to balance transparency, safety, and cost and appreciated the level of thought that has gone into the design.

- Roof Design, Snow Load, Fire Code, and Historic Impacts
    i. The conversation shifted to the design of the roof. Senator Clarkson raised concerns about the complexity of multiple roof lines and the possibility of snow and ice shedding onto the new roof. She asked whether a unified higher roof should be reconsidered.
    ii. The design team explained that he current lower-roof approach attempts to preserve views and lights to existing historic walls and windows, while avoiding excess enclosure of the historic façade.
    iii. The design team also explained that a higher unified roof could simplify some snow and drainage issues and allow more glass, but it would also create significant challenges, including:
        - Enclosing more of the historic State House facade;
        - Potential impacts on House chamber windows and other historic spaces;
        - Fire-separation and code issues between new and historic construction;
        - Additional costs;
        - Changes to interior volume and acoustics;
        - Connections to existing roofs and walls;
        - Potential effects on cafeteria and connector spaces.
    iv. David Scutz noted concerns regarding maintaining natural light in historic spaces, including the House Chamber, and emphasized the need for further analysis before pursuing a substantially different roof approach.
    v. The design team stated that it is actively studying roof options, including drainage, snow drift, heated drains, and impacts to historic materials
- Fire Escape and Future Egress
    i. Several members noted that the fire escape is visually unattractive and will remain visible in some views of the proposed addition.
    ii. The design team explained that earlier concepts considered replacing or eliminating the fire escape, but budget limitations narrowed the current scope. The current design preserves the possibility of a future egress connection that could eventually allow removal of the fire escape.

iii. Members also discussed whether the fire escape could become an opportunity for temporary or long-term public art, provided that life-safety function and historic preservation concerns are respected.

- Parking, Deliveries, and Traffic Flow
  i. As the last part of the design presentation, the design team reviewed a preliminary site plan showing:
     - Delivery access from Bacon/Baldwin;
     - Truck circulation and loading area;
     - Potential accessible parking near the entry;
     - Pedestrian access routes.
  ii. The Committee discussed parking impacts, including concerns previously raised in the House Corrections and Institutions Committee. Agatha Kessler stated that the project is expected to eliminate the existing "C lot" adjacent to the legislator lounge/loading dock area, which currently contains approximately eight spaces used by legislators with mobility needs. She noted that:
     - There are currently approximately 184 legislative parking spaces for 180 legislators;
     - Some issues may relate more to enforcement and assignment than total number of spaces;
     - Replacement or alternative accessible parking will need to be addressed;
     - Public accessible parking remains a project priority;
     - Parking planning is also connected to broader Capitol Complex planning.
  iii. The Committee also discussed the State-owned "pit" parking area and whether it should be reconsidered in the future for structured parking or other uses, though that issue is outside the current project scope.

7. Seasonal Use and Single Point of Entry
   - The Committee discussed whether the new entrance would be used year-round as the main public entrance.
   - The project team explained that the current operational concept is for the new entrance to function as the secure screened entry during the legislative session. During the tourist season, the State House may continue to operate more like a museum, with multiple entrances open, including the historic front doors.

- Several members questioned whether investing in a new accessible and welcoming entrance should lead to its use as the principal entrance year-round.
- Others noted that the State House functions differently during different seasons:
    i. During session, it is primarily a lawmaking space requiring higher security;
    ii. During the off-session tourist season, it functions more like a museum;
    iii. It also serves as a convention/event space for ceremonies and public gatherings.
- The Sergeant-at-Arms emphasized that the guiding principle is balance, including balancing security, accessibility, public welcome, historic character, and operating cost.
- The Committee identified seasonal use and single-point-entry operations as an issue for further discussion, while recognizing that final decisions rest with Joint Legislative Management Committee and other responsible entities.

8. Historic Preservation Review and Approvals
    - The committee discussed required review and timeline by historic preservation entities.
    - The project team stated that:
        i. The Capitol Complex Commission will need to review and approve exterior impacts;
        ii. The State Historic Preservation Office will review construction plans;
        iii. Plans are typically reviewed at approximately 30 percent and 60 percent completion;
        iv. The National Historic Landmark Program will also review and provide input;
        v. The federal review process may take approximately 90 days.
    - The Committee also discussed outreach to historic preservation stakeholders, including a group being coordinated with assistance from the Preservation Trust of Vermont.
9. Budget and Funding
    - The project reviewed the current funding of the project with the committee, including ARPA funds previously made available for design-related work, a

prior $150,000 state appropriation, and a more recent $1.3 million appropriation for additional design work.

- Representative Emmons asked how much of the existing funds had been expended. BGS responded that:
    i. The $1.3 million allocated for FY27 has not yet been used;
    ii. The $150,000 appropriation had been only marginally used;
    iii. Approximately $400,000 of the ARPA funds had been expended;
    iv. Remaining ARPA funds must be expended by the end of December.
- The project team noted that future legislative funding decisions will be required as the project progresses.

10. Schedule
    - The project team shared the timeline for the various stages of the project, noting that the end of the design development phase is nearing. The project team explained the project phases to members:
        i. Schematic Design – initial concept and design direction;
        ii. Design Development – refining design and making the design work technically;
        iii. Construction Documents – detailed documents for construction, phasing, sequencing, and bidding/construction management.
    - The team expects to complete design development around mid-October. After that, a cost estimate will be prepared, and the project would move toward construction documents.
    - The Committee discussed that major design changes become more difficult and costly after design development is complete, though smaller changes remain possible.
11. Communications Plan
    - Senator Hardy raised the importance of a robust public communications plan, citing examples from large construction projects in Middlebury where strong communication helped maintain public support and reduce confusion.
    - The Sergeant-at-Arms acknowledged that no detailed communications plan exists yet but agreed that one will be necessary because the project will affect:
        i. Legislators;
        ii. Legislative staff;
        iii. Capitol Police;
        iv. BGS;
        v. Visitors;

vi. School groups;
vii. Lobbyists and advocates;
viii. Montpelier residents and businesses;
ix. Tourists and international visitors;
x. Users of committee rooms and the mezzanine;
xi. Deliveries and operations.

- The goal should be “no surprises” for people coming to or using the State House.
- Senator Clarkson also emphasized the need for communication with the Legislature, which will be responsible for future funding decisions.
- Susan Evans McClure suggested that future presentations include a slide listing stakeholder group consulted to date.

12. Issues Identified for Further Information
    - The committee identified several topics they would like to see a follow-up for at a future meeting:
        i. Communications plan;
        ii. Seasonal use / year-round entry strategy;
        iii. Roof design, snow load, drainage, and related fire-code issues;
        iv. Stakeholder engagement list;
        v. Parking and traffic flow, including accessible parking;
        vi. Landscape design and accessibility;
        vii. Fire escape treatment and potential future removal;
        viii. Climate resilience, flooding, stormwater, and energy efficiency;
        ix. Interior design, including art, furnishings, acoustics, and visitor experience;
        x. Student and visitor orientation spaces;
        xi. Gift shop location or satellite gift shop concept;
        xii. Historic preservation stakeholder feedback;
        xiii. Materials and exterior design refinement.
13. Feedback on Exterior Design
    - David Schutz asked whether members had concerns about the current rounded exterior entry design.
    - Senator Hardy stated that the selected rounded design was her preferred option among those presented.
    - Senator Clarkson also expressed support for the general design direction but continued to raise concerns about the roof design.

- Susan Evans McClure noted that her personal preference might lean more modern but emphasized the importance of obtaining historic preservation support and stakeholder buy-in.
- The project team noted that materials have not yet been selected and that material choices will significantly affect the final aesthetic.

14. Next Steps
    - The Committee agreed that it should meet again in late October, prior to the Joint Legislative Management Committee's anticipated review of updated designs.
    - The next meeting should provide updates on the issues identified above, including roof design, landscaping/accessibility, parking, communications, historic preservation feedback, and interior planning.
    - Senator Hardy offered to circulate the list of follow-up items to the Committee and to share information about successful communications models from Middlebury construction projects.
15. Adjournment
    - Senator Hardy adjourned the meeting at 12:18 PM.