Public Hearing Norwich, VT Meeting Minutes

Montshire Museum

1 Montshire Rd, Norwich, VT 05055

October 1, 6:00-7:25 PM

Members present—Brian Breslend; Eugene Santos; and Joe Segale.

Staff present—Ryan Flanagan

Public present—Peter Rousmaniere; Grace Elletson; Jeff Chu; Paige Greenfield; Marcos Stafne; Devin Bates; Keith Tookey; and Chico Eastridge.

(5:45-6:00 p.m.)—Public gathered and found seating for the event.

(6:00-6:12 p.m.) **Welcome, review of agenda**

- ❖ Brian Breslend opened the meeting by giving a layout of what would be discussed.
- ❖ Brian allowed the board to introduce themselves, then the audience gave introductions as well.
- ❖ After introductions, Brian went into the five recommendations that the AI Task Force is tackling in its Final Report to the Senate Committee on Government Operations and the House Committee on Energy and Technology on or before January 15, 2020. The five requirements of the report read:
    - ❖ 1) A summary of the current development and use of artificial intelligence in Vermont;
    - ❖ 2) A proposal of a definition of artificial intelligence, if needed;
    - ❖ 3) A proposal for State regulation of artificial intelligence, if needed;
    - ❖ 4) A proposal for the responsible and ethical development of artificial intelligence in the State, including an identification of potential risks and benefits from such development; and
    - ❖ 5) A recommendation on whether the General Assembly should establish a permanent commission to study the artificial intelligence field.
- ❖ Brian also discussed the Interim Report, which was submitted in February.
    - ❖ After meeting with the Legislature on February 15, 2019, it was decided that the Final Report's deadline would be extended from June 30, 2019 to January 15, 2020.
- ❖ After discussing the elements of the report, Brian gave more information about the board and its members.
    - ❖ Members have a multitude of different professions, with some being involved in government, some being involved in the private sector, and others in education.
- ❖ Brian also told the audience about the monthly meetings.

- ❖ The general meetings have had a variety of different speakers, with backgrounds in criminal justice, construction, agriculture, etcetera.
- ❖ The board has also focused on outreach with public meetings. This was the third public meeting so far, with previous meetings in Burlington and Lyndonville, VT.
- ❖ Two more public meetings are scheduled for October. One will take place in Manchester, VT and the other in Essex, VT
- ❖ After discussing the board's members and events, Brian broke down the recommendations the board has proposed thus far.
    - ❖ Brian pointed out that it is also important to consider what people consider AI.

(6:13-7:25 p.m.) **Public Comment & Discussion**

- ❖ Opening the discussion, a general audience member asked how AI would specifically affect Vermont as a whole.
    - ❖ Brian added his input by detailing that there will be job gain, job loss, and job transfer.
    - ❖ Joe Segale voiced that it is hard to forecast what will happen to jobs. This is a primary reason the AI Task Force was established.
    - ❖ Gene told the audience that we should find a specific way to support ethical development of this emerging technology. He asked the audience: *Should we look at costs & benefits? Should we tax AI? Should we regulate?* It is still up for debate.
- ❖ A general audience member offered his advice on the technology. He told the board that they should start with several key needs in the state like healthcare, transportation, and so forth.
    - ❖ From there, they should research what AI solutions would be feasible. They should look at it in a way that is economic and be strategic about what AI could do for humans.
    - ❖ It starts with a definition need and then solutions can be administered.
- ❖ Joe opened the floor to hear what other people had to say about the topic of policy or regulation.
    - ❖ People were curious about the state's role with industry practices and standards.
    - ❖ The challenge that everyone is looking at is how one would test for continuous algorithms.
    - ❖ Privacy and security appear to be concerns among the public. Most people are afraid when they hear the word "AI", but it has been around for decades.
    - ❖ Gene agreed that most people are scared when they hear about autonomous algorithms.
    - ❖ However, the industry does a good job at maintaining itself. They get stakeholders involved in the industry and find the best practices.
    - ❖ That being said, where does it start and where does it end? People agreed that the last thing people would want is to have to meet 50 different AI standards.
    - ❖ Joe pointed out that the AI Task Force is not close to pushing any regulation or policy, as it is hard to predict how things might change. Guest audience member, Jeff Chu, was there for that reason. He wanted to hear perspectives about regulation outside of his private company.

- ❖ An audience member also pointed out that there is a shrinking definition of artificial intelligence.
    - ❖ He believes it is important to discuss where automation and AI start.
    - ❖ Gene gave his current definition, which read "any manmade system that is making decisions based on other possible answers."
    - ❖ Fuzzy logic was another term for the audience to discuss. It is not as simple as algorithms computing true (=1) and false (=0). AI is making decisions based on various factors.
- ❖ The audience was receptive of Gene's definition and this allowed for further commentary.
    - ❖ The audience discussed that it is vital to identify the needs of households, governments, and businesses.
    - ❖ For this to happen, there also must be a planning horizon, or a length of time into the future that is accounted for in this particular plan.
    - ❖ There must also be a metric, so that the technology and lives can be improved. Gene posed the questions: *What would the state care about? Is it going to be risk-based?*
    - ❖ The public also asked if the Vermont AI Task Force was in touch with other similar groups.
        - ❖ Brian responded to this question. He told the audience that it is looking at the EU Code of ethics as a model. However, it is also aware that there are other task forces in Canada, Washington State, and the Bay Area.
        - ❖ Most groups are focused on specific topics within AI such as privacy.
- ❖ Joe told the audience that the task force wants to find the best way to use the technology in Vermont.
    - ❖ He posed two questions: *What industries will be affected? How will they grow and affect other industries?*
    - ❖ A general audience member voiced that the task force should also be looking at social and economic development when considering these decisions.
- ❖ One general audience member asked: *What are potential groups of people that might be disadvantaged (if they do not have access to AI)?*
    - ❖ The audience agreed that this should be a concern. As automation continues, there needs to be more people looking into education (and how it can be affected or supported).
    - ❖ Accessibility is a key issue in Vermont, as its population is very spread out compared to most states.
- ❖ The audience member also asked: *How does the EU enforce the code of ethics?*
    - ❖ Gene told the audience that code of ethics is an overarching document. There is no enforcement currently taking place.
    - ❖ This is a primary reason why the AI Task Force is choosing to focus on the topic of ethics.
    - ❖ These ethics typically get codified in fields. There needs to be accountability moving forward as large amounts of data are being collected through data mining, or the practice of examining large databases in order to generate new information.

- ❖ The audience member told the group that it is important to know the technology's full intended use. He recommended that the Vermont AI Task Force get in touch with other groups across the United States.
  - ❖ At this point in the conversation, Gene drew attention to the aspirational policy the group is looking to achieve. Right now, the task force is working to get ahead of the game by making this report.
- ❖ Next, Brian asked the audience who was concerned about job loss.
  - ❖ Audience members noted that it might get rid of a portion of jobs related to financial services and insurance claims, which can be automated.
  - ❖ However, other complementary jobs will also be created with the further adoption of this technology.
  - ❖ It also might help to solve a problem where there is a shortage of workers.
- ❖ One audience member asked how energy and grid systems would fit into this policy, regulation, etcetera.
  - ❖ She asked: *Would it play into security and safety? How would AI influence these systems?*
  - ❖ Energy and infrastructure have not been looked at too widely yet within the Task Force, so it gives the group a topic to discuss at additional meetings.
- ❖ After discussing infrastructure and energy, the audience talked more on what major initiatives AI could be used for in the state of Vermont.
  - ❖ The audience came to a consensus that AI should be used to manage assets as efficiently as possible.
  - ❖ For example, AI could be used for structural help monitoring. Bridges are very complicated, and it can be used to monitor if they are deteriorating.
  - ❖ It can also be used to address safeties. Human behavior is to cause for car accidents, and it can help stop these injuries or deaths.
  - ❖ When making any of these decisions, people should acknowledge that Vermont is dispersed. People must try to find an appropriate solution that benefits everyone.
- ❖ A general audience member also asked how can AI could be regulated?
  - ❖ She was curious if it could be used in fields such as climate resiliency, flood resiliency, etcetera.
  - ❖ A general audience member noted that it would be a great idea to have Vermont be a hub for those sorts of developments, then work with AI developers. Institutions such as the University of Vermont, Dartmouth College, and Vermont Technical College can help in research efforts.
- ❖ At this point in the meeting, the topic focused more towards the Final Report and the Task Force itself.
  - ❖ A general audience member asked if the AI Task Force had established a working code of ethics. Brian responded that it is expected to be in the Final Report. Ryan Flanagan gave more information on dates of the report.

- ❖ Another general audience member asked if there was any other form of outreach besides press releases. She suggested that the AI Task Force submit a survey to the general public.
- ❖ General audience members were also curious about what happens after Legislature. The board members detailed that it is a possibility for the AI Task Force to become a permanent commission. It is currently researching both the Vermont Commission on Women and the Vermont Commission on International Trade, who are permanent commissions.
- ❖ After this, a general audience member asked if the task force knew how AI was being deployed in New Hampshire.
  - ❖ The Task Force had not communicated with New Hampshire on this topic. It will focus on outreach soon.
  - ❖ Joe Segale reported that it is useful to look at how something is being utilized in another state. He provided autonomous vehicles as an example. Another audience member provided telemedicine as an example.
- ❖ At 7:25 p.m., the meeting adjourned. Some audience members stayed later and had additional conversations as well.