

October 04, 2024

Meet the 2024 VLCT Award Winners and Nominees





By Ted Brady, VLCT Executive Director

Almost five hundred people were on hand last Wednesday at Town Fair 2024 in Killington when VLCT Board President Bill Fraser announced this year's winners of VLCT's awards. The 2024 Legislative Service Award went to Vermont Senator Jane Kitchel of Danville, and the 2024 VLCT Lifetime Achievement Award was given to Killington Town Clerk and Treasurer Lucrecia Wonsor. In an unusual move, two 2024 Municipal Service Awards were presented: one to all Vermont municipal road crews and the other to former Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger. Keep reading to learn more about them and the other Municipal Service Award nominees. Nominations can be made by any member or the VLCT Nominations Committee each year in the specified timeframe before Town Fair.

2024 Legislative Service Award

The Legislative Service Award is given to a member of the Vermont General Assembly who, through their service, has best shown an awareness of the issues facing local government and its capacity for self-governance and, through legislative action, has



sought to solve those problems and provide local authority on a statewide basis.

Winner: Senator Jane Kitchel (Caledonia County)

"I really got the greatest reward from helping individual towns with a specific issue or problem," said 2024 VLCT Legislative Service Award nominee Vermont Senator Jane Kitchel. Jane, who has served in the Vermont Senate for two decades, used her influential position as Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee to secure flood relief for Vermont municipalities this year, including \$10 million in the 2024 budget adjustment bill and \$36 million in contingent appropriations for flood resiliency efforts in the 2025 appropriations bill.



Jane was well known in her district for helping to realize the power of state and municipal partnerships to get things done. In Fairlee, she helped obtain milfoil treatment permits. In West Fairlee, Fairlee, and Thetford, she helped secure state resources to replace a failing dam. In St. Johnsbury, she led efforts to turn an infamously blighted property into new housing. In Barnet and other small towns, she helped identify new funding sources for village water and wastewater systems.

The VLCT Nominating Committee said she has been a huge help to municipalities in her career, even though there were plenty of times VLCT didn't agree with her positions. Her effectiveness as a smart, hardworking, and fair legislator are traits VLCT is pleased to honor. Jane joins a group of powerful moderate Democrats leaving the Senate this year.



All of them will be missed.

2024 Lifetime Achievement Award

From time to time, VLCT presents its Lifetime Achievement Award to a municipal official or employee who has dedicated their career to serving local government, both within their community and through service at a statewide level on a board, commission, or the Vermont League of Cities and Towns.

Winner: Lucrecia Wonsor, Killington Town Clerk and Treasurer

Killington Town Clerk and Treasurer Lucrecia Wonsor became the resort town's clerk in 2002, after a short stint as assistant clerk. She and her family had immigrated to the United States from Portugal when she was a baby, and she moved to Killington in 1998.

As a VLCT Board member for the past six years, VMCTA executive committee member since 2009, and New England Association of City and Town

Clerks member, Lucrecia has become an invaluable connector between clerks, state agencies, and statewide organizations. She's a past president of VMCTA, has been involved with VLCT municipal policy drafting, and has been the primary compiler of a state-mandated clerk fee report that has been used to advocate for appropriate fee increases. She was also the co-chair of the VLCT Equity Committee as it crafted the



organization's first equity strategic plan, equity toolkit, and equity training.

As Lucrecia told *The Mountain Times* a few years back: "You can't just sit in your office. You have to talk to other clerks and treasurers. If you just sit in your office, you don't develop."

2024 Municipal Service Awards

The Municipal Service Award is given to a Vermont municipal official who has shown an active commitment to strong local government, both within their community and beyond its borders, or to a person outside of local government who works to improve the governance and support of or service to Vermont cities, towns, and villages.

Winner: Vermont Municipal Road Crews



Of the 15,761 miles of roads and state highways in Vermont, did you know that only 2,872 of those miles are the responsibility of the state? Our road crews take care of the rest of them, in good weather and in bad.



The July 2023 flooding resulted in more than \$116

million in road and bridge damage to municipal roads in 133 of our cities and towns. The July 2024 flooding hit 42 percent of our municipalities, impacting roads and bridges in 66 municipalities, including many that felt the wrath of the 2023 flooding.

In the hours, days, and months following these floods, you could hardly turn your head without seeing a news story about a town's road crew rushing to reconnect a Vermonter to civilization, replacing a culvert, or miraculously making tons of dirt and stone appear where gaping holes existed just hours before. The men and women who serve our municipalities have put in long hours, prioritized the public good over their families, and pulled off many miracles these past two years. Killington Selectboard Chair Jim Haff and Killington Public Works employee Gerald Pfeifenberger accepted the award on behalf of all municipal road crews in Vermont.

Winner: Miro Weinberger, Former Mayor, City of Burlington



Vermonters know Miro as the longest-consecutively serving mayor of Burlington. His 12-year tenure saw investments in housing development, infrastructure, public safety, and opioid recovery efforts. But, did you know he was also the catcher of a men's baseball team in Burlington? Like a catcher, he did a lot more than just catch balls that came his way at home. The VLCT Nominating Committee nominated Miro because he's had a major influence on the municipal public policy game statewide for more than a decade.



As VLCT president, past president, and multiple-year municipal policy committee chair, Miro led advocacy efforts year-over-year. This included: demanding reforms to the way we train and certify police officers, making changes to Act 250 to ensure municipal land use laws create more housing development, and making significant investments in opioid recovery statewide.

He was also instrumental in keeping the Vermont Mayors Coalition – the informal organization of Vermont's eight mayors – relevant. His efforts to identify common issues and common solutions led the group to formulate policy papers, position papers and news conferences in support of statewide action.

Other 2024 Nominees for VLCT's Municipal Service Award

Tabi Freedman, Zoning Administrator, Town of Dover



Tabi was nominated by Dover Planning Commissioner Peter MacDonald for going above and beyond the typical role of a zoning administrator. She is the town's IT administrator, flood plain administrator, E911 coordinator, health officer, and what she jokingly called "the sign witch", an acknowledgement that signs are a very political issue in Vermont.



Tabi has been working for the Town of Dover for five years, but her families' roots in the valley trace back to when Mt. Snow opened. She has been a ski instructor since 1977, and these days, snow permitting, you can find her teaching at the Hermitage Club on weekends or competing in the Masters Division of the U.S. Telemark Ski Team.

Tabi has also worked on Wall Street doing a variety of information technology related things, done custom kitchen and bath architectural design work, and much more. She says the work of a zoning administrator is similar to the work she has done her whole career and comes down to "helping people solve problems." She has helped the town deal with short term rental issues, kept the office functioning during the pandemic, and helped facilitate much-needed housing growth.

Alex Goddard, Town Administrator, Alburgh

Former Alburgh Planning Commissioner Matthew LeFluer nominated Alburgh Town Administrator Alex Goddard for saving his mother's life. Alex and his wife moved to Alburgh during the pandemic. He was appointed the town's Health Officer in the spring of 2023, and soon after that he became the town's first long-term administrator. He spent more than a decade as a career emergency medical technician serving Rutland, Middlebury, Winton, and a few other communities.



Matthew recounted calling Alex one day at the town offices when his mother didn't feel well: "It's rare to have a town administrator who worries about everyone in town. He understands my neurodiversity. That day was a scary experience, but I talked to him, because I knew if I said something to him, he not only would listen, but would actually respond." After asking Matthew a few questions, Alex suggested he call the Alburgh Volunteer Fire Department, and they quickly got Matthew's mother the life-saving care she needed.

Alex says he and his wife, a certified behavioral analyst who has a family member with autism, share a passion for mental health.

Andrew Brown, Former City Councilor, City of Essex Junction

Andrew Brown was one of the architects of the only known successful village succession movement in Vermont in the last century. As a village trustee in the Village of Essex Junction for a decade, he worked first to merge the village with the Town of Essex, as had been contemplated more than a half dozen times in the previous 50 years. But unlike the historical reaction to the failed merger efforts, when citizens narrowly defeated the merger proposal twice in one year, Andrew and his fellow municipal officials sprang into action and created the first new Vermont city in decades.



Essex Junction Recreation and Parks Director Brad Luck said: "The timeline that Andrew was able to lead an elected board and community to successfully pass a new municipal charter in less than four months and become a new municipality within the next 15 months is unprecedented. It was Andrew's leadership, communication, transparency, patience, determination, and resolve that made it possible."



Following the creation of the City of Essex Junction, Andrew finished his term as one of the city's first city councilors. He also continues his work as a lecturer in the University of Vermont's Public Administration Program, where he teaches future municipal leaders how to move to action.

Sara Haskins, Town Clerk, Morristown

Sara has been a member of the Morristown Town Clerk's office for 16 years, first as an assistant town clerk and as Town Clerk for the past seven years. She is a Master Municipal Clerk, a Certified Vermont Clerk, and a Certified Vermont Treasurer. Oh, and she's also the town treasurer, school treasurer, assistant school clerk, village clerk, and the village and town delinquent tax collector.



Former Vermont Municipal Clerks' and Treasurers' Association President and Thetford Town Clerk Tracy Borst nominated Sara, saying: "Sara serves in so many positions for Morrisville, and yet remains active in VMCTA where she helps members around the state and serves on the Secretary of State's Clerk Advisory Group. Each role I've seen her take on I've seen her improve processes and policies surrounding those roles and always eagerly share what she's developed with her peers across the state."

Secretary of State Sarah Copeland Hanzas had some praise for Sara too, noting she is cool under pressure and generous with her time and expertise. She was particularly impressed with Sara's "BYOB" campaign during the pandemic, a tongue in cheek reminder to bring your own ballot to the polls.

Barbara Butler, Assistant Town Clerk, Town of Calais



The town offices of Calais have seen some big changes since Calais Assistant Clerk and Treasurer Barbara Butler took office in 2018. The entire Selectboard turned over in 2023, the town hired its first administrator, and three different clerks have served in the past six years.



“Barbara was the only one who had real working knowledge of the town, and she is the reason that the transition not only worked at all, but has been an undeniable success,” said new Calais Town Clerk Teegan Dykeman-Brown, who nominated Barbara.

Teegan celebrated Barbara's work recruiting candidates for open positions, orienting people to their new jobs, supporting the selectboard before the administrator started, communicating with residents through recent flooding, and trying to make everyone in town feel welcome in the town offices and in the workplace.

Calais Selectboard Chair Jordan Keyes said: “It is hard to fully articulate the magnitude of Ms. Butler's impact, which is steadfast and ongoing! Her service and organization allowed the newly formed Selectboard to take early, decisive steps towards re-instilling the community's confidence in their local government and to reinvigorate further community engagement.”

