



Orleans-Essex REMC Meeting Minutes

DATE: March 16, 2026

TIME: 1pm

LOCATION: Newport Fire Station, also available via ZOOM.

The meeting was called to order at 1:01pm by Molly Dockter

Those attending in person were Emily Harris- VEM; Molly Dockter- NVDA; Maurice Doyon- Westfield EMD; Michael Sanville- North Country Hospital; Travis Bingham- Newport City Police Chief and Vice REMC Chair; Jeff Young- Newport City Fire Department; and Rebecca Petelle- VT Department of Health. Those attending via ZOOM were Gina Lyon- Barton Village EMD; Lisa Lemieux- Vice Chair VDART Northeast and Colleen Kellogg- Charlston Assistant Town Clerk.

The minutes from January 20, 2026, were reviewed but were unable to be approved due to the lack of a quorum.

Presentation by Lisa Lemieux- Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team (VDART)- Intro for EMDs and Municipal Officials

Lisa introduced herself as the Vice Chair of VDART. She began as an animal rescue volunteer in 2017, served as the Barre shelter manager and as a Red Cross volunteer. These experience gave her lots of experience with emergencies and animal welfare. Due to a recent throat surgery, she will be doing an abbreviated version of the presentation. *(The Cal-Essex meeting on 3/25/26 will feature a full version of the presentation and will be recorded for anyone interested.)*

Lisa outlined that among other services, VDART can review LEMPs and help integrate a pet sheltering plan; organize shelters; provide grant opportunities; operate co-located shelters; and support existing

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facilities. However, they are limited by resources, with Orleans and Essex counties specifically limited by a low volunteer base. Lisa would like to strongly advocate for towns to prepare for animals in their emergency preparedness.

She describes that Franklin and Orleans counties are covered by Guardian Angels (GA), a ministry based in Franklin county that is an independent team. While there is no legal affiliation, VDART and GA work closely to provide sheltering and volunteer services. The contact for Guardian Angels is Tim Stetson tim@timkath.com Since GA is independent, they do not need to be activated like VDART does, but it is best to communicate needs with both GA and VDART to keep communication open about current conditions and needs.

The protocol to activate VDART in Essex County starts with contacting the watch officer at 800-347-0488

Lisa gave a quick background to the historically low response they were receiving in their outreach efforts. With the goal of improving their communication with municipalities and increasing local ability to shelter pets, VDART is offering a grant opportunity to improve sheltering across the region. The entire Urban Grant was \$50,000. Of that \$35,000 is earmarked for municipalities and the remaining \$15,000 is being used to purchase and outfit a recovery/response trailer for emergencies.

There is still money available in the pilot program for towns who are not most vulnerable to disaster/emergency. Supplies include pet basics—crates, bowls, beds, etc, to house animals. Total cost of supplies included in the grant is about \$1000. Requirements for municipality to apply for the grant are: 1) animal sheltering included in LEMP 2) storage space (about 4'x5') available for all supplies 3) space for a pet shelter during emergencies. VDART will take care of ordering supplies and having them delivered to the specified location and will provide training (about 1 hour) to local volunteers for setting up and managing an emergency pet shelter.

Those interested can reach out to Lisa at llemieux25@gmail.com

Molly asked to clarify the difference between VDART and GA. Lisa said that VDART is affiliated with the state and GA is their own, separate entity. They do their own trainings but still work very closely with VDART and stay in constant communication for regional needs. GA does not need to be activated, VDART needs to be activated by calling the watch officer.

Presentation by Emily Harris- EMD Roles

Emily begins with explaining that she will be assisting while Zack is away on military leave. She can be reached at Emily.Harris@vermont.gov

The presentation is attached to the REMC email or can be received by request by contacting Emily.

To help give context to the EMD presentation, everyone present shared their job and their role during emergencies. Travis is the police chief; his primary responsibilities include coordinating in emergencies, working in town, staff—instant command then back to the office. Jeff focuses on fire, rescue, search & rescue, command, and field work. Maurice works with the selectboard on planning, shelter setup, and emergency supplies. Emily asks if residents know to go to the shelter- maurice is unsure of how many do

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know this. Rebecca says she is not a responder but instead focuses in the health operations center, coordinating the the medical reserve for volunteers including shelters, vaccines, and distribution. Emily asks if trainings and exercises are available and Emily says yes- there is one in Lake region next weekend that works on running a setup drill- visit their website for additional information visit. Michael mentions that in his day job he is either a consultant or a planning section chief. He also recently took on the position of alternate EMD for Irasburg and is getting familiar with LEMPs. Since Emily is filling in for Zack, she described his job which includes helping towns with LEMPs, helping to bring people into the planning process, distributing funding opportunities, etc. She reiterated that during Zack's absence she can be reached for any of these needs.

Emily delves into the main objectives of the presentation, which include EM coordination: prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate emergencies. She also reviewed the goals of EM which are outlined in the attached Power Point presentation. She also wants to highlight that if EMDs or other local emergency personnel need assistance, start by asking townspeople and sourcing from within. She also reiterates that EMD are within state statute, but any person can attend REMC meetings.

Emergency exercises do not need to be complicated, they are just meant to work through issues before they occur. She recommends that EMDs prepare with exercises and public communication during blue sky times. Each municipality will need to decide on their communication and work out a media plan to reach as much of the population as possible. Set up VT Alert if you have not already.

She reminds everyone that federal funding is based on a damage threshold- be sure to report!

See presentation slides and Developing Your Emergency Management Program for more information.

Discussion- How to Attract New REMC Members/EMDs

Mike asked when EMD certification is happening. Emily says there is an 8 hour class split into two, 4 hour days on June 11th and 12th.

Maurice asked about a contact list for the REMC and Emily will work on the Incident Support Plan (ISP) for Orleans-Essex similar to the Cal-Essex ISP.

Mike suggests exploring different meeting times to attract more members or garner more involvement. Travis adds that he prefers meeting during business hours.

Emily suggests the addition of food or having meetings at different locations. We are trying this with Cal-Essex and there seems to be interest. Mike adds that he may be able to host at North Country Hospital.

Becky suggests to reach out to local businesses or KURVE to be present at meetings and bring additional perspective. Brainstorm of business/organizations included Fred's energy, the railroad (AOT rail programs, Emily will reach out), the prison, school districts, landfill, airport, Ethan Allen.

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Vermont Emergency Management (VEM) Update

Emily recommends looking at the Preparedness Zone Playbook to understand how to break a town down into zones to more efficiently reach people in an emergency.

She highlights the engagement survey and says VEM uses it to plan for the upcoming year.

2:48pm meeting adjourns