

Windham NRCB Board of Supervisors Meeting

February 5th, 2025

6:30 pm at 301 Barrows Rd, Brattleboro, VT 05301 and on zoom

Present: Cory Ross, District Manager; Meg Kluge, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison, and Geof Dolman, board supervisors; Isabel Bowman, Conservation Specialist, Heather Blunk, Ag Resources Specialist.

Zoom Participants: Pieter van Loon, board supervisor; Phyllicia Moore, NRCS conservationist; Garrett Manchester, Americorps Member.

Updates on Changes to Federal Policies and Funding Programs:

- Lots of changes underway, however we are not currently impacted. Lots of uncertainty is presenting challenges in our work
- Multiple executive orders in place. The most relevant one is prohibitions on DEI work that does impact contractors and may affect certain activities.
 - Our board has always tried to be diverse and inclusive; this is not new, and we don't see that changing. We are mandated to serve everyone in our district. We are stronger when we work with everyone. As the demographics of our county have shifted, we have shifted. We should strive to reach those who are underserved.
- NACD outreach award deliverable of DEI and succession planning has been cancelled
 - Succession planning should still be continued
- We can bill our funders, but the payment freeze is in effect. This could be reversed, this could be canceled, either way, this will take months to sort out.
- They're trying to navigate the changing times, one day at a time; trying to share info and guidance as they can, and provide answers based on the info they have. It will be business as usual as otherwise told.
- Approvals for CSP applications: Windham county has 3, totalling \$127,000.
- Act Now applications: window opened on the 2nd, closes on March 30. First batch for preapprovals for Act Now is slated to happen on Friday, will do those in batches until money runs out. Act Now is focused on crop land land use; practices for cropland, hay, cover crop etc. They're evaluated on a rolling basis. Planners are assessing and ranking applications.
- Ranking deadline for EQIP AMA, RCPP, was moved to Feb 21st for more time for planners. Application cutoff for organic transition initiative is March 7.
- Cory asked about adding an admin assistant position and if they can get a background check to be in the office. It will still be the same footprint but likely will be fine.

- Phyllicxia is wondering if there are any technical trainings that would be useful from NRCS resource staff. Cory, Heather and Isabel can't think of anything right now; if they think of any they should send any ideas to Olivia.
- Incident in the parking lot, someone was in reverse, backed into an NRCS vehicle. It's been taken to the collision center. That vehicle won't be available for site visits. Subaru SUV was brought down, so that can be available if needed.
- Local work group/locally led process is going well, on schedule to meet the deadline. Will have a natural resource assessment for the next board meeting. Submitting to the local fund pool again, will look similar to last year.

Strategic Planning Consultant Selection Process:

- want someone with:
 - natural resources experience
 - gov experience
 - within budget
 - in VT/ connection to VT or New England
- Momentum and Community Roots fit these
- Momentum:
 - nice plan, looks realistic
 - timeline spread out over a period of months
 - includes transition to implementation
 - work with staff and board (not just board)
 - will interview community partners/stakeholders
 - Those who have worked with them, said they're great, feel like they would be a good fit, they would make sure everyone is heard.
- Community Roots:
 - may be able to interview community partners, so not sure if that will happen.
- *Motion to approve proposal from Momentum*
- *Motion approved.*

FY25 Revised Budget:

- Revised budget reflects changed spending for grants, grants that are done, under budget, etc.
- Summarized various expenses and income that went up a little.
- Revised budget is balanced.
- *Motion to accept revised budget.*
- *Motion approved.*

New Admin Assistant Position Description

- made some edits to the description - mostly small language changes of wording and grammar.
- Question: what pay scale would they be on?

- *Motion to approve administrative assistant description.*
- *Motion approved.*

Draft Seasonal Invasive Species Technician (Summer 2025)

- Don't have this grant funding yet but I'm expecting to get it.

- *Motion to accept the invasive species technician position description.*
- *Motion approved.*

VACD Update:

- We've made an offer for the ED position; waiting to hear if it's going to be accepted. Team is excited about the person.
- Jill and the VACD team are trying to stay on top of changes in funding coming out of DEC. Jill is able to stay calm in a storm; can process such changes very quickly and is trying to keep people calm, etc.
- VACD capacity building committee is meeting tomorrow, consultants reporting out. Getting a sense of the recommendations and a timeline and how they might move forward.
- Linda is heading to the NACD national meeting on Friday. There are three resolutions from NH. One has to do with workings between FSA and districts having to sign off on various contracts. Resolution - district gets a waiver to not have to sign off on those contracts (if not impacting us). Another is logging related: EQIP changes somehow to make a certain practice more accessible.
- Why doesn't VACD have a process for bringing resolutions to NACD? Districts can't directly bring a resolution to NACD.
- IRA funds are on hold; VACD gets a lot of funding from IRA, a lot of staffing at VACD on hold.
- Federal hiring freeze - has helped districts in the past.
- There have been rumblings that NRCS may end up with a politically appointed head in VT like FSA.

Monthly Report on District Activities:

- New name for district manager report.
- Plant sale - order so far a little less than a year ago.

- Green River Watershed Alliance: we're taking over financial stewardship.

Next Meeting:

- March 5th, 6:30 at Geoff's
- *Motion to approve minutes from Jan 8*
- *Motion approved*