



## **Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District Board of Supervisors Meeting Official Minutes**

**Date: 18 December 2024**

**Time : 10 AM - 1 PM**

**Location: Berlin Office**

**In Person @ WNRCD Berlin Office:**  
**617 Comstock Rd, Suite 1, Berlin, VT 05602**

**[Video Conference Link](#)**

### **Attendance**

**In-Person:** Rick Hopkins (Supervisor, Chair), Paul Hartshorn (Supervisor, Secretary), Rich Turner (Treasurer, Supervisor), Nancy Everhart (Supervisor), Jeff Cueto (Associate Supervisor), Dan Koenemann (Staff, District Manager), Phoebe Judge (Agricultural Specialist), Kara Winslow (Agricultural Specialist), Lucas Goldfluss (Conservation Specialist), Pat Richardson (Accountant), Henry Bonges (Guest)

**Virtual:** Russ Barrett (Vice-Chair, Supervisor), Sarah Jansen (USDA-NRCS), Dan Hemenway (Guest)

### **Introductions**

The meeting began by going around the room and doing quick introductions. Two guests were present Dan Hemenway (Virtual) and Henry Bonges. Both expressed interest in the District to learn more about what we do and potentially become more formally involved as a supervisor or associate supervisor. Additionally, this was the first board meeting for Kara Winslow, a new agricultural specialist for the District.

### **Supervisor Sharing**

None of the Supervisors had anything to share.

### **Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

**[Formal/Official Minutes](#)** - October 16, 2024

Next there was the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. Rick noted that this was a good overview for the guests about what we've been up to. Rick requested a motion to approve the minutes. Rich moved to approve the minutes. Nancy seconded. There was no discussion. All in favor.

### **NRCS & NRCC Updates - Marybeth Whitten/Rick Hopkins**

**NRCS:** The NRCS updates were provided by Sarah Jansen. There were two key NRCS updates. The first update had to do with the continuing NRCS realignment in VT. There are currently 4 zones and the WNRCD is in the central zone. The central zone will split into Addison (with Marybeth as District Conservationist) with Chittenden and Washington Counties forming a new zone on their own. The advertisement for the District Conservationist for the new central zone has closed. NRCS is trying to get the hire completed before the Presidential Administration change. At that point we will have a new district conservationist that WNRCD will interact with.

Second, NRCS will have a new round of funding coming up called ACT NOW. NRCS has done this over the past two years. This is supposed to be a quick round of funding, with the possibility of having a contract 60 days after the application is submitted. The grant only covers a small suite of practices, all climate smart practices (ex. cover crop, no till, reduced till, nutrient management, soil carbon amendment, pasture and hayland planting - especially conversion of corn to hay). There will be a second mini pool for management plans. There are 8 million available for the climate smart practices and 80K available for the management plans. Note that it has been a past rule of thumb that if a practice has been done for three



years you are not eligible. But this is something different this year, those farms can still apply. Applications will begin ranking on February 2, so apply now for money in March/April. Be sure to tell interested farms. The 8 million is for the whole state of Vermont and this money is in addition to other rounds of CSP, EQIP, etc.

Dan Hemenway asked if NRCS covers strip grazing? Sarah indicated that it isn't a part of this ACT NOW funding, but NRCS does encourage this practice in general.

There was a question about the NRCS realignment. The total number of proposed new zones is 7. NRCS knows what the new teams are. The realignment has technically taken effect but there aren't new staff to fill the positions yet. This is considered a done deal from the perspective of NRCS. The hope is to better manage the work load of the District Conservationists.

**NRCC:** Rick provided the updates for NRCC. Rick is the Central Supervisory Union Representative to NRCC. NRCC is a state agency defined in statute. NRCC receives money through the legislature through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture. NRCC is composed of six supervisory union representatives, and representatives from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, and UVM Extension. There are an additional two advisory members one from NRCS and one from the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts.

NRCC has a meeting today in Montpelier. The most recent meeting was in June. NRCC tries to meet three times per year. The finance committee meets more often, generally monthly. Requests to the legislature are part of the finance committee work. The last meeting of the finance committee was December 11.

NRCC has assembled an application that will be sent out to the Districts to spend down 100K of one time funding that was made available to the Districts by the Legislature. The priority will be to use the money to get Districts up to compliance with things such as public meeting laws (websites, video conferencing, elections, etc.). Other needs can also be proposed.

The other big item impacting NRCC are the VACD subcommittees. The VACD governance subcommittee is looking at the statute that governs NRCC and the Districts. Much of this statute is old and out of date. The NRCC subcommittee is looking to potentially propose a change to the statute. This same subcommittee is also looking at the VACD bylaws. This has been a huge task. The statute review is now going through NRCC rather than VACD. That statute review will happen at the NRCC meeting today.

#### **NRCS Locally Led Process - Role of Board**

Winooski NRCD Locally Led Process [Progress Report](#)  
Working Group Survey [Link](#)

Dan went over the basics of the locally led process. The process begins with a survey that seeks input from all residents of our District on what they think the key natural resource concerns are. Toward the end of the survey period we will have two community forums (local working groups) to solicit more feedback from the public. After we receive all of the feedback, we will synthesize it and come up with the key concerns with our service area. We will generate a conservation action plan and submit that to NRCS. The hope is that NRCS will then select this as a local funding pool and we can tackle some of the natural resource challenges that were brought to us by the general public. Dan asked that the board members be involved in the community forums.

#### **Financial Updates - Pat**

Pat provided an update on profit and loss in the time since the last meeting. As a reminder our Q1 shows a surplus of 112K and the first months of Q2 are in the red. This is a result of grant executions in Q1 (July - September), and associated payments, and then no executions in Q2. The Hands Mill Dam project and NRCS are the main funders in these first two quarters, they are driving the budget at the



moment. We make little money on Hands Mill but because we manage the project, all those transactions are on our books.

Nothing is really out of sorts with the budget. One thing to note is that cash flow is tough. It looks like a bad EKG. Cash flow depends largely on when invoicing is done. It is inconsistent. In the upcoming quarter we should see some incoming money with reports and invoices. We will probably average 60-65K per quarter. We need more funds coming in.

The balance sheet is strong from a cash position. We have 100K in reserves as of today. We have a small credit card balance.

We are still experiencing issues reconciling MVP payments. This is a problem on their end. They were hacked and are behind on a lot of things.

Overall, we are looking good and thanks to NRCC for getting out grant executions to us.

Paul moves to accept the financials as presented. Rich seconds. All in favor.

### **Project Updates**

Lucas: Trees for Streams. This is a program that was started by the Lamoille NRCD. It is a riparian buffer planting program. Landowners come to NRCDs for help with plantings. Last year, Macie completed a project at the Bread and Butter Farm in South Burlington. That is a typical project. We shoot for 400 stems per acre and a 50 foot buffer. One FY25 project we are developing is the Farm Upstream on Lee River Road in Jericho. We are working in collaboration with Vermont Land Trust. This is a 3.1 acre planting with a total of 2.33 acres in need of planting (because some is partially planted already). Lucas presented the planting list. It is interesting because we have ordered from the Intervale in the past but the landowner did not want to do that because Intervale trees are not sourced locally. Instead he wanted trees from Verterra, as all their stock is local stock. Moreover, they have an LCBP grant to donate trees. So for this project we are going to get most of the trees for free. We will also buy some trees from the land owner.

It was asked if there was any concern that some of the buffer might get washed away in future flood events? Lucas indicated that we were waiting for Staci (Pomeroy) to get back to us but it is something to consider. Dan Hemenway requested a copy of the materials.

Phoebe: Vermont Pay for Performance (Phosphorus). Note that this presentation contains sensitive information that cannot leave the meeting. Nor should this information be sent out. Farm records are protected records like medical records.

Seven farms enrolled in the Pay for Performance (Phosphorus) were presented. One farm we usually serve withdrew from the program this year. Otherwise we have five farms in Chittenden County and one farm in Washington County. The program rewards improved farming behavior rather than good farming behavior. Pay for Performance is ending next year and probably getting revamped.

In order for the program to operate, we need to have good working relationships with farmers. We aren't here to rat you out, we are here to help. But we expect farmers will likely be more cagey going forward since more state regulation is coming down the line, especially with CAFOs.

Phoebe was largely impressed with the farms and farmers

Dan: Tree Sale. The tree sale is underway. It went live on December 3. This is more than a month earlier than last year. As of today, total days of sale are 14. In that time we have had 57 orders composed of 519 items. The total sale to date is \$6469.00.

It was suggested that Dan should send out an email to past buyers to ask for planting success rates for the species that have ordered.

Dan also provided updates on two new LCBP Grants. We were notified that we have been awarded one grant to do road improvements on Enos and Partridge Hill Roads in Hinesburg (192K). This



is a follow up project from the Lake Iroquois Watershed Action Plan. The second grant was for the replacement of a culvert in Washington, Vermont (300K). We are working with US Fish and Wildlife on this project.

### **The Bridge**

Article - "[Create Watershed Districts to Mitigate Climate Change](#)" (Nov 20-Dec 3 Issue, Page 21)  
[Letter to Editor](#)

Upcoming Article

There was an article written in The Bridge newspaper in Montpelier proposing the creation of watershed districts to help mitigate climate change. Dan Koenemann wrote a response article to the newspaper introducing the readers to the Winooski NRCD and the NRCDs in general. The Bridge will be working with the Winooski NRCD to write a more formal article on the District. It will not come out until the new year.

### **Paperwork**

Stipend Matrix

Contact Information

Dan presented to the Board two documents. One document was a matrix of information for determining stipend payments to the board members. Dan requested that the Board members provide their mileage so he can process payments.

The second document was an information sheet for the District. It was suggested by the Board that Dan add District office addresses to this information sheet.

### **Employee Handbook Revision Discussions**

[Existing Handbook](#)

[Proposed Amendment](#)

Due to time constraints, it was decided to work on handbook revisions in the time between meetings. Dan will work with Jeff to make a round of edits. Dan will send this document around for the Board to read and provide additional comments. The idea is to have a document that is ready to approve by the time of the next Board meeting. If necessary, Dan will organize a sub-committee meeting to work on these revisions.

### **Website Updates and Compliance**

ADA and Government Transparency / Open Meeting

Streamline - Company only works with special government units to make compliant websites

\$1500 for transition and set up

Additional monthly fees for different design suites (\$300 per month middle of the road)

30 days to offboard at any time

[Proposal](#)

Dan indicated that he was approached by a firm that specializes in keeping government websites in compliance with open government laws and accessibility laws. The Winooski NRCD website is not in compliance in terms of ADA accessibility. There was a brief discussion. The Board said that we should work toward compliance but that the company that reached out to us was asking for too much money (\$200 per month when we currently spend \$100 per year on our website). It was suggested that the District reach out to the Vermont League of Cities and Towns for resources on website compliance. It is also possible that other hosting services such as Squarespace (rather than our current Wordpress) may offer accessibility services but for a lower cost. Dan was tasked at investigating these options.

### **Six-Month Evaluation for Dan Koenemann**

Executive Session



In order to conduct the six-month evaluation for Dan, the Board needed to go into executive session. Paul moved to go into executive session to discuss personnel matters. Rich seconded. All in favor. The time was 12:07PM. The general session was reopened at 12:48PM.

Paul moved to grant a two pay step increase to Dan. Nancy seconded. All in favor.

Nancy moved to accept both Henry Bonges and Dan Hemenway as associate supervisors, and to appoint Rich Turner as a supervisor. Paul seconded. All in favor.

**End of Meeting**

Paul moved to adjourn the meeting. Rich seconded. All in favor.