

Windham County Natural Resource Conservation District Minutes

Wednesday, August 10, 6:30 pm

Geof's house, 301 Barrows Road, Brattleboro, VT

Present: Meg Kluge, Geoff Dolman, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison: board supervisors;
Cory Ross: district manager; Heather Blunk: Agricultural Outreach Specialist
Zoom: Phylyxia Moore, NRCS; David Erickson, visitor; Pieter van Loon, board supervisor.

Update from Phylaxia:

- On the homestretch obligating FY '22 applications; will be done by next week (hopefully). Then moving into contract management cleanup, working with applications that weren't selected so they have a better chance for FY '23. Looking to have earlier sign up dates for next year. Focusing on applications that were already submitted, making sure they're doing better conservation planning rather than just pushing contracts through. Looking forward: bigger funding pool for small scale ag operations. Will work to get ranking questions squared away in the near future for the Windham County funding pool.
- Brattleboro space - have been looking at that, no changes as of now, but it's being talked about.
- Josh will be transitioning into a new role. Will be transitioning from being the conservationist in the Brattleboro office to being the outreach coordinator for the state. There will be a new employee coming in, they're working on a transition plan
- They're doing a search for the soil conservationist position, reposting for that position and will also post the position that will replace Josh (senior soil conservationist).
- RCPP: It's sounding like there will be more grazing support. Next week site visit with Marley in White River, looking at providing more conservation support for grazing, will impact Windham County but not specifically clear about what that will look like.
- The outreach coordinator will be new position that will work with the public affairs specialist (they're in the process of hiring a new person for that position).

Budget:

- Looked at summary of breakdown of income by funder. Biggest categories are Sales, NRCC and VT Dec.
- Looked at percentage of total staff time by project. Right now biggest chunk is unfunded work (board meeting prep, grant writing, etc). Next year Cory will count that under 'core services' since NRCC is increasing funding but it still prob won't cover unfunded work (so tracking this is part of convincing the legislature that the districts need more core funding).
 - David asked if Cory has been tracking subcategories for unfunded work. Cory hasn't but will try to do that in the future.
 - Graph that tracks Cash flow by fiscal year - this year doing better but at the moment a bit lower than in past years (which has to do timing/status of invoices).

- Difference in budget vs actual - a lot has to do with timing of grants/ backlogs in payments/ unknown grant amounts at time of writing budget.
- Expenses: advertisement was way higher than expected for a variety of reasons. Didn't have to pay dues last year but will need to this year.
- Because the budget reports are long and difficult to read: request to adjust formatting (collapse), not include budget sheet detail and not print it unless requested. Geof will work on reformatting this so it's easier to read.

District Ag Programs Update:

- Farm teams concept: put on website. Producers will come to website, fill out a form - who they are, what they do. Will schedule a meeting with all their technical assistance people - NRCS, etc
- Then would hold 1 meeting with all the partners - producer will update what their goals are, then district helps them work through that process. This has worked well for White River, but has worked through Dairy Business Innovation Center. Idea is that all the districts will be doing this. It will probably take a while to get producers and partners on board.
- This might be a good time to get a new soil conservationist (NRCS). Good place to start to help with the daunting nature of all the paperwork involved in funding.
- Pasture walk - Vermont Grass Association. There were 50 people there - want to talk to them to find out how they get so many people.
- Working with Ryan Pat - in Sept workshop - on new surface water regulation, for farmers who draw a certain amount of water.
- Northeast SARE field day was a great time to network with Vern Grubinger and others. They give out grants, we've been trying to work with them.
- Heather has completed level 2 conservation planner training. Needs to do level 1 and 3, get training on Conservation assessment ranking tool (CART).
- Heather met with Dartmouth student about agroforestry. She has to do a certain number of workshops, will help us with that.
- Heather has idea of tour de farms bike ride - West Hill Shop, Ross Thurber, Tour de Heifer, Hungry Lion tour, Orchard Hill Bread/Dirty Pizza Ride. Would also like to do other outreach activity work with established organizations - Outing Club, Southern VT Natural History Museum, BEEC.

Annual Meeting:

- Would like to revisit: should we do one this year? Hold it before it gets too cold (so it can be held outside) or do something like: a past one was held at Walker Farm, they had a big greenhouse space. Green Mtn Orchard is another option.
- Would be nice to do it in the winter though when farmers are available. Can we combine it with a meet your legislator event? January is a good time to do that sort of event.

-During the annual meeting there's usually a program - i.e. tour plus presentation and food. In the past we've given out a conservation award, which is usually 2 to 3 hours. The goal is to bring more awareness of what district is and what it does.

-Possible topics: climate change and resiliency, inflation reduction act/ climate change resilience funding and how we can connect farmers with it. Can we find a grant to pay for this sort of thing?

Heather's Evaluation

-Request to move ahead to increase her pay. Her performance is satisfactory and so she should be advanced to the next level.

*-Motion to accept Cory's recommendation (see reference p. 90 of the board packet for wording).
Motion passed.*

District Manager's Report:

-Bear Creek situation: landowner agreed to project but now isn't being cooperative (wants fill to be dumped in a wetland area), not letting us access land. Rather than burn bridges we're going to try to go in a different way (i.e. via the river bed).

-For skidder bridge - Pieter saw the contact again (David) and reminded him about getting the ball rolling on getting a new one.

-May 6 - possible date for plant sale; goal to do Trees for Streams plantings the following week.

-AFT RCPP - funding we're hoping to get. It's a mess right now. Another district doesn't want it to happen; that district has some conservation planners that need work. NRCS VT is balking about this plan.

-Ultimately VACD may end up signing it rather than us and work will get divided up between the districts, so we'll prob get some of the work but not all of it. Jill has also said that VACD can send along other projects so that Heather has enough work.

-NRCC is a state agency, and there's a push to make the districts agencies. Want to make sure we're not bogged down in bureaucracy and can actually meet the needs of the district.

Minutes:

-Motion to approve minutes with edits. Proposal passed.

Next meeting:

Sept 12th, 6:00pm at Geof's, starting with a potluck.