

Windham County Natural Resource Conservation District Minutes

Tuesday, July 13, 6:30 pm

Linda's house, 434 Corse Rd, Whitingham, VT

Present: Meg Kluge, Geoff Dolman, Linda Corse: board supervisors; Cory Ross: district manager; Heather Blunk: Agricultural Outreach Specialist

Zoom: Katie Ross Morrison, Pieter van Loon; board supervisors; Phylyxia Moore, NRCS; David Erickson, visitor.

NRCS Update from Phylixia:

- Still working on round 2 of reviewing applications; internal deadline Aug 5, to make sure pre-approved applications are done. Local fund pools were pre-approved also. Rankings will be based on questions from local working group, and Phylixia will do a walk-through about how that will all work.
- There is a new GIS specialist (John) who is housed out of the Brattleboro office. The state resource conservationist is his supervisor. He's still mostly teleworking.
- There was a lack of quality candidates for the soil conservationist position, so they need to re-post that position.
- Re: figuring out office space - will hopefully have an update next week.

Review of District Financial Policies and Procedures

- Do we need board approval for all grants/ which grants?
- Are we allowed to approve grants over email/the internet?
- The policy says we need to approve grants over \$5,000 and that the district manager needs to tell the board about grants at the first meeting after the grant has been approved.
- Linda proposes talking to Jill and Claire to see what they recommend.
- Another district has the board approve all grants to make sure the board knows what's happening.
- Meg proposes: the DM will notify the board of grants up for approval, as they arrive, and give board members a chance to delay approval until the next meeting.
- Usually the DM applies for grants without board approval, then if it's approved then the DM needs to sign a contract to complete the work/fulfill the grant.
- Is it even necessary to approve grants at this point in the process?
- Seems more important to discuss future grant possibilities (before Cory applies for the grant).
- Proposal is made to take out first 3 sentences (about board needing to approve contractual obligations over 5,000).

Proposed New Language: Contractual Obligations and Funding Opportunities:

The district manager must obtain board approval for all contractual obligations exceeding \$100,000. The district manager shall inform the board of all grant applications, funding opportunities and obligation of funds before contractual obligations are incurred. The District Manager shall inform the board of all contractual obligations at the first meeting of the board after the date on which contractual obligations were accepted. The district manager shall inform the board of all pending contractual obligations as they develop.

-Important to leave flexibility for Cory to apply without telling us.

-Question: does including grants in a budget which is then approved by the board count as notifying ? Consensus is yes.

-Section 6 doesn't need to be changed due to addition of pay scale, as section 6 says raises are considered during the annual budget, performance reviews and when job responsibilities change (which in the new pay policy is when raises could happen).

-Section 10 change (second to last paragraph):

“Balance sheet and budget to actual for the reporting period as well as the fiscal year. General ledger detailed reports should be made available upon request. .

-Motion to approve proposed changes; motion passed.

Approve Hire of New Greeter for Public Access Greeter Program:

-David Warberton applied as greeter

-Motion to approve hire of David Warberton; motion passed.

VACD/NRCC Update:

-Leg. approved some money for core services. Money will be split equally among the districts (\$20,000 per district). Some of it will be held for council to use.

-There is a new position in VACD, district manager rep - Sarah Damsell and Cory is the alternate; the new core services money will pay for this position. If additional money keeps coming, maybe there will be a base amount that's split evenly and then a chunk of money that goes to districts as needed.

-There is an agreement that there should be a certain amount of money that should be split evenly among the districts.

-There is more energy to revive state-wide structure in VACD; Zoom could help make this happen, still to be seen if it will actually happen. VACD exec board has a pres, vp, secretary, treasurer; meet throughout the year to get updates about what's going on in VACD.

Position Description and Timeline for New Position Posting:

-There are funds to start a new position in August. But American Farmland Trust grant hasn't come through yet; Cory wants to wait for that to happen first to make sure Heather is full time before posting a new job (otherwise the work that would go to a new person will go to Heather).

- New position could include: trees for streams, block grant, tactical basin planning, greeter program, wetlands agreement, Long Island Sound fund grant, High Meadows Fund, outreach and education grants, plant sale, Stilt Grass work.
- Cory's proposal: new position will be a Natural Resources Project Manager who will work on project development, trees for streams, and block grants. These are distinct projects and have good training opportunities.
- Then Cory will be left with a hodge podge of grants and running the district (which has been taking more time).
- New person will need to work remotely some of the time.
- Agreement that considering the current job market, we should simplify the job description. Cory will wordsmith it and send out a draft.

Conservation Planner Training:

- In hopes of AFT grant going through, Heather is required to do ag conservation planner training. She is currently doing level 1 training, and level 2 is next week. Cost including rooms etc would be \$1200. NRCS is desperate for more people to do this work.

Move to commit \$1500 for Heather to do this program (including per diem for meals and lodging). Motion passed.

District Manager's Report:

- Trout unlimited project isn't happening because they'll only award funds to the state and the state isn't interested in being a fiscal sponsor for them.
- Kudos to Pieter for his work on the invasive plants grant; sounds like it was a great team effort.
- For the legislative ask they're asking for info about the district's expenditures; salary, benefits, mileage, and other details. Are there other expenses we should ask for?
- Ideas include: a vehicle (a small truck), income to cover other related expenses (insurance, fuel etc) (should we lease a vehicle?); equipment to use for Zoom meetings and workshops; cell phone; funds for professional development; funds for web design.

Future Agenda Items:

- Will discuss Retention/Disposal Timeline for Old Grant Documents at the next meeting.
- Next Meeting: August 10 6:30pm at Geof's.