

Windham County Natural Resource Conservation District Minutes

Tuesday, December 12, 6:30 pm

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

Present: Meg Kluge, Geoff Dolman, Linda Corse, Katie Morrison, in person;
via Zoom: Pieter van Loon: board supervisors;
Cory Ross: district manager; Heather Blunk: Agricultural Outreach Specialist; Isabel Sullivan:
Conservation Specialist

Board Supervisor Election:

- *No one else came forward to run for this position.*
- *After following procedure and not receiving candidates, movement to appoint Geoff as a board supervisor.*
- *Motion approved.*

Revised Budget:

- Outreach grant - amount is an estimate.
- In process of applying for AgQuip funding, not sure how much that will be.
- Added another staff position for the next 6 months; suggestion - hire someone to do ag work with Heather. Don't want to post for it until NACD funds are in writing.
- Fee to set up 401K plan.
- Ellis Brook will end up happening in FY25, so it has been taken out of the budget.
- Dummerston covered bridge project was added.
- Updated Total income: 526,598.55

Locally Led Process and Local Working Group:

- Survey very similar to last year's.
- One item that isn't clear on the survey: the term 'forest trails' - people think it refers to hiking trails but it's actually logging trails/roads.
- The district can recommend additional NRCS practices. NRCS has a process to take recommendations into consideration, but the process isn't entirely clear. NRCS would like to see this process more standardized so that results are consistent.
- Discussion of question 4 - identify your top 3 natural resource concerns. Should respondents rank each one? Decided - not to use a format where the respondent enters numbers, that would take too much data analysis.
- We went through and made other small edits to the survey.
- The survey gets sent to: everyone on our mailing list, Facebook, Instagram, everyone at coffee chat.
- Questions to add:
 - How have you had contact with the district?

- What workshops would you be interested in seeing?
- What is the biggest threat to your land/ business?
- In the future we should share the results of the survey (this has been a request in the past). We could possibly write an article/press release summarizing/highlighting the results.
- Why do we ask farmers how long they've been farming? Will give us an idea of who the respondents are, how experienced the farmers are who are responding.

Draft Structure for Outreach and LWG Meetings

- Hold Conservation Coffee Chat in Jan, get feedback via Conservation Needs Survey, recruit LWG members.
- Reach out to key partners in Feb: Other places to get to do the survey: Master gardeners, Audubon Society, NOFA, NEMBA, Brattleboro Rec, Conservation Commissions, select boards, Windham Regional Commission Natural Resource Committee, BOC, Marlboro Nordic, Indigenous Groups, Windham Regional Woodlands, Putney Mountain Association, Pinnacle Association, Lake Raponda Association, VT Land Trust, Green River Watershed Alliance, Trout Unlimited, Friends of the West River Trail, BEEC. SVNH Museum.
- Local working group will meet in March and finish work in April and send recommendations to the state.

SE Supervisory Union Annual Meeting Scheduling:

- Kelley Stettner has been hired as their district manager, will likely start in January.
- Looking for possible meeting times. Emphasis on them happening.
- Possible times: Jan 18, Jan 22, Jan 23, Jan 25 in the evening (6:30pm)

Draft Annual Report:

- Meg has a list of corrections.
- Audience: send to towns, legislators, have for tabling.
- Perhaps design a trifold pamphlet for tabling.
- Text and photos could be made smaller to consolidate (less like a slideshow, more like an annual report).
- Call a couple towns to find out how we could get into town annual reports.

Land Acknowledgement:

- ***Motion to take out "We want to" from the statement.***
- *The acknowledgement now reads:*
 - *We respectfully acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Abenaki People, who have stewarded this land throughout the generations.*
- ***Motion approved.***

Supervisor Photos:

- Ask a photography student to come and take photos for the bios on the website?
- Thought is that we could do the photos.
- Guidelines:
 - Face is recognizable.
 - Doing something.
- Goal: do it by the January meeting.

401K Provider:

- Geof and Cory met with Josh Roberts from Edward Jones and Ray Beatty from Trans America to talk about 401K options.
- Big takeaway: \$1000 in one-time set up fees; it would cost the district \$1100/year.
- From there: employees can defer part of the 20% stipend into the 401K, this will not add additional costs to the budget.
- TransAmerica: Good option for small business. Downside: no socially responsible investing.
- Socially responsible investment: funds have to perform up to a certain standard, problem is socially responsible investment funds don't perform well enough.
- Local investment guy: Prentice Smith. He has a minimum investment value, but might be able to give advice.
- Is something available through Vermont League of Cities and Towns?
- Can VACD help provide this service?
- IRA would be simplest but you have to provide them to all employees (which would mean even greeters), which we don't want to do.
- Safe harbor provision: if employer does matching at 3% then you save on annual rates.

Annual Meeting Follow Up:

- Great speaker.
- In the future: try to move it around.
- Really nice having it catered.
- Raffle was nice.
- In the future - have folks introduce themselves somehow.

District Manager's Report:

- There's a concern that districts are building too much of a "nest egg": asking for a billable rate that's higher than necessary.
- Being a stable organization: you need some money in the bank as a buffer that provides stability and allows for flexibility.

November Minutes:

- *Motion to approve minutes.*
- *Motion Approved.*

Executive Session:

Cory's Performance Review:

- There was a lot of positive feedback about Cory from Isabel, Heather and Marie. Linda is hoping to send along their emails to Cory.
- *Motion to approve movement of Cory to the next pay step.*
- *Motion approved.*

Other Pay Raises:

- *Motion to send Heather to the next tier on the payscale for completing Conservation Planner Training.*
- *Motion Approved.*

Upcoming Agenda Items:

Next Meeting:

Jan 10, 6:30 pm at Geoff's

- *Motion to Adjourn, 8:57pm*
- *Motion approved.*