

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

December 19, 2024

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Coordinator & Field Technician), Richard Noel (Chair), Vicky Drew (Supervisor), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Sarah Larose (NRCS District Conservationist)

Conducted via Zoom

Minutes recorded by Orenna Brand

The written minutes are a synopsis of the discussion at the meeting. Motions are as stated. Minutes will be subject to correction by the Board. Changes, if any, will be recorded in the minutes of the next meeting of the Board.

Minutes:

3:15: Meeting called to order. Quorum present.

3:16: Vicky Drew and Richard Noel share VACD/NRCC updates.

- Vicky Drew shares VACD updates.
 - ED search is in progress. First round interviews with several strong candidates are nearly complete; second round interviews will happen in early January.
 - Lauren Weston, Kate Wettergreen, and Vicky Drew attended VACD Annual Meeting on November 19-20. First day was spent in session with organizational development consultants from Momentum Communications and Structural Integrity. Report will be shared with Capacity Building Committee and supervisors. VACD Board of Directors Meeting occurred on second day. Motion to hire Action Circles lobbyist was passed non-unanimously. Richard Noel and Lauren Weston received awards for their years of service and strong leadership, respectively.
- Richard Noel attended NRCC Finance Committee Meeting on December 11 and NRCC Board Meeting on December 18. RFP for one-time equipment purchases will be released soon.

3:26: Molly Magnan joins.

3:29: Supervisors review minutes from November 14, 2024, meeting. Vicky Drew makes motion to accept minutes, Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor. Motion carries.

3:30: Lauren Weston reviews FY25 financials (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss by Month, and Bank Statements). Lauren acknowledges error in previous month's projected net profits. Board accepts.

- Lauren Weston explains discrepancy in projected net profits resulting from incorrect recording of two payments in QuickBooks.
- Board acknowledges need for two-step accounting process to increase redundancies. Lauren Weston will finish GAAP trainings in January.
- No updates on VACD shared bookkeeper position.

3:40: Lauren Weston reviews updated Employee Handbook. Vicky Drew makes a motion to accept, Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor. Motion carries.

- Lynda Ulrich inquires about frequency of updates. Employee Handbook is updated annually.

- Updates include:
 - Expansion of DEI to DEIJA, with increased focuses on action framework and accessibility.
 - Frequency of staff reviews.
 - Changes to benefits, including medical insurance and 401k.
 - Expansion of reimbursements to include cell phones in addition to mileage.
- Other updates discussed:
 - Severance policy. Board agrees not to specify.
 - Travel policy. Vicky Drew advises to base per diems off GSA recommendations. Lauren to contact NRCS Management & Strategy/Business Manager Joe Buford.
 - Whistleblower policy. Lauren to contact VLCT in the new year.
 - Compensation philosophy. Board advises against written policy to keep flexibility in case of poor finances but agrees to include language to the effect of: "Performance raises and bonuses are considered in June at the beginning of the fiscal year, and COLA increases occur in January at the beginning of the calendar year in line with SSA recommendations. All bonuses are ultimately at the discretion of the District Manager." Lauren Weston is interested in bringing all raises to the board for final say.
 - Boot cleaning policy. Richard Noel urges taking precautions against the spread of avian flu. Vicky Drew recommends Lauren Weston contacts Sarah Larose about NRCS resources available to guide this policy.

4:01: Lauren Weston reviews health insurance discussion and raise documentation.

- Board confirms 2.5% increase for all staff.
- Board confirms that District now offers a \$700/month stipend in lieu of health insurance.

4:05: Sarah Larose joins.

4:09: Board enters executive session.

4:13: Board exits executive session.

4:13: Board discusses annual review of District Manager Lauren Weston.

- Board discusses need to develop more formal performance review structure. Lynda Ulrich offers to take lead. Lauren Weston to send DM job description to Lynda Ulrich. Lynda Ulrich will send survey to Orenna Brand to distribute to staff.
 - Board agrees to wait to discuss an additional raise for Lauren Weston until after performance review.

Staff Bonuses

- Board agrees all staff members will receive an appreciation bonus of \$150/year of employment at FCNRCD. Employees having worked less than a full year will receive \$75.
 - Lynda Ulrich recommends tying this bonus to performance reviews in coming years.
 - Lynda Ulrich makes motion to accept, Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor. Motion carries.

4:30: Next FCNRCD Board Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 30, from 3-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT. Lauren informs board of other meetings.

- Meeting will lead into public "open house" from 5-7pm.
- Other meetings:

- January 21: Public Locally Led Dinner in North Hero co-hosted by GICNRCD. 5:30-7pm at North Hero Community Center.
- Local Working Group will meet in early February, likely February 6 after VAWQP meeting. There will be a hybrid option.

4:35: Molly Magnan exits.

4:35: Sarah Larose shares NRCS updates.

- ActNow signup starting February 2, 2025, focus on CPAs/DIAs/CEMAs, and 5 agronomic practices (cover crop, seed down, reduced tillage, no-till, nutrient management, soil carbon amendment). Outreach already occurring in our counties about this potential funding opportunity. Funds obligated through ActNow are Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds, separate from regular funding.
- 2018 Farm Bill has expired, don't know when a new Farm Bill will go into effect.
- VT NRCS re-alignment steps taken to announce vacancy's, DC, Soil Con, and Program Assistant positions, the hope is to get the spots filled by the end of January.
- FY2026 NRCS program signup deadline is August 22, 2025.
- In event of government shutdown, Sarah will follow protocol. Equipment must be shut off and disconnected.

4:40: Board discusses recruiting additional associate board members.

- Vicky Drew recommends Dr. Kent Henderson, Chair of FNLC and retired veterinarian.
- Board expresses desire to include younger and geographically diverse associate members.
- Lauren Weston to reach out to former legislator Mike McCarthy.
- Lauren Weston will invite other contacts from previously made list of potential associate members to January board meeting. Board members will also reach out to their contacts.

4:49: Lauren Weston share the project of the month – maple & forestry.

- Mel Auffredou has spearheaded this work, including 8 site visits this fall with county and NRCS foresters and 4 maple workshops. Glad to be filling a gap among service organizations in Franklin County.

4:53: Board shares county ongoing.

- USDA is testing milk supply for bird flu, advises not to drink raw milk.

4:56: Meeting adjourns.