

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

December 15, 2023

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Richard Noel (Chair), Carissa Stein (Supervisor), Vicky Drew (Supervisor), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Dan Pipes (Supervisor), Sarah Larose (NRCS District Conservationist – arrived at 3:25 pm)

Conducted via Zoom

Minutes recorded by Lauren Weston

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:

3:10 pm: Meeting called to order. Quorum present.

3:11 pm: Vicky Drew shared about ongoing discussions around rule making authority of Districts in the VACD Executive Committee. Richard Noel share that he will be having a NRCC Finance Committee Meeting on December 20th.

3:17 pm: Supervisors review minutes from November 16th, 2023 meeting. Carissa Stein makes a motion to accept minutes, Molly Magnan seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:20 pm: Lauren Weston shared the Project of the Month which is the Soil Health Training Program that is being run by FCNRCD for 99 technical assistance providers in VT and consists of 5 in field days and 12 webinars over the winter.

3:22 pm: Lauren Weston updated Supervisors that Passport office in our building is likely not interested in absorbing our NRCS/FSA office space in the same building. There are ongoing discussions about next steps for improved office space for USDA and FCNRCD.

3:25 pm: Update from Sarah Larose

- 3 new employees starting soon, Emily Jaquish, VACD Program Assistant, Iliena Freiday, NRCS Natural Resources Specialist, and Emilly Lugthart NRCS Natural Resources Specialist, all should be on board by mid-January.
- Civil Engineering Technician, and Soil Conservationist Technician positions still need to be filled.
- Briefly discussed the Quality Assurance Review and next steps, site visits to projects will occur the first week of May. Planning to visit a farmstead project, high tunnel/hedgerow project, and forest trails and landings project.
- Discussion of the Continuing Resolution, and delay of the 2018 Farm Bill, and how that impacts the customers, NRCS, and others.
- Made Board aware of some frustrations and struggles within our Agency in meeting and achieving the goals, the web-based programs we work with are slow functioning, don't function, and we are having to deal with delays and figuring out work arounds – costing time and money!
- Mentioned Local Funding Pool and desire to grow that pool to provide more local potential funding opportunities.

- Ryan Karb, with American Farmland Trust is a new partner with NRCS. He will be assisting VT in implementing contracts.
- Informed the Franklin District Board of the discussion earlier with the Grand Isle District Board of Molly's request to become a full-time District Manager. Jill Arace is aware, and Molly and Jill are working out the details, the board did approve Molly's request to become full-time.

3:36 pm: Lauren Weston shared the need/lesson learned of the month which was a quick overview of the process that occurred related to submitting our AgCWIP grant application through NRCC via Emily Nummer. Discussed how there were some tensions that arose between District Managers and VACD/NRCC staff in the process concerning accountability and transparency, and what resolutions were determined.

3:41 pm: Lauren Weston shared the results of the amount of funds owed to staff from past 2 years based on issues with following 40 hour work week labor laws and overtime/compensatory time calculations. The lawyers working with Lauren Weston on this have concurred with the amounts owed. Proposal to pay the following based on hours worked over 40 each week accruing at 1.5 x rate and then being spent at 1x rate or accruing for later use:

Lauren Weston: \$7,156.75

Katy Dynarski: \$722.72

Kate Wettergreen: \$1,557.13

Mel Auffredou: \$795.08

Megan Walker: \$128.39

Dorothy Kinney-Landis: \$94.88

Dan Pipes make a motion to pay the total, by individual as listed above, of \$10,454.95; Vicky Drew seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:48 pm: Lauren Weston asks if the Supervisors have had time to review the new draft of the Employee Handbook; none have, this item will be on the January agenda.

3:51 pm: Lauren Weston presents proposal to increase wages of Kate Wettergreen, Dorothy Kinney-Landis, and Mel Auffredou by 2024 Cost of Living Adjustment, 3.2%, starting the first pay period ending in January 2024. This would lead to the following wage changes:

Kate Wettergreen: from \$25.62 to \$26.44/hr

Mel Auffredou: from \$23.76 to \$24.52/hr

Dorothy Kinney-Landis: from \$23.00 to \$23.74/hr

Vicky Drew makes a motion to approve this proposal, Dan Pipes seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:52 pm: Board discusses making Lauren Weston's District Manager position a salaried position. Letter drafted with assistance from HR Consultant as proposal to Board:

This letter confirms changes to your position's exemption status as it relates to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). The District Manager is an exempt position. Wages are paid on a salary basis and the position is not eligible for overtime. Your annual salary is \$80,000, which is paid on a bi-weekly schedule, reflects that on average 47 hours/week are necessary to perform the duties of this position.

Unrelated to the exemption status, but related to your work time, the Board recognizes that sometimes it is necessary to work more hours than you are customarily scheduled. It is our understanding that you

will use your discretion to adjust your schedule as needed to strive for a healthy balance of work and out-of-work commitments.

The Board is sincerely grateful for all of the dedication, care, and skillful leadership you have demonstrated as the District Manager and appreciate your service to the agency.

This transition is effective starting the first pay period ending in January 2024. Dan makes a motion to approve this change in exemption and salaried status, as well as wage for Laren Weston, Vicky Drew seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:52 pm: Sarah Larose left

4:02 pm: Lauren Weston discussed ongoing issue with staff member and potential solutions.

4:32 pm: Carissa Stein and Richard Noel left. Quorum remains.

4:32 pm: Lauren Weston shared that a local farmer who we work with closely is interested in potentially working for FCNRCD, will send him general information about the District.

4:41 pm: Lauren Weston discusses the request for financial support letter from the Vermont RELEAF collection. Board asks for more information about the organization and clarity from NRCC if we are able to donate our funds to others.

4:43 pm: Zoom meeting unexpectedly ended. Lauren Weston followed up to Board members with summary email and also requested input on Staff Holiday Bonuses.

In the email, Lauren Weston proposed the following bonuses:

Lauren Weston: none

Kate Wettergreen: \$800 (Lauren's hypothetical bonus and Kate's regular)

Mel Auffredou: \$300

Dorothy Kinney-Landis: \$200

Kerry Brosnan: \$100

All Board members approved the proposal via email, motion carried.