

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

September 11, 2025

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Specialist), Richard Noel (Chair), Vicky Drew (Supervisor), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Dan Pipes (Supervisor)

Conducted at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans
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:

3:09pm: Meeting called to order. Quorum present. Meeting is being recorded.

3:10pm: Lauren Weston provides NRCS updates.

- St. Albans field office has been told they're getting a new Program Assistant starting at the end of the month.

3:12pm: Lynda Ulrich joins.

3:12pm: Richard Noel provides NRCC updates.

- May not be able to attend Finance Committee meeting next week.

3:13pm: Vicky Drew provides VACD updates.

- New general policies for VACD including around salaries/raises were approved at August 21 board meeting.
- VACD Annual meeting is on November 6. Vicky Drew may be able to attend; Dan Pipes cannot attend.
 - o Now accepting nominations for staff, manager, and supervisor awards.
- All Districts now required to have supervisor elections before the end of the year. Vicky Drew is up for re-election; needs 25 signatures from landowners in Franklin County in order to be on the ballot.

3:15pm: Supervisors discuss buildings/land for sale.

- Vicky Drew suggests Brick Store in Fairfield as location for board retreat. Lauren Weston to inquire.
- Georgia parcel: presently full of corn; \$60k/acre; can purchase 1-7 acres; Hinesburg loamy fine sand (easy to install septic); 2-4 feet depth seasonal water table; accessible to interstate but farther away from farm visits, and little to do in Georgia; potential value in the forest wetland behind the corn fields.
- Scott Magnan may be willing to sell up to 4 acres of bare land, but there's potential issue with neighbor's septic system.
- Supervisors discuss metal as most cost effective type of construction/building.
 - o Vicky Drew to contact local metal builders (Titan, Morton) for quote.

- Lauren Weston shares that owner of current office building has mentioned he may purchase and develop nearby parcel.
- All options worth pursuing.

3:33: Lauren Weston discusses potential Tree Sale locations: Hudak Farm, Hartman's Farmstand, Messenger building. District is continuing to evaluate options.

3:37pm: Supervisors discuss tire storage. Orenna Brand to give tires to Richard Noel to store after meeting.

3:39: Molly Magnan enters.

3:40: Lauren Weston presents Mercy CREP contract in Montgomery for board chair signature.

3:41: Supervisors review August 14, 2025, meeting minutes. Dan Pipes motions to approve August 14, 2025, meeting minutes; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

3:43: Lauren Weston to send supervisors financials to dates once questions are answered by accountant.

3:44pm: Supervisors discuss 2026 healthcare options and budget.

- Lynda Ulrich recommends narrowing in on budget as main constraint and choosing the best option from there, as opposed to starting with staff satisfaction.
- Blue Edge Captive offer:
 - o Total: \$75k - \$107k depending on plan "richness."
 - o Roughly \$1000/month/employee in premiums.
 - o Offer expires September 28; broker suggests it could be renewed at same rate.
 - o Minimum 5 staff required to participate in order to qualify.
- Current practice: District spends \$67,200/yr on \$700/month/employee taxable stipend to employees to purchase healthcare on the marketplace.
 - o Federal subsidies currently offset costs but, as of 2026, employees earning >\$62k (most staff) will be ineligible for premium tax credits.
- Scenarios under consideration:
 - o A: Continue \$700/month stipend; employees purchase insurance independently.
 - o B: Apply \$700/month stipend directly to District plan premiums; employee covers \$300/month difference.
 - o C: Apply \$700/month stipend to premiums plus District contributes \$300/month.
 - o D: Reduce stipend to \$550/month; District pays \$1,000/month toward premiums.
 - o E: Maintain \$700/month stipend and district pays \$1,000/month toward premiums.
- Vicky Drew advises treating all District employees the same, even if some benefit more than others.
- Building considerations: current rent is ~\$36k/yr. Purchasing land/building could add costs for utilities, plowing, etc. up to ~\$1k/month.
 - o Lauren Weston to research property tax rates by municipality.
- Larger questions to consider:
 - o How much total can be allocated to healthcare?
 - o What is total benefits package?

- What is salary vs. benefits breakdown currently among staff? (typically 70% salary, 30% benefits)
- Lauren Weston to calculate total benefits package + breakdown for each employee.
 - Keep compensation/benefits discussions separate from raises/salary performance reviews.
 - Lynda Ulrich offers to help Lauren Weston with communicating to employees around total package.
- Board discusses option C. Lauren Weston expresses concern about employee retention with losing the full amount of the stipend which many employees have been suing as additional income and advises that reducing staff would not save money due to billable rate reimbursements nature of grant-funded projects.
- Board further discusses options.
- Vicky Drew makes a motion to reduce stipend to \$500/month, cover healthcare premiums up to \$1000/month/employee, communicate potential impact on COLA and raises to employees, and have conversations with employees about total compensation package. Dan Pipes seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

4:21: Molly Magnan shares updates about house on Swamp Road in Fairfield.

- Property is in the land trust, so may not be able to be subdivided.
- Vicky can call Julia at the state
 - Lauren send Vicky the map for the lot

4:57: Lauren Weston discusses Annual Leave Plan.

- Will be out for 2 weeks at the end of October.
- Will continue to keep the board updated.

4:58: Orenna Brand's scope of work presentation is pushed to next board meeting.

- Dan Pipes suggests presentation should happen at beginning of meeting in future meetings.

4:59: Orenna Brand presents tuition reimbursement request for class in Ecological Economic Theory at UVM. Has also applied for VSAC grant to cover tuition.

- Dan Pipes motions to approve tuition reimbursement request, covering any portion of tuition not covered by VSAC. Richard Noel seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

5:03: Lauren Weston shares recent and upcoming events.

- Sept 7 – Compost Event
- Sept 13 – Lake Carmi Art Event
- Sept 15 – Dam Removal Press Day – 10 am to noon in Berkshire
- Nov 6 - VACD Annual Meeting

5:04: Next FCNRC Board Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 9 from 3pm-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

5:06: Richard Noel motions to adjourn. Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.