

Franklin County NRCB Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes
Revised to fix typos on 10/13/2023

September 12, 2023

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Richard Noel (Chair – via Zoom), Carissa Stein (Supervisor), Dan Pipes (Supervisor), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Vicky Drew (Supervisor), Sarah Larose (NRCS District Conservationist)

Conducted at St. Albans Free Library, St. Albans
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:

3:38 pm: Meeting called to order. Quorum present.

3:40 pm: Lauren Weston shared the Notice of Copyright Infringement from Evans & Dixon LLC regarding the use of an illustration by Joseph Tomelleri against the Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District. Discussion about next steps resulted in the need for a response from the Vermont League of Cities and Towns which carries our insurance. Discussed the need to properly preserve the website as described in Exhibit C in the letter and also take the image down.

3:51 pm: Lauren Weston told the board that it's our understanding that the Franklin County Field Days will be held in the same location as normal next year, and that their lease runs to June 30, 2024 anyway, so we should be able to use the Field Days location for the tree sale in 2024. She also shared that there was a back up plan of Blue Sky Packing in Enosburg which generously offered discounts on refrigerated trailers for us to use in their parking lots. Other ideas for future years include Ed Choiniere's barn or Hartman's but unclear what the insurance requirements are. Dan Pipes made a motion to remain at the Field Days for the Tree Sale in 2024, Carissa Stein seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:57 pm: Lauren Weston brought a question from Action Circles to the Board for input and feedback: Can you live with being the local delivery system (info gathering system?) for the state's EJ work IF taking on this work is supported with extra capacity? The important thing to note here is that State Agencies and key legislators are already aware of your local work group framework and they are interested in using that process for EJ work. It would be in partnership with many other stakeholders, and the idea would be to get you the support you need from the state and VACD to be able to take on this work. The question is: will you NOT OPPOSE this? (Distinctly different from "do you support this?"). Consensus means that everyone agrees to not actively oppose this in the Legislature.

Responses from the Board include:

- What are the metrics to measure success
- What are the details of the program
- To what extent would the NRCB need to address any issues brought forth by the community, what would our accountability be

- It is important that we receive our core base funding first before we sign up for this additional work and funds
- Want to make sure that the community's priorities are valued in this process by the government agencies just as much as State priorities being communicated down out to the community. This needs to be a two way system.
- Where will this work need to land in our priorities as a NRCD (top3?)
- Will this work generate projects that we haven't even considered yet

The Board agreed that no one opposes this request to be the local delivery system but more information and resources are needed.

4:11 pm: Molly Magnan leaves meeting

4:12 pm: NRCS update provided by Sarah Larose

- Two engineering positions for the NWZ have been filled, Josh Nappi to start 9/24/23, no start date for Molly Baker yet.
- VACD working to put together advertisement for VACD PA position.
- EQIP Disaster Assistance (EQIP DA) was announced, sign up deadline was 9/1/23, limited practices are being offered under EQIP DA, such as cover crop and pasture and hayland planting, Franklin/Grand Isle and Lamoille counties have almost 70 applications, not all will be funded, monies have run out. Additional funds will be sought in FY24, no guarantees that we will get additional funds.
- FY24 program information is being worked on and hope to roll out soon, NRCS has a date of 9/28 to update staff on FY24 program information.
- 10/20/23 sign up program deadline.
- Mentioned EWP (Emergency Watershed Program) increased workload due to the flooding.
- Discussed ECP (Emergency Conservation Program) – FSA program -provided details that Sarah Larose was aware of i.e. ECP Storm Elliot being moved forward, not sure if there was going to be another ECP sign up for the flooding.

Carissa Stein mentioned the importance of prescribed grazing being included in future fund pools in emergency situations.

4:32 pm: Sarah Larose leaves meeting

4:32 pm: Supervisors review minutes from August 8, 2023 meeting. Carissa Stein makes a motion to accept minutes as written, Dan Pipes seconds, all approve, motion carries.

4:33 pm: Lauren Weston brought a question from Action Circles to the Board for input and feedback: When thinking about the work of NRCDs statewide - how you work together as Districts and with your partners, how you serve your constituents, how you are funded, how you interact with the state.....

- what is happening now that should happen more?
- what is happening now that needs to stop?
- what is NOT happening now that needs to start?

Responses from the Board include:

- we need to ask the staff this question as they are the ones most impacted and aware

- there should be more helping out other counties (like FCNRCD does for agricultural services in Grand Isle County); and it should expand beyond just shared ag services in some places to make sure that all communities have access to all programs
- there should be some core services that all districts do
- should increase our work with selectboards and towns like helping them with grant writing and management because towns need capacity and assistance
- VACD/NRCC should start serving as a group that creates standard job descriptions and benefits templates statewide and helps us share bookkeeping responsibilities; as well as other human resources items or building a request-for-support program to build efficiencies. They should do this instead of serving as grant managers for agencies and organizations; we need internal support from VACD, not necessarily programming. Turnaround on payments also needs to keep improving
- Districts always do what is asked of us – and we should be able to clarify our roles and to say no
- Want to have more substance at board meetings to help generate projects and really connect into the community.

Lauren Weston brought a question from Action Circles to the Board for input and feedback:

Review the text below from the Statute Changes Recommended by Legislative Counsel and have a discussion about what "teeth" you want NRCDs to have. The House Ag Committee will almost certainly be dealing with this rule making language, and we need to get clear on what it is you actually want. Remember that leg council has said if you tried to enforce the rule making authority that is laid out in your statute, you would face legal challenges. The language changed from regulation to rule making. We don't have all the info yet, it will be an iterative process with the committee and leg council, but it would be good to get clear on what level of authority do your Boards want NRCD to have.

“Review and eliminate authority to adopt rules. (§ 724. Land-use, erosion control, and natural resources conservation rules; approval)

The supervisors of any district shall have authority to formulate rules, as set forth in this chapter, governing the use of lands within the district in the interest of conserving soil, controlling soil and stream bank erosion, and promoting conservation of natural resources and drainage. The supervisors may conduct such public meetings and public hearings upon rules proposed to be enacted as may be necessary to assist them in this work. The supervisors shall not have authority to enact such land-use rules into ordinances unless a majority of the owners of land lying within the boundaries of the district cast their votes for the approval of the proposed ordinance. The approval of the proposed ordinance by a majority of the votes cast in the referendum shall not be deemed to require the supervisors to enact the proposed ordinance. The rules to be adopted by the supervisors under the provisions of this chapter may include provisions for conserving soil resources, soil and stream bank erosion, water quality improvement, and conservation of natural resources and drainage.”

Responses from the Board include:

- We want to keep it for future use, such as if there are certain chemicals being used in a watershed; or used when products are being pushed against the good of society
- It's nice to have those tools in the toolbox with as much buy-in as possible.

5:05 pm: Dan Pipes leaves meeting

5:06pm: Lauren Weston reviews the FY23 financial reports and states that the District did very well last fiscal year and is hoping to keep building on that momentum. Vicky Drew shares that she would be interested in seeing a proposed-to-actual for staff hours on each project.

5:12 pm: Lauren Weston reviews FY24 financials (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss by Month, Bank Statement, and Projected Future Income). Carissa Stein makes a motion to accept FY24 Financials to Date; Vicky Drew seconds, all approve, motion carries.

5:19 pm: Richard Noel shares about NRCC meetings he has attended and discusses that there is a lack of clarity in state statute about whether or not District Staff are State Employees. This is an ongoing discussion with NRCC and Action Circles.

5:22 pm: Lauren Weston reviews the proposed new mission statement for FCNRCD: "The Franklin County Natural Resources Conservation District empowers and partners with land stewards and communities on the ground by supporting connections that benefit natural resources, water quality, soil health, and the working landscape in Franklin County and across Northwest Vermont." Vicky Drew makes a motion to adopt the mission statement as written, Carissa Stein seconds, all approve, motion carries.

The remainder of the draft strategic plan will be reviewed at the October meeting.

Discussion around the potential for a 2024 Annual Meeting

5:39 pm: The next board meeting will be October 12th at 3 pm.

5:41 pm: Carissa Stein makes a motion to adjourn meeting, Richard Noel seconds, all approve, motion carries.