

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2025

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Specialist), Kerry Brosnan (Natural Resources Planner), Mel Auffredou (Natural Resources Programs Manager), Richard Noel (Chair), Vicky Drew (Supervisor – on Zoom), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor – on Zoom), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Dan Pipes (Supervisor), Karyn Rocheleau (Prospective Associate Supervisor), Walter Hutcheson (Prospective Associate 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:

3:00: Meeting called to order. Quorum present. Meeting is being recorded.

- Dan Pipes congratulates Richard Noel and District staff on awards from recent VACD Annual Meeting.
- Karyn Rocheleau introduces herself:
 - o Has been involved with the District previously. Regularly purchases from the Tree Sale. Spoke with Vicky about potential board service.
 - o Owns land in Westford and a farm in Fairfax.
 - o Member of the Rotary Club.
 - o Led the Rotary Cardiac Champ Challenge fundraiser.
 - o Has served on the hospital board for past eight years.
 - o Lived in New Hampshire for 30 years and ran a consulting and training business. Past professional experience includes positions with Wendy's, Ford, and PepsiCo.
- Round of introductions.

3:06: Molly Magnan enters.

3:07: Walter Hutcheson enters.

3:10: Lauren Weston shares updates regarding NRCS and federal government.

- Federal government is back open. First directive for NRCS is to get payments out to producers. Dates for internal deadlines are changing and will be shared with partners by Dec 1.
- Staffing: New Program Assistant in St. Albans office. Unsure if St. Albans office lost staff during the shutdown. 50% of NRCS staff in VT have left or been fired since the beginning of the year. St. Albans office has been ok; Middlebury office very affected.

3:20: Richard Noel and Vicky Drew share NRCC & VACD updates.

- NRCC updates (Richard Noel):
 - o Attended NRCC meeting on November 13. Two supervisory unions submitted their written updates for group review on time.
 - o Willie Nickerson elected Chair of Council (NRCC).

- Finance Committee met on November 19. Rick Hopkins will continue as Chair of Finance Committee; recently attended NASCA meeting.
- AgCWIP will be moving from NRCC to VACD; VACD will hold the agreement. Lauren to ask Michelle Monroe about this change for the next board meeting.
- Richard Noel asks whether FCNRCD is using RAMP for credit services; Lauren responds that we are not.
 - RAMP supposedly eliminates the need for individuals to provide their Social Security number for credit card use.
 - Lauren to ask Michelle Monroe about RAMP and consult Dave Dore of Structural Integrity to consider for FCNRCD use.
- VACD Updates (Vicky Drew):
 - Participated remotely in the Annual Meeting; re-elected as Treasurer for VACD.
 - For FCNRCD: all nine staff and two supervisors attended VACD Annual Meeting.
 - Invoices for 2026 VACD dues have not yet been issued to Districts.
 - Discussion ongoing about how Districts should coordinate with VACD on lobbying efforts.
- Vicky Drew retained board seat on FCNRCD District Board; ran unopposed.

3:40: Orenna Brand and Lauren Weston present 2024-26 Strategic Plan updates to Date.

- Strategic Plan has proven to be very useful, particularly for guiding internal growth.
- Dan Pipes emphasizes importance of internal team stability and suggests exploring cross-training, including identifying who can step in for Lauren Weston when she is unavailable.
- Remaining major items for current Strategic Plan include:
 - Exploring the purchase of land or a building
 - Advancing community engagement planning
- Lynda Ulrich noted importance of maintaining flexibility, suggesting that the next plan should help the organization stay nimble; cautioned against being tied to specific outcomes and recommended that plan may be most useful on an annual basis.

3:54: Supervisors discuss updates on purchase of building or land.

- Lauren Weston has looked into the house Richard Noel identified near Highgate Manor; appears to be a private sale.
- Discussion around Graves Farm property and if the parcel could be used by the District.

3:57: Kerry Brosnan gives Rotating Staff Presentation about the work she performs at FCNRCD.

4:22: Supervisors review October 9, 2025 meeting minutes. Dan Pipes motions to approve October 9, 2025 meeting minutes; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

4:25: Lauren Weston reviews FY26 Financials-to-Date. Richard Noel motions to accept FY26 Financials-to-Date; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Lauren Weston and Vicky Drew met on November 19 to review financials.
- District is in process of working with consulting firm Structural Integrity to rework books; additional updates to follow.
- District still expects to end the fiscal year with net profits. It's typical at this time of year for expenses to exceed income.
- VACD dues expected to be announced soon.

- Question raised about whether the District should pay dues directly to NACD. Vicky Drew notes that it is unusual for Districts to pay NACD dues.
 - o Lauren Weston to check with other Districts about whether they pay NACD dues and report back at December Board meeting.
 - o Vicky Drew to find out what dues VACD pays to NACD.

4:29: Lauren Weston discusses 2025-26 newsletter updates. Dan Pipes motions to transition from printed and mailed newsletter to postcard with link to online newsletter for financial reasons; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Most Tree Sale orders come through the website, and cost of printing and mailing full newsletter + Tree Sale order forms to ~2,700 addresses has increased from ~\$3k to ~\$6k.
- Lauren Weston proposes to mail a postcard with link to online newsletter.
- Vicky Drew asks whether District can notify online customers directly, informing them they will receive a postcard and can continue ordering online as usual. Lauren Weston replies that they can.

4:33: Lauren Weston reviews Draft Operating Reserve Policy and discusses implications for potential building or land purchase.

- Operating Reserve Policy:
 - o District has been working with financial consultant Dave Dore of Structural Integrity to determine appropriate reserve levels.
 - o Current policy draft proposes maintaining three months of operating expenses (including personnel, building, truck), excluding contractor expenses.
 - Estimated monthly operating cost (conservative): \$75k
 - Proposed reserve target: \$225k
 - o Supervisors agree that the District should keep no less than three months of reserves.
 - o Lauren Weston to send the final draft of Operating Reserve Policy to Supervisors for consideration for adoption at the December Board meeting.
- Building purchase considerations:
 - o If reserves are set aside, questions arise about where funds for a down payment would come from. It may be possible to be creative with bank regarding municipal loan and retained cash within existing accounts.
 - o Vicky Drew notes that the current reserve calculation does not include accounts receivable.
 - o Lynda Ulrich raises concerns about tight and unreliable cash flow and emphasizes that, if the District purchased a building, it would need a budget capable of sustaining ongoing building-related expenses.
 - o Karyn Rocheleau recommends developing a full budget for a potential building purchase, including ancillary costs and rainy-day fund.
 - o Lauren Weston clarifies that, while the District would not pay property taxes on a building, it would be responsible for insurance and other costs.
 - o Dan Pipes stresses the need for clarity around priorities: Is the priority a building purchase? Maintaining cash reserves? Supporting staffing and employment?
 - o Lynda Ulrich adds that the District needs a clear understanding of fixed vs. discretionary costs and future income projections before committing to a mortgage.
 - Lauren Weston to prepare a fixed vs. discretionary budget for the January Board meeting.

4:51: Mel Auffredou seeks board approval for contractor procurement for Phase I cultural resources investigation at The Branch Floodplain Restoration project in Enosburgh, VT. Vicky Drew motions to select Hartgen Archaeological Associates for the Phase I cultural resource investigation for this project; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Clean Water Service Provider (CWSP)-funded project on the Branch in Enosburgh, located at intersection of Rte 108 and Chester Arthur Road. Must comply with state cultural resources requirements. Following earlier project phases, it has been determined that additional archaeological review is needed.
- District has access to \$20k for this work within grant budget. Current estimate for the Phase I investigation is \$12k submitted by Hartgen. Under District's procurement policy, Board approval is required for expenses over \$10k.
 - o Uncertain whether shovel tests will be required in the tree-planting areas; if not, total costs may be lower.
- Work is scheduled to begin on Monday, pending approval.
- If cultural resources are found, project design may need to be modified or, depending on the location and significance, the project may need to be stopped. VT Division of Historic Preservation would determine next steps.

5:01: Supervisors discuss contractor issue. Dan Pipes motions to enter executive session; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

5:19: Board leaves executive session. No motions or decisions were made during executive session.

5:19: Karyn Rocheleau exits.

5:19: Next FCNRCD Board Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, December 17 from 3pm-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

- Dan Pipes will have to leave by 4:30.

5:20: Molly Magnan exits.

5:20: Lauren Weston shares Paid Time Off (PTO) drawdown update.

- DM PTO plan is being used (albeit for surgery).
- Lauren Weston is having knee surgery on December 2; will be off for a week after that and on crutches for up to 2 months.

5:21: Lauren Weston shares update on Trout Brook Reservoir dam removal project.

- Project is currently paused for the winter at the direction of regulators. Work will resume in the spring.
- Lauren Weston is finalizing budget amendment and timeline update for the funder.
- Delays can be attributed to very wet site and delay in receiving permits.
 - o Vicky Drew asks that this information be included in a report to the funder.
- Reservoir is expected to continue draining over the winter, which should improve site conditions for spring work.

5:26: Dan Pipes motions to adjourn; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.