

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Specialist), Richard Noel (Chair), Vicky Drew (Supervisor – on Zoom), Dan Pipes (Supervisor), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Walter Hutcheson (Associate Supervisor), Sarah Larose (NRCS District Conservationist), Karyn Rocheleau (Prospective Associate Supervisor), Julie Wright (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:**

3:05: Richard Noel calls meeting to order. Lauren Weston begins recording meeting.

3:06: Round of introductions.

3:11: Molly Magnan enters.

3:13: Lauren Weston reviews newsletter.

- Much more cost efficient to mail postcards than full newsletter with paper order forms.
- Orenna Brand to leave paper order forms at NRCS office for any customers who walk in.

3:15: Sarah Larose shares NRCS updates.

- Discussion of MOU/UCA templates/agreements
  - o Updated MOU will be similar to previous versions.
  - o The MOU and accompanying Unfunded Cooperative Agreement outline shared resources and mutual understanding between NRCS and NRCDs.
    - Lauren Weston notes language in the MOU stating that Locally Led responsibilities would fall to NRCS if the District is unable to facilitate.
    - MOU includes certain unpaid obligations, but the District receives substantial resources from NRCS in return.
  - o Supervisors asked to provide feedback by sharing comments with Lauren Weston. Sarah Larose will bring feedback to her supervisor by Friday.
  - o Vicky Drew asks whether the MOU format is consistent nationwide. Sarah Larose confirms that it is a national template that has been modified for Vermont, particularly regarding Local Led priorities.
  - o Dan Pipes requests to review the MOU prior to Board approval. Supervisors will consider adopting the MOU at a future meeting.
- January 15 FY26 application deadline
  - o Updated from August 22
- EQIP Regenerative Pilot Program, 5-year contract with soil testing practices required
- Iliana Freiday is on detail at the State Office on the Easements team

- Chris Evans completed his detail as the Financial Resources Specialist and is back in the Northwest Zone as the Forester
- Paula Salazar is the new Financial Resources Specialist, VT NRCS obtained her through the Critical Vacancy process
- Travis Thomason is Acting State Conservationist for New Hampshire, while continuing duties with Vermont
- Kia Olsson is the new NRCS Northwest Zone Program Assistant, VT obtained her through the Critical Vacancy process
- Emily Jaquish partner (VACD) Program Assistant is back to a 5-day work week
- Peter Danforth, the Lamoille County District Manager, has announced his retirement and will be retiring in February
- Discussed Locally Led Conservation Delivery, Local Working Group, FY2027
  - o Lauren Weston would like the board to be more involved in Local Led this year.
    - Lauren Weston to send around survey link.
  - o Supervisors should attend Local Working Group meeting on January 15.
  - o State Conservationist wants 80% of EQIP funds to move through Local Funding Pools by 2029.
  - o Lauren Weston and Sarah Larose to discuss setting up meeting with NRCS staff.
- Northwest Zone has mostly caught up with payments/contract management from being shut down.

3:41: Richard Noel shares NRCC updates.

- Attended Finance Committee meeting on December 17, 2025. NRCC is switching from M&T Bank to Union Bank.
- Increase in budget for Westcott Brook project for FCNRCD was approved.
- Clare Ireland is asking that NRCDs send meeting minutes to her – FCNRCD already does that via google drive.

3:46: Vicky Drew shares VACD updates.

- No VACD meetings since last FCNRCD board meeting on November 20, 2025.
- VACD pays NACD \$1000/year in dues.

3:47: Lauren Weston discusses amount to be paid to NACD in annual dues. Supervisors motion to approve a \$250 payment to NACD. Richard motions; Vicky seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Other VT Districts' payments vary widely, from \$0 to \$775.
- It has been shared that it does help if all Districts in one state participate.
- Lauren Weston to pay NACD \$250 in dues.

3:50: Lauren Weston shares responses to questions previously submitted to VACD.

- VACD does not currently have a policy for discontinuing work with contractors (e.g., a formal disbarment or exclusion policy).
- VACD agreed that contractor management training for District staff would be a good idea and will explore the possibility of hosting the training.
- Clarification regarding updated AgCWIP agreement:
  - o The agreement will be held by VACD rather than NRCC. This is better because VACD can assist Districts in meeting deliverables by providing staff support.
  - o When NRCC holds the agreement, a state agency is effectively holding a state grant, which is unusual.

- Likely won't have an impact on FCNRCD.

3:54: Supervisors review November 20, 2025, meeting minutes. Dan Pipes motions to approve November 20, 2025, meeting minutes; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

3:55: Lauren Weston discusses Ramp financial management system. Lynda Ulrich motions to apply for Ramp credit card; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Ramp is a software system for bookkeeping that includes integrated credit cards.
- The District currently has credit cards through business Chase accounts opened in Vicky Drew's name, which is not ideal.
- Ramp requires a Social Security number to open an account but does not require a credit check.
- No individual board or staff member's personal credit information would be used.
- Cash-back rates would be based on the District's risk profile, estimated at 0.5–1.5%.
  - A question was raised about whether having a lease would help improve the District's credit rating. The answer is not known.
- Platform could also possibly be used by staff for mileage reimbursement requests.
- Lauren Weston will submit an application to view the District's cash-back offer, which the board will review at the next board meeting.

3:58: Lauren Weston reviews FY26 Financials-to-Date. Lynda Ulrich motions to accept the FY26 Financials-to-Date; Dan Pipes seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Financial reports generated in QuickBooks Online (QBO) are longer because Chart of Accounts is more detailed as a result of financial management system build out with Structural Integrity.
- Cash flow analysis will be ready by January meeting.
- Income sources are now being broken down by state and federal funding, as well as other sources.
- Net income is currently negative, but significant income for the rest of FY26 is still expected.
- Lauren Weston is working toward closing the books each month with the same dates as bank account statements to align reporting dates to the board.
- Discussion of COLA adjustments:
  - A 2.8% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) is currently shown in the financial documents.
  - Board has discussed in previous meetings the possibility of not implementing a COLA due to significant costs incurred by covering rising healthcare premiums.

4:07: Supervisors enter executive session. Dan Pipes motions to enter executive session; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- No decisions about COLA changes to staff income were made. Additional conversation will happen at next board meeting.
- Dan Pipes exits.

4:43: Lauren Weston presents Kerry Brosnan's tuition reimbursement request for GIS course at UVM. Richard Noel motions to approve Kerry Brosnan's tuition reimbursement request and to update the Tuition Reimbursement Policy to require a grade of B or higher for reimbursement; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Lauren Weston reports that Kerry Brosnan has made efforts to learn what she can internally.
- Cost of course is \$1280 with 20% off for alumni.

- The District expects to partner with NRCS on the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) program, which will require watershed-scale mapping and assessment in the Mill River and Jewett Brook watersheds.
  - o Completing this training may allow the District to keep some GIS work in-house rather than relying on consultants.
- Lauren Weston notes that staff members Lauren Weston, Kate Wettergreen, and Dorothy Kinney-Landis currently have some advanced GIS knowledge.
- The existing Tuition Reimbursement Policy requires a grade of C or higher for reimbursement. Board discusses raising the C to a B.
- Orenna Brand to check in with Lauren about tuition reimbursement in new year.

4:48: Lauren Weston tables review of Operating Reserve Policy until January meeting.

4:49: Lauren Weston reviews Procurement Policy.

- Updates explicitly call for aligning with applicable federal and non-federal procurement requirements.
- Lauren Weston to present a summary table of proposed changes at a future meeting.
- What procurement dollar threshold should require Board approval versus staff decision-making (e.g., \$75,000)?
  - o The need for special meetings is discussed, and the policy should outline procedures for scheduling such meetings.
- Lynda Ulrich emphasizes the importance of drafting policy with future leadership in mind.
- Votes should not be conducted via email in order to comply with open meeting law requirements.
- RFPs should include clear evaluation criteria.

4:52: Lauren Weston reviews her own Paid Time Off plan. She is still where the board wants her to be.

4:53: Lauren Weston shares upcoming meetings and events.

- Tree Sale is LIVE!
- Local Working Group – January 15th
- NOFA-VT Winter Conference – Feb 14th
- Community Water Quality Meeting – Feb 25th
- FCNRCD’s 80th Birthday Party – July 13<sup>th</sup>
  - o Board Retreat also this day

4:55: Next FCNRCD Board Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 22, 2026, from 3-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

4:57: Richard Noel shares information about a potential building he identified in Swanton.

- Lauren Weston to follow up with the realtor for additional details.
- A question is raised about whether the property is located in a floodplain; Richard indicates he believes it is not.

5:03: Sarah Larose, as an individual, not as NRCS District Conservationist, shares updates on the status of the Franklin County Field Days.

- The fair will take place on property located behind Tractor Supply in Swanton.
- Dates are July 30–August 1, occurring Thursday through Saturday (no Sunday).

- The board discusses the importance of maintaining a strong agricultural presence at the fair and possibly hosting a fundraiser.
- Sarah Larose asks if Field Days Committee meetings can take place at FCNRCD offices; Lauren Weston confirms that the space can be used to host meetings.

5:10: Vicky Drew departs.

5:14: Meeting adjourns: Lynda Ulrich motions to adjourn; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.