

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2025

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Specialist), Mel Auffredou (Natural Resources Programs Manager), Sarah Larose (NRCS District Conservationist), Richard Noel (Chair), Vicky Drew (Supervisor – on Zoom), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor – on Zoom), Molly Magnan (Supervisor), Julie Wright (Associate Supervisor), Karyn Rocheleau (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:

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

3:06pm: Sarah Larose shares NRCS updates.

- Regenerative Pilot Program (EQIP) is underway; recently attended national call about the program.
- Re FY27 Locally Led, Lauren Gibson is taking on larger role in helping Districts put together their proposals.
 - o Sarah Larose has to shift workload because of increase in farmstead applications (currently about 30 on the books, estimated at over \$12 million of potential funding).

3:07: Lauren Weston discusses FY27 Locally Led proposal. Supervisors are successfully informed.

- Aim is to continue prioritizing farmstead infrastructure projects, similarly to last year.
- This is based on stakeholder feedback from the Local Working Group meeting, conversations with farmers, and Lauren Weston's involvement in CAFO stakeholder working group meetings hosted by ANR.
- NRCS process requires approval from Supervisors reflected in meeting minutes.
- Why is increased funding needed in this space?
 - o Sarah Larose: Uptick in farmstead applications can be attributed to growing trend of farmers raising their own youngstock --> additional animals, manure, waste storage infrastructure needed. True for farms of all sizes (homesteads to LFOs).
- Why is this trend happening?
 - o Richard Noel: Follows beef prices. Farmers can save costs by raising their own youngstock.
 - o Molly Magnan: Farmers don't sell their milking animals.
- Lauren Weston shares that regulations may soon be changing around how much dirty water/manure CAFOs can hold (i.e., more capacity is expected to be needed).
 - o Farmers have always cared and continue to care about their environmental impact, but there is more enforcement coming.
- District staff are building comprehensive Conservation Action Plan spreadsheet to keep track of funding/resources available for this and all resource concerns in Franklin County.
- Sarah Larose shares that there is not a huge backlog for grazing applications, but some are taking 2+ years to get funded since they are not ranking high enough initially.

- Potential to fold into Locally Led proposal this year? Different from farmstead but still involving engineered practices.
- Lauren Weston and Sarah Larose to discuss whether state resources exist to address this.
- Vicky Drew reminds Supervisors that the State contributes up to \$200k towards farmstead projects through BMP EQIP-Assist program.

3:12pm: Molly Magnan enters.

3:20pm: Vicky Drew shares VACD updates.

- Executive Committee met recently and there is another meeting coming up.
 - Lauren Weston to make sure everyone has meeting information.
- VACD is planning to hire HR/finance person to fill in some gaps.

3:21pm: Richard Noel shares NRCC updates.

- Finance Committee met recently. Combined AgCWIP requests are up to \$5.5 million. Rutland NRCD was approved for a large request for a stream restoration project.
- Still in progress of switching from M&T Bank to Union Bank.

3:24pm: Mel Auffredou presents Staff Presentation.

3:42pm: Supervisors review December 17, 2025, meeting minutes. Molly Magnan motions to approve December 17, 2025, meeting minutes; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

3:43pm: Lauren Weston presents FY26 Financials to Date. Molly Magnan motions to accept FY26 Financials to Date; Richard Noel seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Updates to financial policies and systems are nearing completion.
 - FCNRCD continues to work with same accountant firm.
 - Lauren Weston is now running payroll and paying taxes.
- Large amounts of pass-through money; District is taking on larger projects and will likely have one or more large projects every year.
 - Limiting factor is capacity for project management; Mel Auffredou and Dorothy Kinney-Landis will do construction oversight this summer with implementation projects they have been running.
 - Sarah Larose: NRCS is planning to offer construction inspection trainings this year; District staff should attend.
- Anticipated cash reserves are >\$280k each month going forward (estimated based on when funders normally pay).
- District has recouped some funds since the fall due to billing cycles.

3:56pm: Sarah Larose exits.

- Sarah Larose is doing outreach around events for veggie producers; will send information.

3:58pm: Supervisors discuss 2026 Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA). Richard Noel proposes a motion to implement 2.8% COLA, retroactive to the first pay period of January 2026, for all staff including Lauren Weston and excluding Viva Goetze; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- With 2.8% COLA, change is approximately \$14,500 over the calendar year.

- Viva Goetze is not included because she started on January 5, 2026, and starting wage had already been negotiated.

4:00pm: Lauren Weston discusses DM Annual Review.

- Updated DM job description has been sent to everyone and should be reviewed and voted on at next meeting.
 - o Lynda Ulrich: Is this job description person-specific or could it apply to anyone in this position?
 - o Lauren Weston: Combination of original job description and additional staff-expectations which are same across District staff.
 - Lauren Weston to update 15% budget margins to 10% for DM expectations.
- Lynda Ulrich, Vicky Drew, Lauren Weston, and Orenna Brand had previously met to discuss Lauren's annual review process on January 6, 2026, and decided to rotate through four different performance review formats annually.
 - o Lynda Ulrich: Since last year's format required deeper consideration, wise to change it up this year to avoid rote answers.
 - o Staff and Supervisors will use streamlined version (Option 3) this year.
- Orenna Brand to send survey to staff and board for feedback, setting deadline a week before next meeting; gather feedback from staff for supervisors so they can complete review during next meeting.

4:12pm: Supervisors discuss Ramp financial software and credit card tool. Vicky Drew motions to activate Ramp Core account without opening separate bank account, work towards closing Chase credit card, and use Ramp for credit card and reimbursements; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- VACD and FNLC, among others, are moving to use Ramp.
- Benefits: All staff could have credit card (removing need for Vicky Drew to be attached to District credit card), bank account with 2% cash back; direct mileage reimbursement functionality; writing and sending checks.
 - o Core: free, no cash back, limited support.
 - o Plus: cash back, more support, more features.
 - Cost: \$6,728/year
 - Cash back points would partially cover this.
- Ramp built in bank account
 - o Lauren Weston to confirm whether 2% interest in bank account is relevant to both Core and Plus.
 - o Vicky Drew expresses concern about transferring our funds from current bank account; likes that District has relationship with local bank that can offer municipal loan in support of building purchase; may not want to move everything to Ramp.
 - o Should also take advantage of Chase cash-back before closing that card.
- Two-month discount offer expires tomorrow. Discount is two free months (\$1000).
- Supervisors discuss beginning with Ramp Core and eventually transitioning to Plus it if turns out to be advantageous.

4:24pm: Lauren Weston reviews Operating Reserve Policy. Molly Magnan motions to change policy from three months to two months; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Operational costs are ~\$75k/month.
 - o 3 months = \$225k.

- 2 months = \$150k.
- Supervisors discuss lowering current requirements for cash reserve from three months to two months to free up cash for potential building purchase.
 - Lauren Weston and staff can be more frequent with invoicing to increase cash flow.

4:26pm: Mel Auffredou exits.

4:26pm: Supervisors discuss building purchase.

- Lauren Weston suggests finding a realtor with capacity to work with complex decision-making processes required by FCNRCD organization who can assist with an intentional search for a future property.
- Richard Noel suggests Swanton-local Shawn Cheney
- Karyn Rocheleau suggests Keri Poquette. Lynda agrees.
 - Lauren Weston to connect with Keri Poquette and invite to board meeting.
- Molly Magnan observed that “for sale” is still up at Soule House. Potentially relisted?
- Cash flow/reserve projection is helpful for understanding possibilities.

4:29pm: Supervisors review updates to Tuition Reimbursement Policy. Lynda Ulrich motions to approve proposed changes to Tuition Reimbursement Policy and to add Tuition Reimbursement Obligation Agreement; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Proposed changes:
 - In writing: Reimbursement is considered income and therefore taxable.
 - Minimum grade changes to B (from C).
 - Expectation to stay full-time at 35 hours (from 32). PTO can be used to achieve 35 hr/week requirement.
- Lauren Weston proposes new Tuition Reimbursement Obligation Agreement.
- Maximum reimbursement is \$2500/year/employee.

4:34pm: Supervisors discuss Procurement Policy.

- Lauren Weston discovered that VLCT has template for municipalities; asks if District should shift to VLCT template.
 - Lauren Weston to shift District’s policy to VLCT template for review at next meeting.
- There is no standard or best practice for Districts at this time.

4:37pm: Lauren Weston presents updates to Employee Handbook. Molly Magnan motions to approve proposed updates to Employee Handbook; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Proposed updates: new logo, municipal ethics training, conflict of interest flow charts, whistleblower protections, comp time policy, mileage reimbursement.

4:38pm: Lynda Ulrich exits.

4:42pm: Lauren Weston informs Supervisors of Paid Time Off Plan progress.

- Still on track to have less than 200 hours to roll over into FY27.

4:43pm: Lauren Weston shares upcoming meetings and events.

- NOFA-VT Winter Conference: February 14, 2026
 - District staff presentation: “Grant Funding for Your Farm and How to Influence It”
- Community Water Quality Meeting: February 25, 2026

- Lauren Weston to remind Supervisors over email.
 - Molly Magnan to ask AP Environmental Science teacher to invite students.
- 80th Birthday Party: July 13, 2026
 - Evening of Board Retreat
- District is offering free forestry and wildlife habitat assessments for maple producers, forestland owners, and stream-side property owners.
- District will table at Maple Festival this year.

4:48pm: Next FCNRCD Board Meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2026, from 3-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

4:51: Meeting adjourns: Molly Magnan motions to adjourn; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.