

Franklin County NRCB Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

November 14, 2024

In Attendance: Lauren Weston (District Manager), Orenna Brand (Community Engagement Coordinator & Field Technician), Richard Noel (Chair), Dan Pipes (Supervisor), Vicky Drew (Supervisor), Lynda Ulrich (Supervisor – appointed during this meeting)

Conducted at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St Albans VT
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: Meeting called to order. Quorum present. Lauren Weston shares that her knee surgery is scheduled for Friday, November 22nd.

3:06: Lauren Weston shares Board supervisor election updates. Molly Magnan received 25 signatures to renew her term.

3:07: Supervisors tour the new office.

- Vicky Drew recommends applying for Vermont Community Foundation mini-grant to supplement cost of mounting TV.
- Lauren Weston is seeking advice on purchasing a new shed.
- Window treatments are needed to block sunlight.

3:25: Supervisors review minutes from October 17th, 2024, meeting. Vicky Drew makes motion to accept minutes, Dan Pipes seconds, all approve, motion carries.

3:27: Lauren Weston reviews FY25 financials (Balance Sheet, Profit and Loss by Month, and Bank Statements). Board accepts.

- Board notes expenses have increased to approximately \$50,000/month.
- Lauren Weston reviews Grant Tracking Spreadsheet and projected income. Projections are showing net income on the year expected to be low; FCNRCB staff are working to secure some more grants for this fiscal year.
- Lauren Weston reports that staff had a frank conversation about potential for external funds to decrease over the next four years due to changes out of our control. There are a lot of unknowns.

3:30: Lynda Ulrich joins.

3:42: Lauren Weston shares updates on health care.

- Currently, staff are on Blue Cross Blue Shield Small Group Plan. Premiums are increasing 24%, or \$150-200/month per person.
- Open enrollment goes until December 15th, but legally employer needs to give staff 30 days notice of change in policy.

- FCNRCD will have to pay a penalty to the state for not offering healthcare if they choose this route. Penalty expected to be around \$280/person/quarter over four employees = \$4480.
- Simultaneous discussion about the COLA increase of 2.5% for 2025. \$16,000-\$19,000 extra costs incurred annually either way between COLA or health care premiums.
- Discussion about wages impacting staff tax brackets
- Vicky Drew would like to run options by staff as anonymous ballot.
- Options discussed:
 - #1: No COLA increase; FCNRCD will cover 24% healthcare increase.
 - #2: 2.5% COLA increase; offer \$700/month towards healthcare but staff will pay the difference in cost of new premiums.
 - #3: 2.5% COLA increase, do not offer healthcare but \$700 monthly (taxable) stipend, FCNRCD pay penalty and increase tax bracket, but staff are eligible for tax subsidies in the marketplace.
- Lauren Weston will notify staff of change tomorrow and get input at Monday meeting; send results back to board on Monday for approval.
- Vicky Drew notes that 10% performance raises were given in June. Need to discuss performance raise for Lauren Weston at next meeting.

4:10: Board votes to accept financials to date. Dan Pipes makes motion to accept, Vicky Drew seconds, all accept. Motion carries.

4:11: Dan Pipes makes motion to extend board invitation to Lynda Ulrich; Vicky Drew seconds, all approve. Motion carries.

4:12: Vicky Drew shares VACD/NRCC updates.

- VACD Annual meeting is next Tuesday Nov 19th and Wednesday Nov 20th, 2024. Lauren Weston, Kate Wettergreen, and Vicky Drew will attend.
- Nominations for board members are ongoing. Vicky Drew is nominated for Treasurer (vs. Vice President) for one-year term.
- Richard Noel shares that next NRCC Finance meeting is December 11th, 2024.

4:21: Lauren Weston reviews Strategic Plan – FY24 Updates presentation.

- Vicky Drew recommends purchasing pamphlets/books about the history of Conservation Districts. State office may have some.
- Lauren will send Strategic Plan – FY24 Updates presentation with supervisors. Dan Pipes recommends sending to Andy Crossman as well.
- Vicky Drew recommends letting interest rates come down before starting to look at buying property again.

4:41: Lauren Weston shares StoryMaps e-newsletter.

4:47: Supervisors give feedback on new logo.

- Dislike: Horizon line is Camel's Hump, not Jay Peak. Strange to have leaves without trees.
- Like: Cows, maple leaves.
- Lauren Weston to provide following feedback to the artist: Switch out mountain with horizon with trees. Keep colors simple, as is.
- Board wants to see next version.

4:53: Employee Handbook will be reviewed at December meeting.

4:56: Lauren Weston discusses board involvement in Local Led Conservation process.

- Vicky Drew would like to know about any meetings; shares that, ideally, this work is driven by the supervisors.
- Supervisors would like to see a list of upcoming events presented at each meeting.
 - District is working towards monthly or quarterly newsletter.
- Next locally led meeting will occur in December or January in Grand Isle County.
- Next Local Working Group meeting will occur at end of January or early February in Franklin County.

5:05: Supervisors share county ongoing.

- Richard Noel: With rising cost of heifers, more farms will be building heifer barns to raise their own heifers.

5:07: Next FCNRCD board meeting is scheduled for December 19th, 2024, at 3-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

- Discuss employee handbook updates, Lauren's raise, etc.

5:15: Vicky Drew makes a motion to adjourn the meeting; Dan Pipes seconds; all approve; motion carried.