

Franklin County NRCD Board of Supervisors Meeting Minutes

May 11, 2026

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

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:

3:00pm: Richard Noel calls meeting to order. Lauren Weston begins recording meeting.

3:03pm: Richard Noel provides NRCC updates.

- Last Finance Committee meeting was in March. Two FCNRCD projects under review at that meeting now have revised budgets and are funded.
- Districts set to receive ~\$912k from legislature this year, expected to be split the same way as last year.

3:05pm: Vicky Drew provides VACD updates.

- Next VACD Board meeting is Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 10am.

3:07pm: Lauren Weston provides clarified information about when Board can go into Executive Session.

- Lauren Weston to send to Sarah Larose.

3:08pm: Supervisors review March 18, March 30, and April 22, 2026, meeting minutes. Dan Pipes motions to approve March 18, March 30, and April 22, 2026, meeting minutes; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

3:09pm: Lauren Weston discusses paying the same per diem and mileage reimbursement to Associate Supervisors, if they so choose. Dan Pipes motions to extend per diem and mileage reimbursement to Associate Supervisors; Vicky Drew seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Per diem is considered taxable income over \$600; mileage reimbursement is not taxable.

3:10pm: Lauren Weston discusses moving next year's Tree Sale to second weekend in May.

- Later date would increase chance of good weather and of timely balsam fir delivery from Quebec.
- Supervisors are unanimously in favor of the idea. Julie Wright mentions potential for increased sales on Mother's Day.
- Sarah Larose shares that biggest complaint was around parking this year, but otherwise the event flowed well at Hudak Farm.

3:14pm: Sarah Larose shares NRCS updates.

- Discussed the success of the FY26 Local Led Franklin Farmstead funding pool
- FY2027 Local Led process working through, be prepared for some changes due to IMPAC (Improving Management of Programs, Applications, and Contracts)
- Mentioned the Local Led Appendix 1 training and that it was recorded as multiple Districts were unable to attend.
- Let the board know that CSP deadline is just around the corner
- EQIP pre-approvals were selected and working to get those to obligation
- New DM for Lamoille – Emily Porter-Goff
- Government computer usage – 30-day inactivity message, if districts aren't using can return as NRCS is paying for them.

3:19pm: Maria Burnett gives staff presentation.

3:32pm: Lauren Weston reviews FY26 Financials to Date (through May 1). Vicky Drew motions to accept the FY26 Financials to Date; Molly Magnan seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- The Chase credit card account has not yet been officially closed. One additional billing cycle is pending, and closure is expected next month.
- The negative net operating income reflects the full fiscal year period through May 1. DM anticipates the organization will still net approx. \$65k for the fiscal year, with substantial billing expected in June (approx. \$375k).
 - The Board discusses whether there is a responsibility to break even by the end of the fiscal year, as a municipality. Lauren Weston is not aware of any formal requirement.
- The Tree Sale may or may not break even financially.
- The Board discusses the organization's reliance on DM's familiarity with the financial system.
 - While DM understands the system well, some factors remain outside of her direct control.
 - Difficult to plan for a future facility or building purchase without a clearer understanding of discretionary expenses.
- Staff travel and fuel expenses have increased, particularly due to higher diesel costs this month.
- Upgrading to a paid Ramp account discussed. Cashback incentives could provide some benefit. Lauren Weston will revisit the topic at a later meeting.

3:45pm: Lauren Weston shares Financial Policy updates.

- Procurement Policy
 - Vicky Drew apologizes for losing the version of the document containing her comments and recommends that the Board defer approval until further discussion can occur.
 - The proposed Procurement Policy is adapted nearly verbatim from a template provided by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns and reviewed with CPA Dawn Bugbee.
 - Discussion of the proposed incidental purchases policy:
 - District does not currently have a formal policy in place, until this one is approved.
 - Treasurer is comfortable with the proposed framework as long as all purchases remain within the Board-approved annual budget. DM confirms that the approved annual budget fits within the proposed policy structure.

- DM can make hiring decisions as long as staffing expenses remain within the approved annual budget.
 - In cases where new grants are received mid-year and require additional staffing, the Board recommends adding language requiring Board approval of budget adjustments.
 - Compensation Philosophy
 - Discussion of performance-based compensation structures:
 - Board agrees that raises should not function solely as an awards system but can still reflect employee performance.
 - General support for a tiered performance review structure with categories: “not meeting expectations,” “meeting expectations,” and “beyond expectations.”
 - DM raises concerns about creating incentives that could negatively affect work-life balance or team culture. Hesitant to include an “exceeding expectations” category for that reason.
 - Board is inclined to follow DM’s instincts around team culture.
 - Also supportive of structuring raises by years of service, such as separate tiers for employees with 0–3 years and 3+ years of tenure. One option is to provide higher percentage or higher flat award to newer employees to encourage retention and avoid inflated salaries for more tenured employees.
 - Board agrees that specific raise amounts should not be codified in the policy and that compensation adjustments should depend on available budget and organizational profitability.
 - Additional topics to consider: probationary periods, longevity recognition, and expanded PTO benefits. Include expanded PTO benefits in revised draft.
 - Lauren Weston will revise the draft and bring it back to the next meeting.
 - Board of Supervisors Policy Handbook
 - Supervisors need to complete ethics training and sign conflict of interest document every year.
 - Board Chair is lead whistleblower contact. Need to brush up on policy.
 - Lauren Weston will formalize proposed language and bring to next meeting.

4:12pm: Molly Magnan exits.

4:16pm: Karyn Rocheleau exits.

4:43pm: Walter Hutcheson exits.

4:46pm: Lauren Weston shares that District Manager Annual Review is happening Tuesday, May 12, 2026 at 4pm in the FCNRCD office.

4:46pm: Sarah Larose exits.

4:46pm: Dan Pipes motions to enter Executive Session; Lyna Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

4:51pm: Board exits Executive Session.

4:51pm: Dan Pipes motions to contract Fitzgerald Environmental Associates for Boudreau Marsh Brook floodplain restoration project; Lynda Ulrich seconds. All in favor; motion carries.

- Vicky Drew compliments Lauren Weston on a job well done.

4:53pm: Lauren Weston presents PTO Update.

- Has blocked chunks of time off on calendar throughout summer, pending progress on Trout Brook Reservoir Dam removal.

4:55pm: Lauren Weston discusses plan for upcoming Board Retreat on July 13, 2026, at Fairfield Community Center in East Fairfield.

- Retreat will run from 8am-4pm with 80th Birthday Celebration planned for evening.
- Potential topics: financial training, ethics review, open meeting law review.
 - Proposal for Structural Integrity to lead financial training. Lauren Weston to schedule outside of board retreat.
 - Lauren Weston has circulated training materials on these topics already and will send them around again.
- Dan Pipes would like to include a “State of the District” discussion using the strategic plan as a reference point.
- Board members express interest in having time for broader visionary discussions that are difficult to fit into regular meetings.
- Additional suggested topics include:
 - organizational history and “how we got here”
 - “Acronym 101”
 - new Board member training materials developed by Julia King
 - team-building and personal development activities
 - Board-strengthening exercises
- Lauren Weston will finalize the agenda with grounding exercises, team building, and strategic planning activities, and save financial management training for separate day.
 - Will distribute preparatory materials in advance and expects Board to review them.
- Walter Hutcheson expresses interest in learning more about the organization’s funding pool and broader funding landscape.
- Lauren Weston will check whether associate members can attend.

5:01pm: Walter Hutcheson returns.

5:06pm: Supervisors discuss potential building purchase.

- Discussion of goals for building purchase:
 - Would consider anything along I89 exits 18-21 (Georgia to Swanton), up to 20-minutes max off of 89.
 - Renters can be helpful for generating income but can cause other problems.
 - Land for doing demonstrations is ideal but not a deal-breaker.
- Why does District want a building?
 - Doing it for staff or farmers? Only ~10 farmers come into the office each year – staff mostly go out into the field – so staff are priority.
 - If raw land is purchased, a Supervisor would have to step up and help DM with the building process, which is unlikely. Need to be realistic.
 - Currently paying ~\$3k/month in rent. District can stay for 3.5 more years, leaving anytime if a property is purchased and in November if to another rental.
- Discussion of how to get to constructive consensus:

- Supervisors need to get on the same page about priorities.
- Julie Wright's idea: everyone ranks list of property attributes from 1-10 so DM/realtor can know top priorities.
- Homework: think about vision for District with two-year outlook.
- Discussion of renting vs. owning:
 - Renting is sometimes the cost of doing business.
 - Economy has changed since conversation started, and owning a building may be less realistic/wise than before.
 - Need to consider Operating Reserves Policy.

5:29pm: Lauren Weston shares upcoming events. Encourages Board members to assist with tabling efforts.

- May 12 – Hard'ack Food Forest Stewardship & Tree Planting
- June 5-8 – Dairy Festival – Tabling
- July 13 – 80th Birthday Celebration
- July 30-Aug 1 – Franklin County Field Days – Tabling

5:30pm: Next FCNRCD Board Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 10, 2026, from 3pm-5pm at 431 Franklin Park West, Suite 100a, St. Albans, VT.

- Includes Supervisory Union discussion with Lamoille and Grand Isle Counties.

5:31pm: Vicky Drew motions to adjourn meeting; Dan Pipes seconds. All in favor; motion carries.