

Windham County Natural Resource Conservation District Minutes

Tuesday, June 7, 6:30 pm

795 Bonnyvale Rd, Brattleboro, VT 05301

Present: Meg Kluge, Katie Ross Morrison, Geoff Dolman: board supervisors; Cory Ross: district manager; Heather Blunk: Agricultural Outreach Specialist; Phylixia Moore: NRCS; David Erickson: visitor.

Greeter Hiring:

-2 of the greeters are interested in returning. They're both good. Ashley got especially good feedback, was great with boaters and did helpful tasks on his downtime, including picking up trash.

-We're still looking for a third greeter. Will likely increase the pay to \$20/hour to try to recruit someone.

-Motion to hire Ashley Bies and Alejandro Hernandez. Motion passed.

Budget:

-In general we are doing better financially than in the past. We have about \$50,000 surplus and Cory proposes adding a third full time person. It would probably be a natural resources project manager. This person would find and develop projects (such as the Dummerston and Brattleboro Farmers Market rain gardens, or trees for streams projects). Cory would like to wait a month to start the hiring process. This position would be good for a recent graduate.

-In terms of the various income sources: the Plant sale is recurring; workshops – fluctuate; basin planning -fluctuates; AGCWIP – 4 year grant; Trees for Streams – fluctuates; Core services agreement – should be consistent or increasing; Project development – consistent. There is currently a lot of money in block grants right now.

-Cory has not yet added anything for accounting assistance, but we should probably add that. David suggested adding \$3,000-\$4000/year. A challenge will be finding a good person. Cory is adding \$3000 expense for accounting assistance to the budget.

Motion to approve the budget for \$311,467.54. Motion passed.

Update from Phylixia.

-They're currently interviewing for the soil conservation position but haven't made a final decision.

-Travis visiting on Thursday, will visit office and do site visit at Greatful Greens. NRCD Hopefully will get more space in the office. A GIS specialist will be added to the office in June. Date was finalized late but she's open to supervisors coming to the visit.

-They submitted local fund pool last Friday.

-Resource focus for the local fund pool will be plant pest pressure for invasives and forestry; this will include herbaceous weed control, brush management, and wildlife projects. Amount requested - \$150,000 based on past requests. The state technical meeting is on Oct 19, we should have an answer about funding by then.

-A new suite of funded practices are coming out that include urban agriculture and agroforestry; for example, urban ag include raised beds, roof runoff structures, and low tunnels.

Discussion of District Serving as Fiscal Agent for Trout Unlimited FEMA Funds:

-Funds for Beaver Brook project (\$500,000) in Wilmington, FEMA is saying money needs to go to a municipality. We wouldn't have to manage the project. Our involvement would include submitting the grant, signing docs, and invoicing grant to Trout Unlimited. Cory would like to be involved somehow so he can learn about dam removals. This could push us over \$500,000 that would require us to get an audit, but we could charge an indirect fee for the cost of the audit. We would have to be covered under Trout Unlimited's insurance.

Pieciak and Associates do audits for a lot of local non-profits, they might have a sense of the potential cost of an audit.

-Cory will talk to Jill to find out how much an audit costs.

-Revisited policy about board approving contracts (and what amount the contract needs to be for board to be required to approve it). Current policy says we need to approve over \$5,000, we'll revisit that number next week.

-Cory is interested in doing this; will pass it by Claire first to see if she thinks if it's doable.

-NRCD is a municipality – allows us to be a pass through for grants, puts us in a good strategic position to make grants possible.

Discussion of Retention/Disposal Timeline for Old Grant Documents:

-There are a lot of old files in the office, they're taking up a lot of space. This raises the question: do we need to keep all these files? What should we keep, what should we get rid of? Cory will consult with the local historical society to help determine what we should keep and what we can get rid of.

-This doesn't seem like something that Cory or Heather should get paid to do. Perhaps Jolene or the board can help with this, Cory is going to bring back a survey of what types of docs are in there and report back to the board.

District's Manager's Report:

-The end goal of the nitrogen project is a set of approved practices that farmers can use to decrease nitrogen introduction into LIS by farmers.

-Goal is to create a working group to get local farmers' inputs into this.

NOFA Candidate Event:

-Traditional statehouse to farmhouse event isn't going to happen this year; NOFA wants to do a virtual forum instead. They invited partners to co-host. We're the only district who said yes. We would help source questions and reach out to the public for food systems/ag-related questions. There are 10 co-hosts, a variety of non-profits. Is this appropriate for us to do? General consensus is yes, as long as we stay neutral.

-If this isn't going to happen in the future we should try to make it happen at the district level.

FY23 Appropriations Request:

-We decided to not lobby for appropriations because the money was initially in the clean water fund, which is supposed to be spent on projects, not organizations. Another senator put \$250,000 into the agency of ag budget and that was passed, so this year we have that much more than in the past. There isn't agreement about how to use it, for now it's been decided that the money will be divided evenly between the districts (with some set aside for shared services etc).

-There are some district managers that want the district structures to be significantly changed. This raises a question: who has the authority to decide about these changes. The boards thoughts are that the district supervisors need to approve this type of change. NRCC is a state agency: it can't advocate, can't hire, but works internally; VACD is a non profit: it can advocate, can hire, works externally. Having both gives the districts flexibility.

-The process of the district managers having a district rep for VACD meetings is in the works.

Minutes Approval:

Motion to approve May minutes. Motion approved.

Next Meeting:

-July 13, 6:30pm at Linda's.

Future Agenda Items:

-Amend policy for board approval of contracts.