



Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District Board of Supervisors Meeting

Meeting Minutes

March 26, 2019 9am-1pm
617 Comstock Road, Suite 1 Berlin, VT 05602

Attendees: Gianna Petito, Kristen Balschunat, Lawrence Rowley, Jeff Cueto, Paul Hartshorn, Rick Hopkins, Marybeth Whitten (NRCS), Brian Fitzgerald (VNRC)

9:05 Rick called the meeting to order

9:06 Supervisor and Staff Sharing - Paul: Concerned about new draft state regulations around RO water disposal from sugar houses (concerns about the water changing the pH and temperature of streams). Paul expressed that this will be challenging for smaller sugaring operations. Sap will be considered hazardous waste - can't just pour on the ground. Gianna suggested that District staff look into the regulations and report back and proposed inviting a staff member of the Agency of Ag to a board meeting to speak about the changes. Brief discussion about potholes.

9:15 Business Items

- Motion by Jeff to approve minutes from 1/29/19 meeting seconded by Paul, all in favor. Motion carried.
- Financial Report: Discussion - White River Junction is no longer employing Cherie - that means the two Districts will no longer split the cost of QuickBooks. Jeff wondered if it would be possible to share costs with other districts (ie. multiple users). Motion by Jeff to approve financial report from 1/23/19 meeting seconded by Paul. Motion carried.

9:30 Staff Report

- Tree and Trout Sale: Keurig has requested another thank you luncheon sponsored by the board. Planning for the event:
 - Friday April 26th - Keurig volunteers will organize species by order - this will be the day of the meal. Each board member will bring an item to share for lunch. Gianna will send out a sign-up sheet. Paul will probably be sugaring. Rick will not be around for the weekend but will prepare food ahead of time. Lawrence and Jeff will be

available for the weekend and will each bring a dish. Gianna will coordinate with the board in more detail via email.

- Sunday Trout Sale Pickup Sunday. Jeff may be able to attend. We will also ask if Mike is available.
- Grant Writing Updates:
 - Strategic Planning can be fully funded between a grant and money from City Market. Gianna is looking in to which consultant we should hire. Rick recommended that we each read over the Natural Resource Assessment before that conversation takes place. Gianna mentioned that there will be additional homework on the part of all board members from the SP consultant. Rick recommended opportunities for public comment on our final SP.
- Reviewed Caitlin's logo - all comments favorable
- Talked about Stream Team Water Quality Data and how we are sharing it with partners to lead to action
- May 9 - Septic Conference
- Agriculture Grants - Starting to focus on equine outreach
- Scoping for projects: Emerald Ash Borer Tree Inventory - potential intern project
- Aerator - advertise in AgReview
- Bruce H. is advocating for the District to purchase a no-till grass seeder (90/10 expense split) Will invite to a future board meeting

10:15 Guest Speaker - Brian Fitzgerald (VNRC) - Topic: Mill Pond Dam Removal

- Dam is on private property in the Town of Colchester on Indian Brook
- Construction is expected by July 1st
- Funded by Fish and Wildlife as part of Winooski pass-through cooperative agreement. No cost to owner
- There should be benefits for the ecology: Aquatic organism passage, improved sediment transport
- 21lbs of P will be removed in the form of sediment before the dam is being taken out
- Upcoming Projects: Bull Run Dam removal spearheaded by Friends of Winooksi (Northfield), Cross Brothers Dam in Northfield is in the scoping phase currently (selectboard would like to remove it), Cabot privately owned dam (will be led by Friends of Winooski). Many other dam removal projects are happening across the state with different organizations
- Resources for project prioritization: ANR Atlas lists Dam Hazard Classification, TNC website lists their ecological impact rating for 400 dams in the Champlain Basin

11:10 NRCS Updates

- NRCS has received appropriations from the Farm Bill so they are ready to sign (obligate) contracts
- In Washington County there was a strong focus on producers applying to write Forest Management Plans (FMPs)
- Friday was the last day of sign ups for 2019 dollars (Round 3) Lots of people signed up in this District - more forestry than agriculture applicants
 - Washington County: 34 applicants - 17 pre-approved - 9 FMPs, 12 high tunnels, 8 wildlife habitat assessments, 2 farmstead contracts, 1 pasture contract, 1 drought application
 - Chittenden County: 38 applicants - 14 pre-approved - 10 high tunnels, 8 wildlife habitat assessments, 4 farmstead applications
 - NRCS was requested by national to increase the assistance being offered to new and beginning farmers (1 applicant in each county)
 - There is no minimum acreage to apply for NRCS funding (but the producer must be established with FSA). Size is taken into account for payment rates on certain practices.
- Discussion about ranking - ranking is based on the size of the resource concern - WNRCD can conduct a local workgroup to weigh-in on questions to be asked in the ranking process (we have 250 points to allocate). Discussed the benefits of mailing a survey vs. hosting in-person meeting. The deadline for submitting questions is around August/September.
- Pathways positions have been hired in Morrisville and Middlebury (college-age program - targeted for sophomore year. 640 hours before graduation).
- Job Opportunities Currently Open: Engineer, Grazing Specialist, Business Analyst (x2) & Soil Conservationist
- East Creek is a priority watershed - East Creek Watershed Planning Committee. April 22 Purdue specialists will give a final report about regional watershed organizing.
- Farm First (VHCB) helps farmers develop a long-term business plan (\$75), also offers counseling information, which is important to offer in a time where many farms are struggling to make ends meet.
- Marybeth invited everyone to call or email her at anytime with questions

11:45 NRCC Updates from Rick

- Ag WQ Programs Manager Suzie Walsh-Daloz is leaving, so a job description has been posted to fill the position.
- Basin Planning Grant year 2 is under way, planning to work towards a third year
- FY20 Budget is being discussed
- Will create a new Supervisor Handbook

11:50 Supervisor Timesheets

- Supervisors filled out timesheet forms to request mileage reimbursement

11:52 S.96 Discussion

- The proposed Clean Water Regional Utilities Bill (S.96) will seriously impact how districts receive money and how it is disbursed. Originally proposed because the state would like to remove their responsibility from administering clean water grants due to understaffing. The proposed clean water utilities would decide how to spend money regionally. RPCs are the default “utilities”, though districts may be asked to serve as that utility. The “utility” would be legally responsible for ensuring phosphorus is actually reduced. Discussion about not wanting to take on that liability as WRNCD due to our small staff and limited capacity for regional grant administration.
- VACD has been lobbying against the proposal in the legislature
- Gianna requested all supervisors to call their representatives with these talking points:
 - The proposed system decreases efficiency
 - Conflict of Interest is a concern (especially with Districts and RPCs)
 - Environmental groups are in support, but implementers are not in support
 - It is duplicative of the Basin Planning process
- Gianna has been in conversation with VNRC which runs a weekly water policy caucus and are currently in support of the bill.

12:15 Consideration of End of Gianna’s Probationary Period

- Discussion in Executive Session
- Motion by Jeff to deem Gianna’s performance fully satisfactory, to move her past the probationary period and increase her pay to the next step. Seconded by Paul. Motion carried.

12:40 Further discussion about Tree and Trout logistics, including the location of a water source

12:50 Next meeting will be at the WILLISTON office Tuesday, May 21st 9-12

12:52 Paul makes motion to adjourn, seconded by Jeff and Lawrence. Motion carries.