

NRCC Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

April 17, 2024

8:30 am

Zoom Meeting

Agenda

1. Welcome (Rick)
2. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes (Rick)
3. Financial Statements (Clare)
4. Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates
 - DIBG & EDIBG (Lina)
 - Congressionally Directed Spending Request (Clare)
 - AgCWIP Payment Schedule (Emily and Clare)
 - Other grants updates, as needed
5. Administrative Updates (Clare and Lina)
6. Discussion of Supervisory Union structure and function (Clare)
7. Legislative Update & VACD Committee Update
8. Other Business, as required

Attendance

Voting Members: Rick Hopkins, Richard Noel, and Bill Manner

Other attendees (non-voting):

Jill Arace, VACD Director

Clare Ireland, Finance Director

Jess Miller, Grants & Finance Manager

Emily Nummer, Agriculture Programs Manager

Lina Smith, Grants & Finance Manager

The meeting was called to order at 8:32 am.

Welcome

Review and Approve Meeting Minutes

Clare presented the finance committee meeting minutes of March 20, 2024.

Bill made the motion, seconded by Richard to approve the minutes. Upon a call for a vote, all voted in favor.

Financial Statements (Clare)

Clare presented the FY24 financial statements from July through December 2023, noting:

- As of the end of December, NRCC was about 1/3 through the projected budget and a little behind.
- The budget is somewhat backloaded with increased expenses for the 2nd half of the year due to COLA adjustments for personnel and the timing of certain projects.
- The Project Development grant has seen fewer applicants and will not be fully spent.
- The Design & Implementation Block grant is a little behind with delayed projects.

Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates

Design & Implementation and Enhancement Block Grants

Lina presented two projects for approval:

1. Design & Implementation Block Grant: \$49,823.70-North Branch Winooski Strategic Wood Additions II submitted by Redstart.
2. Enhancement Design & Implementation Block Grant: \$37,020.00-Peacham Pond DFW Access Stormwater Implementation submitted by Caledonia CNRCD.

After some discussion, Richard made the motion, seconded by Bill to approve the two projects presented. Upon a call for a vote, all were in favor.

Congressionally Directed Spending Proposal

Clare reported that the congressional spending request spearheaded by Bennington District Manager Michael Fernandez came together quickly and was submitted to Senator Welch's office on April 8. The proposal was for a total of \$7.45 million, of which \$6.75 M will go to the Agency of Agriculture to subgrant out to farmers. NRCC was the applicant because of the ability to move quicker and part of the proposal is to give districts a role and provide additional services. She noted the Agency of Ag was in favor of the proposal and should garner support with the Agriculture Committee.

Richard made the motion, seconded by Bill to authorize council staff to move forward with the process. Rick noted it should be discussed by Council at their next meeting. All were in favor.

AgCWIP Payment Timing

Emily gave an update on AgCWIP payments. The finance committee will be asked to approve awards to each district with payments to be made in July. Each district will be funded under this agreement either directly or through another district. If there is a delay in the award process, a payment of \$39,250 will be requested from NRCC to go to Bennington and Ottauquechee to support their cash flow as they are new to the program. Clare suggested using retained earnings from the previous agreement to fund this temporarily.

Tactical Basin Planning

Clare reported that FY25 workplans are being put together. We are on track to have that agreement in place for the next fiscal year. There is more money available under the Tactical Basin Planning grant this year due to successful advocacy with the Clean Water Board. Clare is hoping districts will get increased funding and will also submit a proposal for Council which will be similar to last year.

Administrative Updates

- Clare reported that DocuSign has been secured and is being used. The cost is \$1,500 per year.
- She is working to get Bill added to the bank account as a signer.
- Clare noted she is pregnant and expecting at the end of June and plans to be out through September. A plan for coverage will be discussed at the next finance committee meeting.

Discussion of Supervisory Union structure and function:

Clare reported that White River NRCD has expressed an interest in leaving their current supervisory union with the Winooski District and joining the Southeast supervisory union with Windham and Ottauquechee. Rick noted this topic was discussed by the central supervisory union. There is a question about the process by which this would happen. Council will need to discuss feasibility, practicality, and if it is in the public's interest. He believes the ball is in White River's court currently as there would need to be a formal resolution from their board to initiate the process.

Bill was not aware of White River approaching Ottauquechee yet. Windham and Ottauquechee will need to take a vote to approve the reorganization, and Council can then weigh in. It was noted that if White River joins a new supervisory union, Winooski would need to find a union that will take them in. Clare added that given that a lot of the supervisory unions only have two districts together, any change like this could cause a cascading impact on multiple supervisory unions. Referring to the Title 10 Chapter 33 § 802 of the Vermont Statutes she highlighted the section that refers to the formation of supervisory unions.

§ 802. Formation of supervisory union

The State Natural Resources Conservation Council, on petition from two or more districts, may combine several districts into a supervisory union after having determined that such a union is feasible, and in the best interests of the people in the district. The Council may hold hearings and receive testimony from landowners with lands lying within the bounds of the proposed supervisory union. If the Council determines that a union is administratively practicable, feasible, and in the public interest it shall so indicate in its minutes and proceed with the organization. (Added 1967, No. 303 (Adj. Sess.), § 17, eff. March 22, 1968.)

She noted:

- There is no language specifically outlining the reorganization of supervisory unions. Because of that, and because of the administrative process through which supervisory unions come to be recognized as entities by the state, any reorganization is functionally creating a new supervisory union, so the language above should apply.
- Council would need a petition/formal resolution from every district that would be impacted.
- Council may hold hearings and receive testimony from landowners.
- Council doesn't have to approve and could reject the proposal on the grounds of it not being administratively practicable, feasible or in the public interest.
- The Secretary of State's office would need to also approve.
- This could take a year or more to complete the process.

- If White River and Winooski each join a preexisting supervisory union, this would reduce the total number of supervisory unions in the state from six to five. Given the composition of Council, this would effectively reduce districts' voting power within Council. Given that, it might be preferable to do a larger reorganization, potentially impacting as many as five of the six existing unions: the Northeast, Northwest, Central, South Central, and Southeast unions.

Jill noted that NRCS is considering a new field management structure and districts may want to align with that.

Legislative Update & VACD Committee Update

Jill reported that disappointingly there were no changes to the budget coming out of the House going to the Senate. In the Senate, the Senate Ag Committee is pushing hard for us to get additional \$200,000 additional funding. Jill requested restoration of the \$112,000 and an additional \$250,000 in her testimony. She noted they were generally supportive. She also did a proposal for one-time funds. She is optimistic.

She has asked for Conservation Districts to be put back into the Act 250 discussion.

Other business, as required

The VACD full board meeting has been scheduled for May 16, 2024, 4-6 PM

Clare is working on scheduling a NRCC meeting for May/June and recommended one for both months.

The motion was made by Bill, seconded by Richard to adjourn the meeting. After a call for a vote, motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 10:04 am.

The next finance committee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, May 15 at 8:30 am.

Approved at the May 16, 2024 meeting with no changes.