

NRCC Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
May 18, 2022  
8:30 am  
Zoom Meeting

**Present:** Rick Hopkins, Christopher Von Alt, Clare Ireland, Jill Arace, and Emily Nummer

## **Agenda**

1. Welcome (Rick)
2. Approval of February meeting minutes (Clare)
3. Approval of March meeting minutes (Clare)
4. Staffing and operations updates
  - a. Holden's departure
  - b. Grants & Finance Specialist hires
5. Grant proposals, approvals, and updates
  - a. DEC Project Development
  - b. DEC Tactical Basin Planning
  - c. VAAFM AgCWIP
  - d. VAAFM Core Services
6. Update on VACD's legislative initiative (Jill)
7. Approval of February financial statements (Clare)
8. Review of March & April financial statements (Clare)
9. Other business, as required

## **Welcome**

Rick welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 8:35 am.

## **Review of February & March Meeting Minutes**

Clare reported that she accidentally sent out the minutes of the January meeting instead of the February meeting. She will send out the correct minutes and the committee will review and vote on them at the next meeting.

## **Staffing & Operations Updates**

- Holden's Departure

Jill noted that she and Clare are reviewing all of the agreements, subagreements and invoices that Holden managed. Other than some incomplete administrative items, and the lateness that everyone is aware of, they haven't found anything of concern. They are also working hard to complete reporting and invoicing to DEC by Friday, due to the imminent year-end shutdown of the DEC Business Office.

- Grants & Finance Specialist Hires
  - Clare reported about two new hires. Lina Smith and Jess Miller will be starting on May 30.
  - Chris asked about salary levels and candidates. Clare reported that our offer was in line with similar positions we've seen advertised by other organizations recently.

## **Grant Proposals and Updates**

- DEC Project Development. This grant supports developing specific projects. Changes have been made in the new agreement to include more aspects of project development.
- DEC Tactical Basin Planning. We recently got FY23 TBP plans from all the districts. We will try to have agreements in place by the start of the FY23 fiscal year.
- DEC D&I. Jill reported that we will do an RFP later, maybe in the summer.

Both Project Development and Tactical Basin Planning agreements will be expiring. DEC has been managing these grants with new staff, which has been challenging. Reporting requirements have been onerous.

- VAAFM AgCWIP. We are heading into the end of the current grant agreement. Final reporting will be due in mid-June. The new grant agreement will ideally start right after the expiration of our existing agreement. We are in the process of doing a rebudget for the proposed amounts, per VAAFM's request. Right now, under the current agreements, funding falls into two categories: base funding and conservation practice surveys (CPS). In rebudget, we're looking to reallocate from CPS to lump sum. Some districts that didn't rebudget might not complete all their CPS deliverables. We will have a surplus on this current grant.
  - Rick asked about CPS. Emily reported these are practices above and beyond. Difficulty with reporting and accounting for these. It's a challenge to identify if they meet NRCS standards. Rick added that even NRCS standards have only a 10-year life span and need maintenance and monitoring.
  - Chris asked if farmers have the opportunity to get training on the various practices and options. Emily reported that AgCWIP is flexible and can include some of that if Districts want. Vermont Pay for Phosphorus.
- VAAFM Core Services.
  - We are nearing the end of the current core services agreement, which covers through the end of the fiscal year. We will have a new agreement soon and will aim to have agreements in place by the start of the FY23 fiscal year.

## **Legislative Initiative Update (Clare and Jill)**

Clare and Jill provided an update regarding the \$248,000 one-time funding for capital and equipment expense, and the \$250,000 addition to Conservation District core funds. The \$250,000 will be added to the \$112,000 Council already receives for core funding for districts, for a total of \$362,000. This will be the new starting point of our budget from now on. These funds will be coming to Council through the Agency of Agriculture, and our usual timing is to work on preparing the budget and agreement with VAAFM in June in order to have an agreement in place by July. Clare noted that Governor Scott has been threatening to veto the budget, which may cause a delay in this process. Jill noted that, even if there is a delay, the funds must be spent by the end of FY 2023. Clare reported that we have begun discussions with District Managers about budgeting the \$362,000 in core funding. She noted four possible buckets of funding: 1) core services, 2) operating expense, 3) central representation and capacity-building, and 4) regional initiatives. The Finance Committee discussed the decision-making process for the allocation of these funds. DMs may be discussing this budget with their boards over the next month. A retreat is planned with DMs on June 2nd, and board members are invited. If there is relatively easy agreement on approach at this meeting, Clare and Jill will prepare a budget for the Finance Committee's consideration, that will then be submitted to the full Council for approval. If there is not clear consensus among DMs on the budget approach, we will ask the Finance Committee for guidance on a framework. Even if this process is not completed by July 1, the Agency of Agriculture generously allows a start date of July 1.

### **NRCC Other Business**

There was no other business.

### **Next Meeting**

There being no further business, the next meeting was scheduled for 8:30 am, June 15, 2022.

### **Action Items for Follow Up**

- Clare will update the invoice tracking spreadsheet to include information about NRCC's cash position and exposure.
- Clare and Holden will meet to discuss recommendations for updates to the Finance Policy
- Clare will set up meetings with other banking institutions to learn more about other options
- Clare and Holden will meet to work on streamlining grants approvals and payments