

State Natural Resources Conservation Council

An Agency of Vermont State Government, Serving Vermont's 14 Conservation Districts

NRCC Meeting Minutes June 29, 2017

The Annex Conference Room, Montpelier

Present: Marli Rupe (VT DEC), Alan Shelvey (South Central Union Rep), Kerry O'Brien (NRCC Administrator, Caledonia County NRCD), Mike Middleman (VTAAFM); , Jill Arace (VACD); Bill Manner (Southeast Union Rep); Richard Noel (Northwest Union Rep); John Thurgood (NRCS); Vicky Drew (NRCS)

Meeting Opened: 1:05 Alan called the meeting to order.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Richard moved and Bill seconded to approve previous meeting minutes as presented. The motion was approved.

FY18 Budget Presentation:

Kerry presented the FY2018 Draft budget on behalf of the NRCC Finance Committee with narrative memo. Comments included:

- Capacity Building budget – NRCS needs to show that \$30/hr as an hourly rate for training days is allowable. John indicated that we need to document each District's wage, fringe, benefits and indirect in order to justify the \$30 and determine and average. He suggested that NRCS would just need to see the average, but it would need to be auditable and backed up. Alan will work with Jill to prepare a request for this information from Districts. It was discussed that the data would help provide a good basis for RCPP or any statewide agreement that offers a standard hourly rate.
- It was suggested to change NRCC Administration funding from VAAFM to NRCC Management to better represent the funding purpose.
- Column 3, it was suggested that mileage allocation is too low. When Ag Program manager position is hired the Management budget will likely be adjusted.
- 1% bookkeeping for each class is noted. \$1820 for NRCC Management includes bookkeeping for both columns 3&4 since there was no admin in the VAAFM-CWF grants, so this is allotted to NRCC Management. Kerry will add this to the memo for clarification.
- It was noted that personnel is contractual – but it was conceptualized separately in the budget to demonstrate the staffing goals. This will also get noted in the memo.

Richard moved and Alan seconded to approve the FY18 budget. The motion was approved.

NRCC Employment update:

Appointment of NRCC Human Resources Committee: Marli Rupe, John Thurgood, Kerry O'Brien as Administrator. Suggest to reach out to other members to ask if they would like to be included.

Ag Program Manager Position committee team: Marli Rupe, Mike Middleman, Alan Shelvey, Bill Manner, Kerry O'Brien, Jill Arace, Sarah Damsell. ~18 applications were received. Kerry will compile to google drive and create spreadsheet for review.

NRCC Employment Logistics Summary (handout)

Research with the state was necessary to determine options for NRCC employment on its own. Kerry contacted various state offices to receive guidance on process. There were several options outlined including state employment, restructuring through statute, merging with another agency, hiring through VACD or District. Marli also mentioned the option of “limited service” employees, who are hired based on immediate need and not long term. This might be an option if NRCC were to pursue state employment.

NRCC was leery of state employment with the revenue downgrades, the fact that the state isn’t hiring, and the budget impacts (funding from NRCC would need to pay for Dept of Human Resources, etc., with the state).

Office location is a primary issue. State employment needs to be located. Marli suggested getting a desk for a few days a week at ANR office in Montpelier could be a potential. The same question was asked of Mike Middleman for VAAFM (thinking of the Ag Program Manager position). Vicky indicated that no additional space could be allocated to NRCC employee, but available existing space could be utilized. Mike noted that any position funded through state funds would not be able to lobby the legislature.

Restructuring through a statute change, similar to VT Housing and Conservation Board was discussed. They are a “Public Instrumentality” with some state support, but employees are not state employees. They carry own insurance, lease own office space, etc. Their board is made up of representatives from state agencies and stakeholders, similar to NRCC. NRCC would need a legislative sponsor and funding to support creating this change.

It was not determined yet which direction NRCC will take, but this is a legitimate Capacity Building focus area and would require funding, resources and focus to help develop this further. This will be included in strategic planning process for NRCC.

Hiring an NRCC Bookkeeper:

Caledonia County NRCD’s bookkeeper has indicated that she will not continue managing NRCC books. NRCC discussed hiring a contracted position to manage books with potential for Districts to utilize this position as well for their own books. It was discussed that this position could have opportunity for growth and manage District auditing, etc. It was discussed that the advertisement ask for individuals for bids, which would include their rates, bid for services based on description of budget and contract.

Marli moved to approve the solicitation of contracted bookkeeping services and authorize HR committee to manage logistics, this will include request to Districts if interested in utilizing services (they would have to provide funds for this). Bill seconded. The motion was approved.

NRCC Finance Committee Updates:

NRCC Financial Procedures:

The board reviewed updates to the financial procedures. With NRCC increased budget, more authorization was allocated to committees to approve agreements and budget adjustments. Bill moved and Richard seconded to approve the financial procedures as presented. The motion was approved.

Review of FY17 Budget Reconciliation.

The board reviewed expenses through June 27th. Any final expenses will be completed by July 31. The Finance Committee will manage any final budget adjustments to close out the fiscal year.

VACD Service Agreement

NRCC Finance Committee approved services from VACD for personnel, recruitment, grant and subgrant management, budgets, and financial management in their May meeting. The agreement was presented to the full board. Marli moved and Bill seconded to approve the VACD service agreement as presented. The motion was approved.

AAFM Report:

Mike reported that Jeff Cook is planning on having a FY18 agreement to NRCC within a month.

DEC Report:

Marli provided an update on the \$500,000 Block Grant to Districts. The purpose of this funding opportunity was to allocate \$2 million to readied projects on the go-list. 90 day pre-award costs are allowable so we may begin work. Currently there is no anticipation of when an agreement to NRCC will be ready.

Mike moved that a committee be created to manage the RFP for the DEC Block Grant, Marli will be on the committee, and the Districts will be the only recipients of the RFP. The Committee will be authorized to develop and execute this process. Bill seconded. The motion was approved.

The committee shall include Marli, Alan, Hilary with Jill advising and Kerry Administrator. Other DMs had expressed an interest during grant proposal process, there is a DM conference call in July and will include this topic. Vicky indicated that District Managers who are program participants may not be involved in project selection processes.

DEC will need to see the map and completed screening criteria for each project. It is suggested that the first step is to request a letter of intent to participate from each District, with map and project readiness screening. Vicky suggested that Engineer or consultant must sign off on project (screening). Marli will prepare more guidance so that NRCC can begin framework for RFP.

NRCS Report:

Press Conference to announce the Environmental Stewardship Conference, potentially at the Whitcomb Farm. The program incentivizes farms to elevate their stewardship above and beyond requirements, includes financial support, soil testing, and signage. This will be the formal launch for the program.