

Approved Finance Committee Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2025 – 8:30 am

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87661939646?pwd=VXpMYkRJSUtGYjRuTFJTa041bWMYUT09>

Agenda

1. Welcome (Rick)
2. Review and approve February meeting minutes (Clare)
3. Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates
 - AgCWIP Agriculture Advisory Team RFA (Emily)
 - VAWQP Regional Coordination (Alli)
 - Other grants updates, as needed
4. Admin Updates (Clare)
 - SU Rep reporting form for NRCC board meetings
 - Request for office space at DEC office in Montpelier
5. Impact of Executive Orders and Changes to Federal Funding (Clare)
6. VACD Report
 - Staff Furlough & Federal Updates (Jill)
 - Organizational Development Work (Jill)
 - Action Circles Contract & Legislative Work (Jill & Clare)
 - Jill and Jeff's Retirements & ED Transition Plans (Jill & Jess)
7. Other business, as required

Attendance

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

Kate joined the meeting at 8:43. Rick left the meeting at 9:33.

Other attendees (non-voting):

Jill Arace, VACD Executive Director (outgoing)

Michelle Monroe, VACD Executive Director (incoming)

Clare Ireland, Administrator

Jessica Miller, Grants & Finance Manager

Emily Nummer, Agriculture Programs Manager

Alli Lewis, VAWQP Coordinator

Welcome

Rick welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. The committee did brief introductions for Michelle.

Approve Minutes of February Meeting

Richard made the motion, seconded by Bill to approve the minutes of February 15, 2025. Upon a call for a vote, all voted in favor.

Grant Proposals, Approvals, and Updates

AgCWIP Agriculture Advisory Team RFA

Emily presented the draft AgCWIP RFA. She outlined the purpose of engaging district managers in questions around standardization of agriculture services, direction of strategic initiatives, and prioritization of work. Clare added that this is a concept that has been talked about for a while and aligns with a history of NRCC engaging district managers in helping with program management and guidance. Kate asked about the use of the funds allocated for this effort. Emily reported that this is a deliverable outlined in our parent agreement, so we don't have much ability to reallocate these funds for other purposes. Clare added that this initiative was developed during our last AgCWIP application and treated as additive to individual district requests. There will be another AgCWIP RFA out next year, and we will have another opportunity to evaluate this program and funding then.

Kate noted that due to insufficient time to review the document, she could not vote on it during the meeting, but suggested the committee handle this as a consent agenda item. The committee agreed, and Rick proposed a week for review. Bill moved to treat the AgCWIP Advisory Team RFA as a consent agenda item with a response date of 3/26/25, after which, if there are no objections, the RFA will be considered approved. Kate seconded the motion. Upon a call for a vote, all were in favor.

VAWQP Regional Coordination

Alli did not have any specific updates ready for this meeting but reported on a successful VAWQP Annual Meeting. She will be returning to working on VAWQP Regional Coordination issues in the next few days.

Statute & Admin Updates

SU Rep Reporting Form for NRCC Board Meetings

Clare asked for committee feedback on the Supervisory Union (SU) Rep reporting form she prepared for the last NRCC Board meeting. She explained the history of SU Rep reporting at NRCC Board meetings: initially these reports were done as a verbal report-out, then switched to written reports. However, she has not been receiving written reports from SU Reps, and verbal reports have mostly focused on the individual rep's own district, so Clare hopes this form will give SU Reps a tool to solicit information from other districts, as well as prompt SU Reps to think about the kinds of things that are helpful to communicate to NRCC and organize updates. The committee did not have any edits to the documents and encouraged Clare to distribute these well in advance of the next NRCC Board meeting along with guidance for SU Reps.

Request for Office Space at DEC Office in Montpelier

Clare updated the committee on a request to secure NRCC office space in ANR's National Life office in Montpelier. This request was made in conversation with Marli Rupe and arose out of conversations around meeting space for NRCC board meetings. As a state government entity, it would be good for NRCC to have a physical presence in a state-owned building for a number of reasons: public access and visibility, aligning NRCC's mailing address with a physical location, and having a space to keep NRCC's files. Clare also reported that she's looking into NRCC's ability to access state computers and IT systems and reserve meeting space directly.

The committee encouraged Clare to reach out to Nina Gage as well to inquire about office space in the VAAFM building. Other possibilities for meeting space were also discussed, including the Annex building in Montpelier.

Impact of Executive Orders and Changes to Federal Funding

Clare gave an update on the federal situation. NRCC generally has less risk exposure since its budget is composed primarily of state grants that do not contain federal passthrough. Right now, NRCC only has two grants that contain federal funds – both under the Trees for Streams program – and is proceeding with both. Neither funder has issued a stop work order, and LCBP has been generally encouraging that work should continue.

The bigger impacts of this situation are to VACD and the districts, though the district impact is highly variable.

Richard asked about NRCS office closures. Jill responded that the St. Johnsbury office was on a list of leases to be cancelled for a while, but that lease has been restored. Richard also said the St. Albans office was on a list of buildings to be sold, but that was retracted as well. Clare said we'd keep an eye on this situation, and that the uncertainty stemming from these federal issues has prompted some districts to reconsider having offices in NRCS buildings. She reminded the committee that there is about \$6,000 left on our Core Services one-time funds, and that money is currently being held in case any district needs to make a sudden update due to the federal situation (like new emails or laptops). The committee will need to discuss that balance at a future meeting.

VACD Report

Staff Furlough & Federal Updates

Jill reported that VACD spent most of the past few weeks trying to navigate different issues arising from the federal situation, including preparing for a possible staff furlough. Because the government did not shut down, VACD is able to keep its technical staff on for now, but will have to closely monitor its federal invoices, since they will soon have about \$500,000 in outstanding federal invoices that are not being paid due to the ongoing freeze on IRA funds. VACD may need to furlough staff in the future but will first work to shift staff to other agreements as we wait on the federal situation to resolve.

Clare noted two of the big impacts we're aware of to districts have been White River and Bennington through the cancellation of the Climate Corps program. Jill added that Essex is also high on our radar since they have a \$1.2 million grant that's currently frozen that they've already started spending on. Clare reported that in response to these issues, she's reached out to the State Attorney General's office, who will be looking into the Climate Corps issue in more detail. Clare can also forward additional information to the AGs office. There was a discussion about a chestnut processing facility grant that was terminated in New York and how this is impacting Bennington.

Organizational Development Work

There were no organizational development updates, except to note that this will be revisited soon.

Action Circles Contract & Legislative Work

Clare reported that work with the legislature is ongoing. House Agriculture has supported our full \$3 million request, while House Environment supported \$1.2 million. Our FY26 base budget is still at \$500,000, but budget crossover is at the end of this week. In spite of our ongoing budget uncertainty, we've seen a lot more engagement with the legislature and more legislators proactively reaching out to us. Clare noted that Poultney-Mettowee NRCD and Rutland NRCD are meeting with the Rutland delegation today, which is a first, and those districts will be speaking to their districts' work specifically, including stormwater and water quality projects.

Jill and Jeff's Retirements & ED Transition Plans

Jill reported that Michelle Monroe started earlier this month. Jill will be slowly transitioning out of the ED role, working part time and taking vacation time, but supporting Michelle as needed into April. Jeff Farber has also announced his retirement, so VACD will be working to review and potentially reconfigure his position into a more HR-focused role, while shifting some of the agriculture program work to other staff or hiring a new agriculture position. She also noted that Emily is going on maternity leave, so Michelle will be stepping in during the meantime since she has a background and interest in agriculture, and this will give Michelle the opportunity to learn more about this side of our operations.

Clare added that neither the federal funding freeze nor pending VACD staff transitions impacts NRCC staffing. She does not anticipate that NRCC will need to update its personnel budget for the year, though we will be revisiting NRCC staffing during development of the FY26 budget, and there may be some shifting of responsibilities at that time.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Bill made the motion, seconded by Richard to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 10:08 a.m.

The next finance committee is scheduled for April 16, 2025 at 8:30 am.

Approved April 23, 2025