

NEK Tri-District Supervisory Union Annual Meeting

September 17th, 2025

Meeting was called to order at 1:07 PM

Board attendance: Tim White, Bill Manning, Willie Nickerson, Matt Langlais, Amber Reed, Alyssa Conn, Emily Dehoff, Chris Steel

District staff: Sam Mayne, Clara Fernandez Odell, Sean Willison, Emily Finnegan, Sarah Damsell, Karina Morales, Will Marlier, Taylor Johnson

Public: Dave Blodgett (NRCS), Michelle Monroe (VACD)

Opening remarks

Bill welcomed all to the meeting and remarked on the value of having such a connected and cooperative Union.

Meeting Topic(s)

- Review of the VACD Capacity Building Report
 - Sam noted the time and effort spent on developing this report as reason to address it as a Union at this time. He encouraged a focus on actions at the Union level in this discussion
 - Michelle spoke about the use of the report by VACD. She said it was used in creating a workplan when she started with VACD this year, and that it also informed the hiring process. She admitted it was not as helpful as many hoped, with its primary focus being identifying the challenges more than laying out a roadmap to solutions.
 - Small groups discussed their largest takeaways and potential actions and shared them with the larger group. Takeaways included:
 - Improving the sharing of resources, including administrative protocols, policies, technical expertise, and equipment. Critically, this sharing needs a clear structure and be intuitive for new staff and supervisors to access, with written protocols and procedures. Some areas won't make sense to consolidate—for example reporting on services provided while duplicative also provides unique insight into specific needs in each area.
 - The strength of districts is the local connection to communities, and regionalizing services comes with a tradeoff. However, consolidating services increases efficiency—would it make sense to have a Union-level Ag CEO, Admin CEO, etc. with local staff focused on program delivery. Could programs themselves be more efficient if regionalized?
 - The report identified the problems—the hard part is identifying the solutions. Is it valuable to create solutions at the Union level when there are state-wide challenges? Yes. The Union can be an example to the rest of the state—and the NEK Union is the most functional and able to do this in the state at present.
 - Does the board or staff spearhead the solutions? Staff are over extended already, but many board members joined their boards because of an interest in on the ground work, not the type of administrative questions. VACD is hiring an HR specialist who may be able to assist.
 - Districts may need to give up some level of local control—the original reason for much of the inconsistency across the state. There was general interest in giving up some administrative power like pay scales and benefits. This would allow for more board time to think bigger picture about the goals and priorities of each District.

- A memo from Walter Medwid (Associate Supervisor, Orleans County NRCD) was read encouraging the Union to think about how strengthening the role of the Union could improve the services we provide by reducing inefficiency and redundancy.
 - All voting Supervisors present were in favor of grappling with this topic (Willie, Bill, Chris, Tim, Matt, Alyssa)
 - The NEK Union Reps have been discussing this potential for some time without making headway, so it was determined that real progress would require hiring a consultant and creating a committee specific to this topic built of both staff and Supervisors to guide the consultant's work.
 - ECNRCD agreed to apply to a WUV Capacity Building Grant to cover the costs of this exploration, including hiring a consultant, covering staff time, and providing stipends to Supervisors for participation. Sam will work with the Union Reps to develop an application.
- Bill discussed a program he has been trying to develop to bring Sterling College students to the NEK for summer internships as a workforce development and education opportunity. He has been identifying funding sources.

Other Business

- Bill announced an upcoming project he is working on to develop bioremediation techniques in Lake Memphremagog. The project would focus on the development of mycelium structures to filter pollutants out of Lake Memphremagog and its tributaries, a strategy which could be spread to additional watersheds. He encouraged supervisors to speak with him about volunteering or sharing the project with others.

Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM.