

Essex County Natural Resources Conservation District Board Meeting

February 18th, 2026

Meeting was called to order at 12:30 PM

Board attendance: Tim White, Terry Williams, Chris von Alt, Bill Manning, Ursula Johnson

District staff: Sam Mayne, Clara Fernandez Odell

Public:

Opening remarks

Bill welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Approval of meeting minutes:

Tim moved to approve the January meeting minutes, Chris seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Financials

- Sam noted that he had corrected the coding issues brought up at the last meeting.
- Bill moved to approve the financials, Ursula seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Accomplishments/Updates:

- Grant Updates
 - Sam said that the grants that had been submitted just before the last meeting were still pending. The timeline for decisions is not known, though Sam expects to hear on the Clean Water grants by mid-March at the latest.
 - Sam highlighted the newly submitted grant for road repairs on the Silvio O. Conte refuge, which had been opened for submissions in the last month.

Meeting Topic(s)

- Clara provided an update on ECNRCD's draft Local Fund Pool application
 - The application was drafted according to the feedback ECNRCD has received by the public and Local Working Group members to improve the county's forests and logging industry. The request is for \$150,000 focused on NRCS practices that improve forests for timber production and wildlife habitat as well as logging infrastructure like forest trails, stream crossings, and landings. Forest management plans are also an eligible expense. The board asked whether the request was enough money. Clara described her decision-making based on the number of forestry applications typically received in the county and average cost of those practices, as well as considerations for the total amount of funding available statewide. Sam noted that if more applications come in than can be funded, it makes a strong case for a larger request in the next year. Board members remarked on the known need and Clara encouraged them to spread the word about the opportunity.
 - Terry motioned to approve the application as written, Tim seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
- Clara described a recently started program to provide Farm Resilience planning across the NEK in partnership with NOFA and the three NEK Districts.

- o The program provides whole-farm resilience planning, with farms enrolled put into small cohorts based on farm characteristics to help develop resilience plans. Each farm receives a \$5,000 grant to implement an identified resilience project at the end of the process. The NEK Districts hope to continue the model in future years once this round is complete. The board was curious to hear what risks farms had identified. Risks identified included flooding, drought, market volatility, and demographic changes in the region.
- Clara provided an update on nursery operations
 - o She plans to begin sowing seeds next week.
 - o The NEK District Plant Sale is open for orders online. The board was excited about the available stock and agreed to spread the word.
 - o Sam mentioned that the Intervale business advisors planned to use the business plan template developed during the advising process with Clara as a model template for other nurseries requesting assistance, which speaks to its quality.
- Sam updated the board on the ongoing construction on Baptist hill in Lunenburg
 - o Construction is ongoing, with progress being made. The final concrete pouring is expected on Friday 2/20/26 with an expected couple weeks of backfill after that.
- Bill remarked on the structure of the annual work plan and encouraged sharing it with others. Sam noted that the template is the same one he was given by the previous District Manager, but said resources like this are frequently shared among Districts. Tim moved to approve the Work Plan, Terry seconded and the motion passed unanimously.
- Sam asked for confirmation that the board would like ECNRCD to be enrolled in the State unemployment insurance (also called unemployment tax) program. Sam and the District's bookkeeper have enrolled the District for the 2026 calendar year. He understood this to be the most common approach. The board asked clarifying questions about what options are available, many of which Sam did not know the answer to. Sam said he would do some more research. Chris moved to approve enrollment for 2026 with additional action to be taken if Sam is able to gather more information. Tim Seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.
- Sam described the requested changes to the District's procurement policies. He noted that the changes, which included changing only two words, clarified what he understood to be the intent of the policy which is that the District will always accept the best *value* bid, as opposed to requiring selection of the lowest cost bid. He feels the current policies leave some ambiguity. Terry motioned to approve the changes to the procurement policy, Tim seconded and the motion passed unanimously.
- Sam presented the employee assessment with added job satisfaction questions. He plans to use this as a way to evaluate changes to compensation and operations to ensure staff retention, and asked for board input. The board was supportive of this approach. Tim asked that is be done by the time he leaves the board because he wanted to ensure staff were compensated fairly.

Other Business

- None

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held at 12:30 PM March 18th in the conference room at the US Fish & Wildlife Service Silvio O. Conte Refuge Nulhegan Basin Welcome Center in Brunswick, VT.

Ursula made the motion to adjourn at 2:05 PM. Tim seconded. Motion carried unanimously.