

# VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD

## *Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program Advisory Board Meeting*

October 14, 2021

### MINUTES

**Advisory Board members present:** Alyson Eastman, Norah Lake, Colleen Goodridge, Michael Snyder, Sarah Isham, Dan Lerner, Gus Seelig, Joan Goldstein, Fred Kenney, Jenna Koloski (arrived at 1pm), Ashlyn Bristle

**VHCB staff present:** Liz Gleason, Mariah Noth, Calley Hastings, Betsy McGavisk

**Guests:** Karen Freeman (VHCB Conservation)

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At 12:05PM, Alyson Eastman called the meeting to order.

At 12:07PM, Liz Gleason invited staff and board members to share brief introductions of themselves.

At 12:29PM, Alyson Eastman and Liz Gleason invited staff to give general program updates to the advisory board.

At 12:33PM, Calley Hastings shared an overview and update on the Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program (VFFVP) 2-year business planning program for working lands businesses. Fred Kenney asked a clarifying question on the business planner network, and Liz Gleason shared several examples of farm and forest businesses that have enrolled in the Viability Program.

At 12:43PM, Mariah Noth provided an update of the VFFVP COVID Response & Recovery programming which has been in place since March 2020. This program has supported working lands businesses that required business and technical assistance due to challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, but that did not enroll in traditional the 2-year business planning services..

At 12:48PM, Aaron Guman shared an overview of the Water Quality Grants program which provides awards of \$5,000-\$40,000 for on-farm capital improvements to decrease phosphorus runoff.

At 12:53PM, Mariah Noth summarized the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) which assists small towns, businesses, and organizations access grant writing and technical assistance consultants to apply for grant funding that may not be accessible otherwise.

At 12:58PM, Liz Gleason shared a budget update on the sources and uses of funds. The VFFVP budget will be expanding between FY22 and FY23. The majority of VFFVP is funded by VHCB trust funds, state and capital bond funds, and federal funds and it is used for operations and program delivery, business services, and grants to farmers. Fred Kenney asked a clarifying question on a funding source.

At 1:02PM, Liz Gleason invited board members to ask questions of Viability staff. Board members asked clarifying questions on VFFVP's relationship with other technical service providers in the state, common themes among clients, and service provider network capacity.

At 1:05PM, Jenna Koloski joined the conference call.

At 1:24PM, Liz Gleason shared an update on the farm and forest advising program. The number of forest business clients may grow with VFFVP's additional funding.

At 1:33PM, Liz gave an update on the VFFVP on the forest landowner transition programming and shared that Ethan Parke, a previous VHCB staff member, has been hired part-time to conduct an assessment of this program in preparation for additional funds towards this program.

At 1:33PM, Joan Goldstein and Alyson Eastman departed the conference call.

At 1:36PM, Liz Gleason shared a conversation prompt on how the VFFVP best reaches out to its target audiences for business planning work. The board was split into 4 zoom breakout rooms in order to discuss.

At 1:45PM, Liz Gleason and Calley Hastings shared an update to the board on the farms who were informed that their contracts with Horizon Dairy will end August 2022. VFFVP has been working with NOFA-VT to conduct research and outreach with all of the impacted farms and connect them with business advising resources. Fred Kenney prompted a conversation related to potential new markets for the Horizon dairies.

At 1:56PM, Liz Gleason provided a scheduling update for the Advisory Board.

At 2:01PM, Liz Gleason adjourned the meeting.

Minutes submitted by Betsy McGavisk.