

## **VERMONT HOUSING & CONSERVATION BOARD**

### **Organizational Grant Committee Meeting**

#### **Minutes**

**May 30, 2023**

Board Committee Board Members: Neil, Ann, Emily, Maura, David

VHCB Staff Members: Jenny, Karen, Gus, Gretchen, Pollaidh, Trey, Marcy, Anne

Neil welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **Conservation Partner Updates:**

Karen and Trey provided brief conservation partner updates. They talked about maintaining the health of the conservation partner network. Karen explained that the annual organizational grant review process continues to be a critical component of supporting the work of these nonprofit partners. It is also key in helping identify organizations that need additional assistance as the ongoing relationships and communications staff has with these groups provides deeper insight into how our partners are doing and what support they need.

There was a committee discussion about the unprecedented funding environment of levels of state and federal resources. There was concern about staff capacity to advance projects at the pace needed. Significant state funding as well as Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) dollars, full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, significantly more Forest Legacy program funds, anticipated higher NRCS dollars for farmland conservation and potential America the Beautiful (30X30) funding provide once in a lifetime opportunities that the state will want to maximize. This requires both gearing up and keeping organizations staffed at appropriate levels along with managing the complexities that come with federal resources. It also poses the question of sustained funding levels beyond the next few years.

The issue of enhancing stewardship was addressed. VHCB and the conservation organizations are experiencing significant increases in stewardship and management oversight and costs as easement portfolios continue to grow, recreational resources and trail infrastructure are impacted by higher use and climate change and properties transfer to new owners. More investments are also needed for better public engagement to achieve diversity, inclusion and equity. Investing in new stewardship partners like the New England Forestry Foundation and the Northern Rivers Land Trust is part of the strategy to address these needs. These investments will be discussed further at the Conservation Issues Committee in June.

Lastly, there was a brief board committee discussion about a few organizations that staff have been particularly focused on, which have presented both new and ongoing challenges. Overall the network is strong and doing great work around the state.

#### **Housing Partner Updates:**

Jenny provided Housing updates and talked about issues that the Board needs to address with several of our partners. She spoke about the extraordinary work that the housing network has accomplished over the past three years. There was a board discussion about development delays and higher costs, which have been challenging for organizations. Predevelopment expenses have dramatically increased over the past few years. Staff are looking at this issue and project capacity grants may help with these increased costs.

There were several recommendations that the board committee reviewed with staff. The committee talked about the recommendations and asked questions about the proposals. There were brief discussions about successful partnerships around the state and plans to set aside funds for a Shires project as part of their workout plan.

**Shires Housing Workout Plan                      2023-076-001**

Emily moved the recommendation for the Shires Housing workout plan. Ann seconded the motion. Everyone voted in favor of the motion with the exception of Maura Collins, who voted no.

Roll Call Vote: Neil–yes, Maura–No, Emily-yes, Ann-yes, David-yes

**Rural Edge Operating Loan                      2023-077-001**

David moved the recommendation for Rural Edge Operating Loan. Emily seconded the motion. Everyone voted in favor of the motion.

Roll Call Vote: Neil–yes, Maura–yes, Emily-yes, Ann-yes, David-yes

**Rutland Merger Support Grant                      2023-078-001**

Emily moved the recommendation for the Rutland Merger Support Grant. David seconded the motion. Everyone voted in favor of the motion

Roll Call Vote: Neil–yes, Maura–yes, Emily-yes, Ann-yes, David-yes

Jenny updated the board committee about the staff’s plan for this year’s organizational grant process. The plan is to continue to do the streamlined process for another year. Staff have found this approach has been a good balance between obtaining helpful information without being too burdensome to our partners. Karen seconded Jenny’s comments and emphasized the very close relationships staff maintain with our network. There was a brief board discussion about this process and agreement about the plan for the upcoming year.

The Meeting adjourned 2:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Marcy Christian

Vermont Housing & Conservation Board