

**Vermont Housing and Conservation Board  
Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program**

Advisory Board & Implementation Grant Review Meeting

Thursday, June 8, 2023

1:00pm-3:30pm

Video Conference (see details below)

**VIDEO CONFERENCE DETAILS**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6828873586>

Meeting ID: 682 887 3586

One tap mobile

+16465588656,,6828873586# US (New York)

+13017158592,,6828873586# US (Washington DC)

**AGENDA**

1:30pm Welcome and Introductions

1:35pm Approve Previous Meeting Minutes (attached), Program Updates, and Review Grant

Application and Review Process

1:45pm Public Comment

1:50pm Grant Deliberations (Executive Session)

3:15pm Vote on Slate of Grant Applications

3:20pm Other Business

3:30pm Adjourn



## Vermont Housing & Conservation Board Conservation Issues Committee & Vermont Farm & Forest Viability Program Advisory Board

Joint Meeting Meetings  
Wednesday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022  
Via Conference Call

Conservation Issues Committee Meeting Minutes  
September 21, 2022, 12:30 – 1:20

**Committee members present:** Kate McCarthy, Billy Coster, David Marvin, Amy Richardson, Neil Mickenberg, Stephanie Smith (designee for Diane Bothfeld)

**VHCB Staff present:** Karen Freeman, Bill Dell'Isola, Stacy Cibula, Isaac Bissell, Trey Martin, Elizabeth Egan, Gus Seelig, Janice Pello, Holly McClintock

**Call to Order:** Kate McCarthy calls the meeting to order at 12:31pm

**Public Comments:** Kate invites public comments. No comments were made.

**Approval of Minutes:** Motion by David, seconded by Neil, to approve the minutes of the 6/22/2022 Conservation Issues Committee Meeting. Unanimous approval, with Stephanie abstaining as she was not present at that meeting.

### Discussion and Action on VHCB Private Working Forestland Guidelines:

Karen acknowledged Ethan's great work on the document and described changes that have been made to these guidelines since the June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022 meeting of the CIC:

- The term "working" was added back to every section where it was previously removed ("Privately Owned *Working* Forestland"). The term "working" is intended to include all forests providing intrinsic benefits, such as carbon sequestration and wildlife habitat, instead of just forests used for material benefits, such as timber.
- Language regarding the Forest Legacy Program in the "background" section was amended, based on feedback from the Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation (FPR).
- The section pertaining to sugarbush land was removed, since NRCS considers sugarbush operations to be "agriculture" and eligible for ACEP-ALE funding. This section will be added to the Ag policy.
- In the "eligibility criteria" section, the connection with the Use Value Appraisal (UVA) program was made less specific, de-linking VHCB's program eligibility requirements with that of UVA's. Directly applying the definitions of UVA could be taken as potentially confusing or inaccurate.
- The reference to a management plan was moved from the "criteria" section into the "priorities" section.
- In the "priorities" section, under "management", the reference to "*Desired Future Conditions of Vermont Forests listed in the Vermont Forest Resources Plan*" was removed, and the bullet point was simplified. Keith Thompson, Private Lands Program Manager with VT Forest, Parks & Recreation has advised that the conditions don't apply to VHCB's guidelines. The goal is to achieve the quality of the forests that the UVA program strives for, without that level of specificity.



Kate opens the discussion to CIC members.

Neil asked for clarification on the application process for entities that have not worked with VHCB before, and Karen says that there will be a separate guidance document for applicants to refer to. There was discussion about the change to Minimum Eligibility Criteria #2 removing the reference to specific UVA criteria and replacing with: "The project shall be eligible for enrollment in UVA in accordance with minimum acceptable standards established by the Commissioner of Forests, Parks, and Recreation". The suggestion made was that this verbiage might still be too specific, since there may be projects that are a good fit for VHCB funding, but not eligible for UVA for reasons such as a power line or percentage of wetland within the parcel boundary. After some discussion, Billy suggests to leave the bullet point as-is and allow staff discretion for approval of future projects. Kate polls the committee, and leaving in bullet point #2 receives unanimous approval.

In regards to the phrase "*healthy, mature, or growing forest*", in the "priorities" section, under "management", David suggests removing the word "*growing*". After some discussion of the word's relevance, Kate conducts a straw poll. David, Billy, and Stephanie are in favor of removing the word, Amy neither agrees nor disagrees. Billy then suggests revising the language to "*healthy, mature, or in any stage of succession*", and the group is all in favor of this.

Kate opens up the discussion to other comments. Karen mentioned there will be text added to the Guidelines referencing a companion operations document that will include information on the application process. It's acknowledged that a year from now may be a good time to revisit these guidelines. Nothing else is raised.

David motions to advance these guidelines to the Board for adoption, and Billy seconds. Kate calls roll, and the motion passes unanimously. Guidelines will pass on to the full Board for approval.

#### **Other business:**

Stacy gives an update on the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) Working Group.

By mid-January of 2023, the group will deliver a report to the legislature with suggestions. The group is leaning toward a hybrid model, implementing some features from some or all of the five methods that are currently being researched. So far, \$1 million has been allocated to the pilot.

Stacy notes that there are a number of financial incentive programs available to farmers, which may actually limit the number who apply since it is confusing and time-consuming to navigate all the programs out there. There is then discussion on the idea of a "farm navigator"—an individual whose job is assisting farmers in sorting through the vast array of financial assistance opportunities. Neil and others think that funding a position like this may be a good idea. There are existing entities that do work similar to this, i.e., the Farm and Forest Viability Program, UVM Extension, or the Conservation Districts, but Stacy notes that there's no one-stop-shop and that's a gap that can be filled.

In response to a question from Gus regarding funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, Billy says there will most likely be resources available for PES work. Billy will follow up with more details as they are available.

Kate asks Stacy about the extent to which the Committee may be helpful in preparation for the January report to the legislature. Stacy would welcome any feedback, and will present the CIC with materials sometime around December.



Karen will connect with Kate to discuss potential dates for future CIC meetings.

Committee adjourned: 1:21 pm.

**Farm & Forest Viability Program Advisory Board Meeting Minutes  
September 21, 2022 1:30-3:00pm**

**VHCB Conservation Issues Committee members present:** Kate McCarthy (chair), Amy Richardson, Neil Mickenberg, David Marvin, Billy Coster (designee for Julie Moore)

**Viability Program Advisory Board Members Present:** Colleen Goodridge, Stephanie Smith (designee for Alyson Eastman and Diane Bothfeld), Sarah Isham, Joan Goldstein, Fred Kenney

**VHCB Staff present:** Gus Seelig, Liz Gleason, Karen Freeman, Holly McClintock, Mariah Noth, Calley Hastings, Isaac Bissell, Trey Martin, Betsy McGavisk, Janice Pello, Elizabeth Egan, Stacy Cibula, Bill Dell'Isola

At 1:34pm Liz Gleason facilitated introductions of board members and new staff members and purpose of joint committee meeting.

At 1:42pm Liz Gleason provided background and an update on the Viability Program's Forest Landowner Program, which provides intergenerational forest transfer planning and is experiencing significant growth at this time.

Attendees discussed the Forest Landowner Program, providing suggestions for cultivating partners, landowner engagement, and synergies with other statewide conservation and climate goals until 2:30pm.

At 2:32pm Gus Seelig provided an update on VHCB's Farmworker Housing funding which is being administered by the Champlain Housing Trust to repair farmworker housing. Attendees shared reflections on the program and suggestions for the future of the funding.

Billy Coster left the meeting at 2:44pm.

At 2:47pm, Liz provided other updates on the VHCB Farm & Forest Viability Program including new funding sources, staff changes, and program work areas.

At 2:52 Liz Gleason adjourned the meeting.