

Washington County Soil & Water Conservation District

Minutes of Regular Meeting May 28, 2020 - USDA Service Center, 2530 St. Rt. 40, Greenwich, NY

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Attending:

Board Members

John Rieger, Chairman
John Dickinson, Vice Chairman
Kate Ziehm, Treasurer
Cassie Fedler, Director
Jay Skellie, Director

Staff Members

Corrina Aldrich, District Manager
Lori Sheehan, Office Manager

Rieger If I have no objection on anyone's part and I hear none, then I will call the meeting to order at 7:32 pm.
(Call to order at 7:32 pm by Chairman Rieger)

Rieger Next item on the agenda is to approve the minutes of the previous meeting
Do I have motion?

Skellie Moved

Fedler Seconded

Rieger Any additions, comments or corrections
All those in favor say I

Directors I

Rieger Motion carried.
(Minutes: **Motion** by Skellie/Fedler to approve the minutes of the last meeting. **Unanimously carried.**)

Rieger Next item, Financial Reports for approval
Do I have a motion to accept the treasurer reports?

Ziehm Moved

Fedler Seconded

Rieger All those in favor

Directors I

Rieger Opposed; Motion carried

(Treasurer's Report: After review and approval of the finances, **Motion** by Ziehm/Fedler to approve the Treasurer's Reports (as a whole) for March and April and to pay bills as presented. **Unanimously carried.**)

District Manager Report:

Aldrich There was a statewide district managers meeting, they have been trying to have them every 2 weeks to kind of see how people are doing and what's going on in the landscape out there. Some are anxious to get started with field work and it depends on where you are in the State. Basically, a couple of things on the forefront of everybody's minds is what is going to happen with local county budget appropriations and impacts on SWCD budgets. Some county's get their appropriations in quarterly installments and have been told not to expect the third and fourth installments. So, they are basically being cut in half at this point. Budgets are on everybody's

minds and wondering what is going to happen with the vouchering process from NYS, that is obviously going to be slowed down and the State budget for 2021 was approved but we don't know for sure what is going to happen with that. First action with that would be Part B Funds, which is a \$6,000 pot of money to do a project - we would have to have something in on that in November. So those are the big questions and also when we can kind of resume doing in-person board meetings because it is okay to try and get basic business done through conferencing and video calls, but it is not the same as having a good conversation about what we need to do with our budgets. Some counties have not gotten much direction from their local governments, some counties have. Everybody is at the reduced rate of 50% in the office that is allowed but those co-located with USDA and FSA agencies. FSA agencies have 2 major programs going on. CFAP for COVID, that signup started Tuesday (May 26) and they are not allowing people in the office, they have to come by appointment, and they are doing the paperwork outside weather permitting with 1 or 2 people in the office and then crop reporting will be starting here shortly. So that is making some issues for them having the reduced staff and it is going to make a difference in whether we are able to do what I was anticipating by being fully staffed. I will be doing a conference call with the employees Friday afternoon May 29; we have been trying to do them on a regular basis Friday afternoons and figure out a schedule so that we can be able to move ahead and get stuff done with grant applications that are due June 15th. There are just some things we need to work together on, so we are thinking maybe having 2 people in the office in the mornings and two people in the afternoons. Do a rotation with Laura where she is in 1 day a week and doing field work. We will get something figured out and will let you know when we all have decided what is going to be workable. Any suggestions are great.

Dickinson Are you doing any field work?

Aldrich Yes, we all are doing field work

Dickinson So as far as the book of business and grants, is there still progress being made on the projects that were approved

Aldrich Yes and we have projects in varying states of completion or starting or in progress. We have some we need to work on payments and closeout paperwork for

Dickinson So that's all work that must be done in the office with your partial staffing

Aldrich Yes, a fair portion of it

Rieger It almost sounds like it is business as usual

Aldrich Yes, my kitchen table looks like a paper nightmare

Rieger Well I guess what I am trying to say is that everyone is trying to make do with what they can to keep everything moving in the right direction

Aldrich As much as possible. I'm not going to lie, there are some days that we have stuff at home and are doing as much as possible, but are we all getting a full 8 hours in every day - probably not as much as we would like to

Skellie So Corrina - do you think the State is going to hold hard and fast on their deadlines - like the grants you are trying to get done

Aldrich The deadline for the ones that are due June 1st - they can't extend those they already extended them once. The Round 26 RFP is due June 15th they didn't think there would be another extension for that one either. So, we have 3 applications we are working on we will probably get at least 2 of them done. I'm still waiting on some more information from an engineer on one; but it is a smaller one

Dickinson On the third one, the hold up is not SWCD - the hold up is the engineer...correct

Aldrich Yes

Skellie I don't know as far as money flowing from the State and Cassie can chime in anytime, but a lot of the towns are looking at only doing about 75% of what our chips allotment is because we are kind of nervous that he is going to come back mid-summer and say he wants 20% of that or 25% of that back. Our small town does not have a fund balance to flow that so we told our highway guys to hold back and I know there is rumors on other

things across the whole budget that they may cut on so its hard telling if they will take anything out on the State as far as grants ...I don't know

- Aldrich Well this Round 26 funding was part of last year's budget so the funding is already there, but what might be in Round 27 for the ag non-point that may get cut from 14 or 15 million that they start out with; we might be looking at half that in future budget rounds - who knows
- Skellie Yes
- Aldrich So we need to do our best to get those applications in this year while we know that there is a stable pot of money...for lack of a better word
- Dickinson So even though that money is budgeted is it in your escrow account or is it still in the State coffers
- Aldrich It is in the Ag & Markets accounts
- Dickinson Do you feel comfortable that it is safe?
- Ziehm So I just want to chime in here because we are working with some grants that are coming out of Ag & Markets that have been promised to us as well, as grants from the 2020 round, and we are taking a very caution measure with; being that we are not going to get that money for a very long time is what we have been told.
- Aldrich Yes. So, like somebody that has some grants from DEC, DEC is saying that you can voucher for stuff, but the payments are going to be delayed. If you have any active grant you are doing work on they got a phone call notification that it would be a 4-5 month delay on the grant payments, the Department of State grants will be the same and they are talking about rolling out the applications for the consolidated funding sometime in June – it's already about a month later they usually do them around the first of May and they will have a delayed due date and that will be dependent on staffing and re-opening and those are usually due July 26th in that neighborhood. I think money that has already been allocated to different departments is there and can be spent - we are just going to be waiting for it longer than we normally would. If it has not been allocated who knows. That's my guess on it.
- Ziehm We want to make sure that we are as caution as we can be from a cash flow standpoint because all indications we have had from Ag & Markets and the State, and we had a conversation with Carrier Woerner early in the week, technical it should be there if it was promised to you but it is going to be awhile, so I think we just have to be prepared for cash flow.
- Aldrich Yes and with that in mind I guess with what we have for items on the agenda we have already donated the leftover trees from the tree program and there were a few customers who ordered things that we were short on, so they got refunds. The Part C project idea - the Grassland Bird Trust we have given them \$6,000 the last 2 years to do habitat management, this is the third year they have put a request in - it is a great request and everything but I guess I would like to air on the side of caution and seeing how it is the third year of the request just say no we don't feel we can do it this year.
- Dickinson Yes, I think that is a for sure
- Aldrich The district needs to improve our telework capability by buying laptops and you know maybe future appropriation from the county is technical help with getting onto the county server or getting us more up to speed with being able to telework more efficiently because the other thing moving forward not as fast as it was doing, the service center is going to be enlarging their footprint and there will be construction going on probably next winter so being able to telework during construction at the service center would be a beneficial thing. I think we need to take care of ourselves and keep as much money as we can.
- Rieger You won't get an argument from me Corrina as I told you the other day, we need to make sure that we take care of our district and our district employees and I would rather have \$6,000 in the bank or in our plus column. If we need to spend money for our people and I just think those are the types of things we need to look at. Getting back to what Kate was saying a few minutes ago, from the educational viewpoint things do not look good. That is one of the largest parts of the NY State budget and no one seems to know yet the real implication of that, but when that hits and it is already creeping in already there is going to be a lot of shortfalls here and I think we just need to be as caution and as protective for our district as we can.

Anyone else

- Dickinson I agree, I don't know how you plan or prepare or react to this because there is just no way of knowing when there are some many uncertainties. I don't see how we can plan other than don't spend anything if you don't have to
- Rieger Cassie
- Fedler I agree
- Skellie I agree too. When this first started hitting and we were talking to supervisors I was one of the ones that said we need to start planning because we don't know how far or how deep this is going, so like John says -- you don't even know what you might be planning for
- Rieger And the other thing that we are running into is in a lot of areas now is with additional expenses, in the past we haven't had to deal with and now not only are we dealing with shortfalls and additional mandates, so I think we are all on the same track there. So, Corrina at this stage of the game on the agenda you talked about donating leftover trees - do you want to take these one at a time?
- Aldrich Yes, the Part C thing we don't have to act on just wanted it on there to let you know that we had a request, but we do need to have approval on those leftover trees and the refunds to the tree customers.
- Rieger Do I hear a motion
- Dickinson So moved
- Skellie Seconded
- Rieger Questions or comments. Not hearing any, all those in favor, I.
- Directors I
- Rieger Motion is carried.

(Motion by Dickinson/Skellie to approve donating leftover trees from tree program for conservation projects and to issue refunds due to tree customers. Unanimously carried.)

- Rieger CWICNY Dues - Corrina
- Aldrich Well we talk about not spending any money we don't have. CWICNY has proposed that each district in the Champlain Watershed Improvement Coalition; there is 5; pay dues moving forward to keep the organization afloat because we get a lot of grant funds through them and to support them. Right now CWICNY is paying \$4,000 a year out of pocket to have the Lake Champlain Lake George Regional Planning Board administer a grant for us and that starts depleting what CWICNY has in their budget, and we got 3 grants through the Basin Program this year, of course all those deadlines have been pushed out but we may not be seeing funds from them that we were anticipating. It is just like everybody else; everybody's budgets are in limbo or shot. So I guess what was asked by CWICNY was are people going to put dues to CWICNY in their budgets for the individual districts and if you don't want to that is fine and if you do you can make it discretionary to what you want to pay in for CWICNY. I guess my question to you guys is do we want to have it as a budget item as we start working on our budget and if not - that's fine too. I'm just putting it out there.
- Dickinson So I'm confused so you said we have gotten several grants through CWICNY and then you are saying something about dues and funds - which way is the money flowing.
- Aldrich So CWICNY has gotten grants that has allowed us to purchase the hydro-seeder. CWICNY got the grant with the whole group and got \$50,000 for us to purchase a hydro-seeder. The district has purchased it and now we need to be reimbursed, CWICNY is managing that grant, they were the sponsor for that grant, but the Lake Champlain Lake George Regional Planning is administering the grant and we are paying them to administer the grant. So CWICNY has outflow and it does not necessarily have a lot of inflow of cash.

Rieger So let me ask one question – you are paying Lake Champlain Lake George Regional Planning Board how much to administer a \$50,000 grant?

Aldrich CWICNY is paying \$4,000 a year for them to administer the grant for us, the total grant is \$250,000

Rieger Okay

Aldrich Because it is \$50,000 for each county

Skellie So where does CWICNY get the \$4,000 to pay

Aldrich What they have already in their operating budget from administration from other grants in the past from profits from the stormwater trade show that they usually put on, that is their main fund raiser. They have an operating budget; our operating budget is only about \$10,000 a year. What we have in our accounts is \$40,000, but we are not going to be able to have the stormwater trade show this year, its like everything else our opportunities for fund raising are severely limited

Skellie Do you think the other members of the CWICNY group are going to contribute or do you think some won't

Aldrich Some of them actually contribute through their county appropriation and some contribute through their own soil & water budget. So, my guess is probably three of us will and two won't. Franklin County won't because they are the ones that get paid quarterly for their county appropriation and they have lost their last 2 quarters. We don't have to act on it I'm just putting it out there. Do you want us to have it as a line item on our budget along with whatever other dues that we pay?

Skellie This time you were proposing to use the Part C funds

Aldrich Yes, we can use Part C funds towards dues because of the legislation change with that

Dickinson So where do most of the funds come from for CWICNY, are they State funds

Aldrich No, they are a not-for-profit. They apply for grants

Dickinson Where do the grants come from

Aldrich DEC, Department of State, Lake Champlain Basin Program and we get some administration funds off of them but it got to a point that the soil & water districts are so busy that we don't have the capacity to administer a large grant that is why we hired the Lake Champlain Lake George Regional Planning Board to administer the large grants

Dickinson My point is we have fiscal issues on a State level - they might not have any money anyway

Aldrich Yes

Dickinson I don't know

Aldrich It is something to think about whether you want us to put that in our budget for the Washington County SWCD

Rieger One of the options we do have we can always decide to expend that money and pay dues at any time correct? As opposed to having it as a line item

Aldrich Yes, we could have a general line item of dues and a certain amount to it and go from there. I don't want to take up a whole lot more time with this – just putting it out there. The bigger things are the AgNPS grants and being able to make the payments from the grant funds on those.

Rieger And are we going to need 2 separate motions for the Walker Farm and Twin Brooks?

Sheehan No you can do them as one, it is through one grant, Round 22

Rieger Ok do I hear a motion

Skellie So Moved

Dickinson Seconded

Rieger We have a motion, a second, questions or comments. Not hearing any - all those in favor

Directors I

Rieger Opposed. Carried
(Motion by Skellie/Dickinson to approve AgNPS Round 22 Champlain Farmstead Runoff Grant Payments for Walker Farm & Twin Brooks Farm. Unanimously carried.)

Aldrich The as-builts should be done for Twin Brooks tomorrow. We should be getting them

Rieger Good. Moving on to Round 23 and John apparently you have to rescue yourself on this one

Dickinson Abstain

Skellie So Moved

Rieger We have a motion

Fedler We have a second

Rieger Questions or comments. Not hearing any all those in favor

Skellie, Fedler I

Rieger opposed; abstained 1. Motion is carried
(Motion by Skellie/Fedler to approve AgNPS Round 23 Ideal Heritage Manure Grant Payment for Ideal Dairy – Bishop Site. Abstain Vote Dickinson; Carried.)

Rieger Now I need an update on this - is Round 23 a separate one now to the Bishop Site, or was that all under one

Aldrich No, that's all under one

Rieger Ok, good. Moving forward. Jay and Cassie update from supervisors on county budget appropriation

Skellie We will let you know tomorrow

Rieger Okay

Cassie No, we will only know who the budget officer is tomorrow, we won't know anything else

Aldrich Well, from the Soil & Water perspective the former would be better than the latter

Rieger Okay

Aldrich I think, but that is just my opinion

Skellie At this point there hasn't been any laid out-line as far as looking at cuts on stuff. I think we are still trying to get a handle on the number we are going to be down on tax revenue and then look at what we have for fund balance and see how much we want to take there before we go onto other things. I am DPW Chair and I told Deb to pick out things the County pays for on our projects for the summer and have them in the back of your mind which are the priorities. DPW is an easy target lots of times so we may have to cut some paving and other things and I don't think we will feel the full brunt I think that some of the other parts of the county are going to have to feel the hurt too.

Fedler I think until we finally hear what the State is going to do, what their final decision is and how much that they

are going to withhold - they are keeping everybody in a holding pattern for everything

Aldrich Yes, that's the hard part of it. I guess I don't know - was the county DPW working Jay

Skellie They are coming online, they can only get up to the 50% just like everything else

Aldrich Well I guess, I don't know. In my head I was thinking that if they were not running trucks, they were not spending money on fuel and breaking things, and they weren't spending money on projects. It still costs money to pay people, but it may not be total doom and gloom

Skellie The biggest thing that hurts is some of the county and especially DPW is there are certain things we budgeted to buy and that is done early in the year so about three-quarters of that was already been done and you can't reach out and pull that back, so that has kind of tied our hands on some of the budget.

Aldrich Yes, the district has purchased the hydro-seeder, we had the funds early in the year and now we are going to have to wait until September or October before we see the reimbursement from that as opposed to we should have been able to have it here next month

Fedler We also have the challenge at the county coming in, like you said working in your office, so image that at the county office building and all the departments and the staff and the logistics. You could spend all day just discussing how to get DMV working or to bring on full social services, or get the county system up - it is a nightmare on some many levels and the additional costs and safety precautions

Aldrich Yes, what is your sanitizing budget going to be this year. PPE has become a whole new animal, which I need to get signed up to be able to get some here in the office because with the limited staff no one has had to wear masks, but as the USDA folks start coming back, having more people in the office, they are suppose to be wearing a mask sitting at their desks.

Skellie As a county unit I would think that you could get ahold of Tim Hardy because he is in charge of getting hand sanitizer out to people and they have some masks left, not a lot. You may want to check with him, I would think that you would be qualified, as far as the county - wouldn't you think so Cassie

Fedler I would think so and you do have to provide it for your staff - it is required for you to provide it for the staff and I would think that you should be able to get some from Tim Hardy. I know they were making a run around Jackson yesterday and they were in Greenwich making deliveries

Aldrich So that was on my radar to do list for tomorrow morning. So, they will deliver them?

Skellie Yes, he drops stuff at our towns so I think he probably would

Fedler Yes, he lives in Cambridge so you are right on the way so I don't think he would mind, not Tim, but some of the staff that was bringing it around yesterday

Aldrich So has the county got like a policy in place on the reopening stuff and field work

Skellie So everybody is to wear masks if they can't social distance out the 6 ft. or more so that means when they are sitting in the offices and stuff - they are wearing masks. But some of the highway crews - when a guy is in the truck by himself or payloader he doesn't have to have a mask and there was some concern if a guy is working on the ground around that equipment he needs to be able yell to people - and you know they are social distancing somewhat in their crews, but if they all get in the truck to come back they better put masks on. Is that correct Cassie - did I get that right

Fedler Yes you got that right. Plus, if you are leaving your office and are moving at all you have to wear a mask, walking down the hall or any common areas you have to have them on

Aldrich That's what I was getting the jest of from a lot of the other district managers. Some of the districts are basically following county policy, others are developing their own policy, some of it depends on where they are located and who they are co-located with and if they have their own facility or not

Skellie One of the things we look at too is at the county - as frustrating as it is, we still have to look at the safety of our

employees and the people there so these steps and things we are going to have to do for awhile

Aldrich Yes, I had another question and I can't remember it

Rieger While you are thinking do you want to move forward with telework capabilities

Aldrich Yes, I guess we need to look into investing in a couple more laptops

Fedler I would think if you reach out to Terry in the IT Department at the county she could probably help you if you are not sure of what you need, she could help you get up to speed on that, she is extremely good in the IT department; maybe she would be helpful as a person to ask to see if she has an idea of what would work best for you

Aldrich Okay

Skellie And I do think you need to go forward with it - you guys are going to continue to do a lot of work from home probably right through the rest of the year if not further

Aldrich Yes, it is just kind of the way things are. Terry you said.

Fedler Yes, Terry. Her last name escapes me

Skellie Now I can't remember her last name either, she heads the IT department

Aldrich I will look it up on the county website

Fedler Yes, she is head of the IT department and is very good

Aldrich The IT person here at the USDA – their first priority is NRCS and FSA and Rural Development, they are not going to help us until they get everybody else all situated, so we are pretty far down on the list and there is not really any agreement in place where they are obligated to help the Soil & Water District with their IT issues, unless it happens to be one of the computers here in the office

Rieger Are you all set with that Corrina

Aldrich Yes, I guess – I will find out more from her and come back to you guys with this is what we need to do

Rieger Okay, are we set to move on to scheduling of the next meeting?
Supervisors

Fedler What did you say

Rieger I didn't - I said we are passing the buck onto you and Jay

Fedler Can you pick a rainy day, how is your crystal ball

Skellie A evening on a rainy day – right

Rieger Is an evening out of the question

Fedler No, but Mondays or Tuesdays is better for June

Ziehm I am fairly flexible, I can do evenings for the most part

Skellie It works for me

Fedler Does the 22nd work

Dickinson That is a Monday night, I may be out of town the last 2 weeks of June so you may not have me anyway. But right now - it looks okay

