

Working Lands Enterprise Board Meeting Minutes

Annual Symposium – FY24

June 28, 2023 9:00am-4pm

Bread & Butter Farm, South Burlington, VT

Voting Board Members Present: Alyson Eastman (Deputy Secretary, Agency of Agriculture – designee for Anson Tebbetts, Secretary), Chair; Charlie Hancock, Vice Chair; Tayt Brooks (Agency of Commerce – designee for Lindsay Kurrle, Secretary); Danielle Fitzko (Commissioner, Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation)(arrives 9:41 AM); Bob Lesnikoski; Alison Low; Donna Young; Marisa Mauro (arrives 12:30); Tyler Miller; David Hubbard; Alisha Utter (departs 2:30 PM); Megan Camp (departs 11:45 AM); Will Belongia; Alan Calfee (departs 4:00 PM); Jon Ramsay

Voting Board Members not Present: None

Non-Voting Board Members Present: Sarah Isham, Vermont Economic Development Authority, designee for Cassandra Polhemus, CEO; Ellen Kahler, Executive Director, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund; Liz Gleason, designee for Gus Seelig, Executive Director, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

Non-Voting Board Members not Present: None

Staff: Elizabeth Sipple, Clare Salerno, Diana Ferguson, Kristina Sweet, Laura Ginsburg (departs 2:00 PM), Abbey Willard (Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets); Paul Frederick, Katharine Servidio (Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation)

Guests: Jake Claro, Director of Farm to Plate Network, Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund; Rob Riley, Northern Forest Center

Members of the Public: None

Elizabeth Sipple calls the meeting to order at 9:16 AM.

Introduction of Hosting Farm Businesses

Corie Pierce, Owner of Bread and Butter Farm, and Mike Proia, Owner of Blank Page Café, introduced themselves, gave an overview of each of their businesses, and expressed gratitude for WLEB's past and ongoing support.

Board Member and Staff Introductions

Agenda Review – Charlie Hancock

MOTION to approve minutes from the April 18, 2023 Board meeting – Alison Low motions, Alan Calfee seconds

MOTION passes by unanimous voice vote

Sector Needs and Priority Investments in the Agriculture Sector – Elizabeth Sipple

Presentation: Key learning, trends, and hurdles identified by Farm to Plate Priority Strategy Teams and recommendations to WLEB regarding priority investment areas – Jake Claro, Director of Farm to Plate Network

Jake provided background information on the previous 10-year agricultural strategic plan and newly-developed plan (Farm to Plate 2.0) and explained the status of priority strategies, including key issues business owners are facing and ongoing work by network groups

Presentation: The Future of Agriculture Commission’s research fundings and analysis regarding diversified agriculture needs and infrastructure investments within the maple, produce, and meat sector – Abbey Willard

Abbey shared the Future of Agriculture Commission’s history and report recommendations focusing on infrastructure investments and technical assistance. She referenced report excerpts on the meat, maple, and produce industries and ongoing support for WLEB, including the following legislative allocations for FY24:

- \$2 million for WLEI (\$1 million base and \$1 million one-time funds)
- \$2.3 million for meat, maple and produce (maple can be 25% maximum)

Presentation: Overview of funding available to Vermont agriculture and food businesses in FY24 – Kristina Sweet

Kristina shared FY24 funding amounts and details developed to date on the Organic Dairy Farm Assistance Program, Small Farmer Diversification and Transition Program, Agriculture Development Grants (meat, maple, produce), and USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Program.

Sector Needs and Priority Investments in the Forestry Sector – Charlie Hancock

Presentation: Forest Futures Report – Danielle Fitzko

Danielle shared key points related to the ongoing development of the Forest Futures Roadmap (final report anticipated January 2024) as well as emerging issues and priorities across the forest sector.

Presentation: Northern Forest Regional Plan – Rob Riley, Northern Forest Center

Rob shared the background of the Northern Forest Center and described its focus areas, recent programming, and key issues and data related to the northern forest region and its businesses.

Reflections on Presentations and Key Takeaways – Abbey Willard

WLEB members captured and shared their individual priorities/recommendations from the morning’s conversations, which were combined into key takeaway ideas to inform the FY24 budget discussion.

Working Lunch Takeaways on WLEB Engagement on Housing – Tyler Miller

WLEB split into three groups and discussed opportunities/benefits, challenges/risks, and any needed information related to farm worker housing.

Priority Investment Areas – Service Provider Strategy Committee

Committee members shared the results of a series of meetings with service providers and identified target investment areas related to supporting working lands businesses.

FY24 Provisional Budget – Elizabeth Sipple, Ellen Kahler

The Board reviewed and discussed budget recommendations including seven potential funding opportunities for Fiscal Year 2024.

MOTION to approve provisional budget for FY24 – Tayt Brooks motions, Danielle Fitzko seconds

MOTION passes by unanimous voice vote

Other Announcements – none

Public Comment – none

MOTION to adjourn – Alison Low motions, Danielle Fitzko seconds

MOTION passes by unanimous voice vote

Meeting is adjourned by Charlie Hancock at 4:05 PM.

Meeting Materials

- *Working Lands Enterprise Board Meeting Minutes Draft 5/16/2023*
- *Working Lands Enterprise Board Meeting Agenda 6/28/2023*
- *FY24 WLEF Funding Priorities*
- *FY24 Budget Template*
- *Symposium Data Brief*