



RI STATE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

17 Smith Avenue, Greenville, RI 02828
949-1480

MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, November 25, 2008

9:15 AM

USDA NRCS Conference Room

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Eastern RI
Conservation District

Northern RI
Conservation District

Southern RI
Conservation District

Director
RI Department of
Environmental Management

Governor's Appointee

Eric Offenberg called the meeting to order at 9:20.

In attendance were:

Eric Offenberg, Chair; Kenneth Ayars, RI DEM/Ag, Kristen Dame, URI Cooperative Extension, Dick Went and Norm Hammond, RIACD, NRICD, Gina DeMarco, NRICD, Dick Hart, ERICD, Tom Sandham, SRICD, Ramona LeBlanc Administrative Assistant.

ADVISORS

Coastal Resources
Management Council

RI Association of
Conservation Districts

RI Resource Conservation &
Development Area, Inc.

RI Statewide Planning
Program

RI Department of
Transportation

RI Water Resources Board

URI Cooperative Extension

USDA Farm Services Agency

I. Minutes

A motion was made to accept the September 17th and October 29th minutes: Norm/Dick, unanimous.

II. Financial Report

Cash will allow continued operation through the rest of the fiscal year, but there will not be money available to pay the directors' insurance which will be due before the next legislative grant monies are expected. A motion was made to accept the financial report: Ken/Dick, unanimous. An additional motion was made to pursue an administrative fee for the CIG grant with NRCS, similar to the one included in recent RIACD/NRCS grants: Dick/Norm, unanimous.

III. New Business

A) Annual Report to Legislators

District managers were advised that annual reports must be available by mid-January. A letter will be delivered to the legislators that will advise how the reports can be accessed electronically. This will eliminate printing costs.

B) Meeting Schedule

The State Conservation Committee will meet the 2nd Wednesday of every other month in 2009, commencing in January.

IV. Review District's Financial Status

NRICD's status is stable. Should the next five year proposal with Providence Water Supply Board, which is in draft form, not be approved or if state funding is drastically cut again next fiscal year, contingency plans have been discussed. They include restricting administrative work to only what is required and the possibility of moving office to a DEM location in the district.

ERICD has voted to close office on 12/31/08. Tom Sandham will be district manager of SRICD and bill ERICD for one day of work per week. The phone will be moved to Emerson Wildes' house and Linda Wildes will work from home for both Eastern and Southern.

Dick Hart presented an outline of revenues on hand and a list of projected expenses should the office remain open on a scaled back capacity until next year's legislative grant is received. The question of supplemental funding and alternative office space was discussed. Eric and Ken both voiced concern that relying on state funding is not viable as there is likely to be additional cuts in coming years. They both advised that the money on hand would be better spent keeping the work going in the district for as long as possible and that that was more important than keeping an office open. Dick also voiced concern that the district's current involvement in agricultural projects such as farmers markets and aiding in marketing meat is moving away from its primary role in conservation. It was suggested that keeping farms viable through such efforts supports conservation efforts.

SRICD has approximately \$20000 in their accounts now with income from stormwater grants and an outreach grant with NRCS.

V. New Directions/Projects

The consensus of the committee is that the districts must develop a plan beyond mere survival until the next legislative grant. There will likely not be any resolution from the State in the near future. Rather, any available funds should be spent to keep programs running. Consolidation of overhead must be considered to allow the districts to continue to provide services to landowners and the community. Funding for a creative proactive person to seek work and new grants for the districts would also be well spent.

The three separate boards must, by law, continue to exist. But the districts can share resources and staff. ERICD should try to find shared (and perhaps donated) office space to house records, etc.

The RIACD is already equipped as a 501 C 3 organization to receive grant monies that are not available to the districts. The idea of allowing it to become a centralized umbrella organization for the three districts is to be considered. This may involve consolidating to a single administrative entity with shared bookkeeping and accounting.

All districts should try to identify several sites that could provide unmanned space for the display of district, DEM and NRCS information with the districts clearly

identified as the contact for a variety of programs and assistance. This will increase visibility while limiting overhead expenses. NRCS had previously committed to helping to develop a publicity campaign to increase community awareness of the districts. Announcing a network of district locations would be a good use of that offer. As part of a comprehensive strategic plan, the development of these satellite locations might be aided by RI DEM/Ag supplying the display boards.

Kristen Dame is interested in discussing Sustainable Agricultural Research Education (SARE) grants with the districts. They fund outreach that specifically targets sustainable agriculture and are designed for work that the districts are already doing.

Each district is asked to address the following issues before the next SCC meeting on January 14:

- Review minutes of the SCC meeting of 10/29 and identify those issues/ideas/suggestions that they agree with or disagree with.
- Prepare a financial analysis similar to the one Dick presented for Eastern at this meeting that outlines monthly expenses including overhead and a projection of payroll hours in comparison to income.
- Prepare a priority list of work currently being done and what work the district would like to do.
- Prepare a list of possible satellite locations.
- Review “Who Are the Conservation Districts?” flyer with the development of a Conservation District brochure in mind. Bring any ideas to next SCC meeting.

In addition the NRICD board is asked to examine how the consolidation of the districts under an umbrella organization would impact its status.

The RIACD was asked to pursue a RI Foundation grant for strategic planning. It was also suggested that the existing \$3000.00 grant from the RIF be used to develop a RIACD website that would link to districts’ and partners’ sites. The development of a District brochure should also be a priority.

The meeting adjourned at 11:45.