

Eastern Rhode Island Conservation District
2490 Main Road – Tiverton, RI 02878 – Phone (401) 816-5667

ERICD Board Meeting
February 11, 2014
7:00 PM

Chairman Emerson Wildes called the meeting to order at 7:08 pm.

Present were: ERICD Directors: Emerson Wildes, Ron Mucci, Suzanne Hourihan; District Manager: Jessica Blackledge; District Conservationist, NRCS: Melissa Hayden.

- I. **Minutes:** Minutes from the January 14, 2014 ERICD Board meeting were presented. Ron made a motion to approve the January minutes. Suzanne seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- II. **Financial Report:** A written Financial Report was presented. Suzanne made a motion to accept the Financial Report as presented. Ron seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. DM reported that she will be meeting with Ramona on Thursday, February 13, 2014 at 9:30 at NRICD to discuss ERICD budget and she stated this item will be discussed later in this meeting's agenda.
- III. **NRCS Report & Staff Presentation:** Melissa Hayden presented a report to the Board on the number of contracts, amount of obligation, and details on specific NRCS project updates within the District bounds. Melissa also presented a brief Conservation Practice Training to the Board on NRCS Brush Management practices. Melissa answered questions asked by Board Members related to this practice.
- IV. **RISCC Report:** Ramona LeBlanc provided a written report (in lieu of her presence) stating that the SCC met on 1/30/14.

The SCC approved SRICD's proposal that the additional funding it receives from the State be split between the three Districts and SRICD has issued a check for \$2000.00 to the ERICD which will be deposited immediately.

The SCC approved a new FFOS farm conservation plan fee structure and landowner options for plan development. Base price for a full plan developed with the Districts will be \$950 for properties up to 50 acres. A summary of the new protocol for processing new and existing FFOS enrollees adopted by the SCC will be provided to each District Board.

Eric Offenbergh expressed his intent to resign as Chair of the RI SCC. The next SCC meeting will be in late March.

The DM reported SCC responses to questions posed by ERICD regarding discussions involving the character or job performance of a current or prospective Director or employee of the District should be performed in Executive Session. Any votes taken should occur in Open Session.

In regard to the question as to how meetings for which no quorum is reached should be addressed, an informational meeting may be held. However, this meeting should be limited to providing updates ONLY. No discussion or action, including voting, may occur. No minutes need be recorded for this meeting on the Open Meetings website. A notice stating the meeting was canceled due to lack of quorum will fulfill the legal requirements.

V. District Reports:

- A. District Manager:** A written Report was provided. Highlights of the DM Report and Board activity on same are as follows:
- 1. Geese:** Work completed this month included providing assistance, information and support to landowners and other partners, research, reporting and billing tasks, project planning and development. DM continues to develop new and existing partnerships, provides assistance and recommendations to landowners as needed and continues outreach and volunteer development for the 2014 field season. Anyone interested in assisting with this aspect is invited to participate
 - 2. NRCS Outreach:** ERICD's recent Conservation Open House workshop in conjunction with this agreement was held on February 5, 2014 from 5 to 7PM at Mt. Hope Barn. This event was rescheduled from 1/22/14 due to inclement weather. We also had poor weather on 2/5 which resulted in low turnout. Results from the workshop include: 3 landowners in attendance, one potential NRCS application, strong beginning partnership with Mt. Hope Farm with much room for growth and future partnership. We will be planning the next round of workshops for Eastern District highlighting livestock operations. This will include a site visit/ farm tour aspect and will be scheduled for some time in April 2014.
 - 3. NRCS Ag Tech:** GIS parcel data layers are still needed from each town in Eastern District. The DM will be follow-up on her requests for these datasets over the next month. Work this month also included landowner assistance and follow-up, guidance and recommendations re: land use, tech and financial assistance program enrollment and eligibility, project planning and management, communication with partners, site visits and an NRCS practice certification, data entry and file organization, research, GIS management and mapping, and site visit prep and performance. DM will continue work under this agreement as needed, requested and directed by NRCS DC, Melissa Hayden
 - 4. FFOS:** DM assisted a few local landowners with FFOS Farmland Applications this month. No FFOS Farm Conservation Plans were written this month. DM currently has 3 farms awaiting farm plan development and will contact the landowners to schedule site visits within the next two weeks. DM will continue writing FFOS plan as work as available and necessary.
 - 5. Petty Cash Account:** DM reported that \$24.25 remains in the ERICD petty cash account. DM reported that replenishment of the Petty Cash account as approved by the Board in the January meeting has yet to occur. She will discuss this matter with Ramona and resolve it by the next month's meeting.
- B. Chair Report:** The Chair's Report is included under later Agenda Items.

C. Directors Reports:

- 1. Suzanne:** Reported that she will not be at the March ERICD meeting as she will be on vacation.
- 2. Ron:** Recovering from knee surgery. Nothing further to report.

VI. Old Business:

- A. Tiverton Harbor Commission Request:** In January the DM and the Chair worked together to complete edits and send the ERICD response to the THC. The letters were drafted on January 23rd and mailed on the 25th. As of this meeting no response has been received from the THC. The Board discussed providing a copy of the letter to the THC or a similar notice of activity to the landowner. The Chair stated that he would notify the DM of action to take if any.
- B. Town Funding Requests:** DM reported that she has completed and mailed the request letters for town funding requests for the 2014 fiscal year. DM requested that the Board be more involved in securing town funding contributions in the future.

DM also suggested that ERICD take Jean Lynch RIACD up on her previous offers of assisting the Districts with promoting and marketing the District to the towns, as their knowledge of the

District, what ERICD has done and can do for them can only help with town funding request success.

Suzanne made a motion that ERICD ask Jean Lynch to help ERICD market the Districts to towns in Bristol and Newport Counties. Ron seconded the motion. The Board stated that they would like involvement in this process and would like to meet with Jean to discuss how this shall occur. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Board Recruitment:

- 1. Board Candidacy Submissions** – DM asked for the Board to report on the results of references checks they performed on Board Candidates. Suzanne moved that the meeting be moved to Executive Session to discuss the results of reference checks on Board Candidates. Ron seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was moved to Executive Session. Ron moved to return the meeting to Open Session. Suzanne seconded the motion and the meeting moved to Open Session. Ron moved to appoint Russ Smith as an Associate Director to the ERICD Board upon his acceptance of said role. Suzanne seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.
- 2. Follow-up Activity Completed by Board Members** – Board had no additional activity to report.
- 3. Report from the RI SCC RE: Board Candidacy Requirements** – Concern was expressed by the SCC related to the proposed ERICD Board Candidacy requirements on two levels:

The first concern is that the process ERICD has adopted for appointment/election of District Directors exceeds what is written in State Law (copy of section of the Law provided) as it pertains to Board appointment/election. The SCC recommends ERICD ask Ken Payne to review the Law as it is written and ask his opinion as to whether ERICD can impose additional criteria. If it is determined that ERICD cannot do so, and ERICD would like to recommend that Law be changed, ERICD should present that request at next SCC meeting as the SCC is currently working on a package of legislative changes and could include that change if accepted by the SCC.

The second concern was specific to those Directors who are elected. The question was: Is it Constitutional to require more stringent criteria for election to a District Board than to public office (i.e., BCI check)? The SCC seemed to think some research was required on this point as well. Having said all this, the SCC recognizes that there seems to be more flexibility in the appointment of Associate Directors, which can occur at the discretion of the Board. However, it doesn't appear that a District can make serving as an Associate Director a pre-requisite to full Directorship.

If the ERICD Board would like further discussion of these issues at the SCC level they should let Ramona know and so it can be put on the next RI SCC agenda. This will remain on the agenda for next month. The Board will discuss their preference on this issue next month.

D. Funding Opportunities:

- 1. Organic Farm Certification:** This topic was discussed at the last SCC meeting and the topic was tabled until the next SCC meeting.
- 2. Community Garden Project with Sandywoods Farm** – DM met with representatives from Sandywoods, Church Community Housing, the Maher Center and others to discuss the future of Sandywoods Community Garden on January 31, 2014. Much was discussed and the group will reconvene to develop a more concise proposal this Thursday 2/13/14 at 3 PM. There will also be a meeting for the folks renting community garden plots at Sandywoods on Sat, 2/15/14 at 11AM. DM will attend both events.

3. 8 Rod Management Plan –Nothing to report.

- E. SRICD Proposal for State Allocation** – This was discussed under the RI SCC Report noted previously in these minutes.
- F. Operational Strategy Development to Reduce/Eliminate Expected 2014 Budget Shortfalls & Report to the SCC:** DM reported the need to discuss ideas of where ERICD can cut expenses and maximize income. She suggested that this could include suspending Director's Stipends, cutting back Admin Time temporarily and focusing more on District project agreements and FFOS plans, finding free office space (though this will undoubtedly lessen the rate of fringe payments NRCS makes to ERICD to share office space as a Field Office), and having a Board Member take on the role of ERICD Secretary and become responsible for taking, typing and disseminating meeting minutes each month. DM requested the Board develop a Subcommittee to address the financial and budget issues ERICD currently faces. DM will meet with Ramona and Emerson to develop ideas/plans and report back next month.
- G. NACD Did You Know Board Self-Evaluation Results – Requested by D. Went, NACD Treasurer** – DM has tabulated the results of this evaluation. DM is providing the results to ERICD Board before forwarding results to Dick Went as requested. Board approved sending the results to Dick Went as he requested to complete this task.
- H. RI SCC Personnel Subcommittee:** DM stated that she had nothing to report on this item this month.

VII. New Business

- A. RI Farm Bureau Membership Dues** – ERICD's RIFB membership dues were due at the end of 2013. DM requested a Board decision on paying ERICD's RIFB membership dues. Suzanne moved that ERICD pay the dues. Ron seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.
- B. NACD Membership Dues** – Last year (2013) ERICD sent \$100.00 to NACD for membership dues. The requested amount in 2013 is the same as 2014: \$775.00. Considering that Dick Went is now the Treasurer of the NACD and the NACD Regional Conference will be held in Newport, RI (ERICD's District), DM requested the pleasure of the Board regarding sending membership dues to NACD this year. Suzanne moved to send \$100.00 in membership dues now and send more contributions later in the year if ERICD is able (to be decided at an undetermined future time). Ron seconded this motion and the motion passed unanimously.
- C. NACD Updates/ News** – Jean Lynch attended the annual NACD meeting. The Farm Bill passed but RI legislators voted against it. The SCC has hired a new Executive Assistant who started on Jan 22, 2013 and is training as Ramona's replacement.
- D. RI Envirothon Request for Contribution** – Emerson suggested sending a \$50 contribution. Suzanne made a motion the ERICD send a \$50 contribution to the RI Envirothon. Ron seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Adjourned at 9:10 PM

Next Meeting: March 11, 2014 at 7:00pm