



## VERMONT URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY COUNCIL

VT Urban & Community Forestry Program  
1 National Life Drive, Davis 2  
Montpelier, VT 05620-3801

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### Quarterly Council Meeting

March 13, 2023

### Microsoft Teams

#### Meeting Minutes

*Attendees:* Elise Schadler, Richard Amore, Ann Hazelrigg, Bill Jewell, Cecilia Danks, Chris Company, Darren Schibler, Megan Davin, Bonnie Donahue, Savannah Ferreira, Joanne Garton, Danielle Gift, Ginger Nickerson, Gwen Kozlowski, Josh Behounek, Adam McCullough, Tessa McGann, Mike Fallis, Sara Packer, Timothy Parsons, Katarzyna Janiga

#### **Welcome & Council Business**

- There was a brief overview of the [December meeting minutes](#), which were accepted. Discussions at the December meeting included grants, an update on the town Forest Census, as well as strategic planning.

#### **Remembering Jarlath O'Neill-Dunne**

- UCF Council members took a moment to remember Jarlath O'Neill Dunne, who passed away in January.

#### **Council Member Survey Results and Strategic Discussion**

- Goals:
  - Understand federal requirements and how other urban and community forestry state councils operate.
  - Review and discuss survey results.
  - Generate ideas on how to create a sustainable, effective, and beneficial framework for both Council members and program staff.
- The Farm Bill in 1991 established Urban Forestry programs – every state must adhere to four requirements to get funding from the US Forest Service (USFS).
  - Urban and Community Program Forestry Coordinator (Elise Schadler)
  - Volunteer/Partnership Coordination (Gwen Kozlowski)
  - Urban and Community Forestry Council
  - State program strategic planning.
- States may implement these requirements in numerous ways to meet their unique state legal and program needs (including use of grants, contracts, and/or agreements).
- Failure to comply with the requirements results in an adjustment of annual state allocations by the Region/International Institute of Tropical Forestry until all four elements are satisfied. To receive full funding, each State shall document that it meets the program requirements in its annual grant narrative.
- In 2014, efforts were made to put together program guidance for state urban forestry programs, which included a section on councils:
  - Each state will have a broad-based UCF Council that consists of governmental agencies, industry professionals, academic institutions, nonprofit and community based



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organizations and grassroots volunteers concerned with urban and community forestry and reflects diverse public participation.

- States are encouraged to utilize the Council to expand delivery of the state program, leverage external resources, grow public/private partnerships, and build a vibrant statewide constituency empowered to promote urban forestry statewide.
- The Council is at minimum required to advise/assist the State Forester in the development of program emphasis, priorities, implementation, and periodic review and revision of the 5-Year State Strategic Plan/State Forest Action Plan.
- UCF Council Handbook:
  - The purpose of the Council shall be to advise the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program, a joint initiative of FPR, the University of Vermont Extension on policy development, program direction, a competitive grants program, and evaluation of the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program's effectiveness within Vermont communities.
  - The Council shall also foster understanding and appreciation of the benefits and values of trees and forests, to ensure the most beneficial and economical of urban and community forestry policies are adopted throughout Vermont.

### Comparison of UCF State Councils in the Northeastern United States:

	Vermont	Connecticut	Iowa	Massachusetts	Maine	Michigan	New York	Wisconsin
How many members?	20	17	30ish	30ish on the board	12	15	371 as of 2020; 34-member board	24
Member composition	Professional	Professional	Professional	Geographic	Both geographic and professional	Both geographic and professional	Geographic	Both geographic and professional
Are there term limits?	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes but w/option of 2 renewals (9 years max)	yes	no
Function: is the Council solely advisory, a board, a nonprofit, etc.?	solely advisory	nonprofit	nonprofit	nonprofit	solely advisory	solely advisory	nonprofit	solely advisory
Annually: frequency/format/length of meetings	3 in-person full-day, 1 virtual 1/2 day	5 annual meetings; half day with field activity; hybrid	5 annual 2-hour meetings plus 2-3 events	board meets monthly in-person for a half day meeting, including lunch - one field day in the summer; membership meeting annually	once annually for a 1/2 day meeting	2 1/2 day meetings and 1 brief 1-hour check-in. Since the pandemic they have all been virtual meetings.	board meets 3x annually (2 virtual, 1 before the annual conference) - typically 2 hours; updates from committees plus new/old business; membership 1x annually before the conference	3 full-day in-person meetings, 1 half-day virtual
Primary activities of Council	strategic planning, grant review, some participation in annual conference	advocacy, runs a grants program, workshops, conference, education	celebrate great work happening statewide, serve as professional networking opportunity, information exchange	advocacy, training, workshops, seedling giveaway, conference, education	strategic planning, grant review	advise on strategic direction, grant review (there is a grants subcommittee)	run a grants program, advocacy, training, workshops, conference, education	advise on strategic direction, advocacy (every other year they submit a biennial report to the state forester)
Have you initiated any major changes to Council membership, meetings, activities, or mission/purpose during your tenure as Coordinator?	handbook (by-laws) have been simplified (dissolved Executive Committee)	thinking about it	yes, the council became a nonprofit in 2018	not recently	Council used to be a nonprofit, but that did not work out. The group dissolved and for a long time it was just 5 people, but they've been slowly rebuilding.	Recently developed a handbook, otherwise no	not recently	10 years ago the council formed issued groups (workforce development, urban wood utilization, advocacy, stormwater, public health) and some are more active than others.
Funding	none	2 separate FS grants, funded from state allocation	partial state allocation	partially state allocation	none	none	separate FS grant, funded from state allocation	WI's UCF program has a LTE position partially dedicated to planning the meetings, creating agendas, taking minutes, etc.

- Range of membership on each state UCF Council
- Member Composition: since states focus on prioritizing professional diversities (like Vermont), other states focus more on geographic diversity and try to ensure that a representative from each region is involved.
- Most states have term limits – Vermont does not.



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- Function: some states (like Vermont) are advisory, other groups are nonprofits separately from their state Urban Forestry program.
- Meetings: vary, most states strive for a mixture of in-person and virtual meetings
- Primary activities: strategic planning and advocacy are a common theme.
  - Some UCF Councils are also non-profits that run their own grant programs.
- State First Action Plan Updates are coming up – the next round is in 2025; there will be a role for Urban Forestry Councils in those updates.

### Survey Results

- In February, Elise sent out a survey to Council members about the council's role, as well as its future, filled out by 17 out of 18 members.
  - Goal: gather data about the role of Vermont's Council and the format and purposes of the meetings.
- Frequency of meetings (4 meetings a year):
  - 64%: quarterly meetings work well
  - 12%: quarterly meetings work well, virtual meetings preferred to in-person meetings
  - 6%: quarterly meetings with topical sub-committees
  - 6%: quarterly meetings, all in-person
  - 6%: prefer less meetings, but all in-person
  - 6%: full Council should meet less, but topical sub-committees should meet in-between full Council meetings
- Duration of In-Person Meetings:
  - 35%: 9:00 am – 1:00 pm (half-day)
  - 26%: 9:00 am – 3:00 pm (full-day)
  - 26%: 10:00 am – 2:00 pm (half-day)
  - 9%: 12:00 pm – 4:00 pm (half-day)
  - 4%: Don't have an opinion
- Future Council Meetings/Field Trip Locations:
  - I don't mind travelling around the state for quarterly meetings. Hopefully the grant projects will give us some candidates for tours soon. Would be great to see the work Rutland City is doing.
  - USDA Forestry Program, administration of conservation and operation funding.
  - Downtowns or villages doing good work, perhaps St. Albans? Or visit some town forests, state park, nursery, tree farm, Shelburne Farms, or even private properties doing innovative work.
  - Crossing the border to see what other states are doing.
  - Northfield? Norwich University takes great care of their trees.
  - Chestnut Orchard HRC, South Burlington
  - Central place, like Montpelier.
  - VAEL Lab, North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier.
  - Tour of floodplain access improvements made in Brattleboro in the Whetstone Brook Floodplain to mitigate flooding of downtown and elsewhere downstream. To that end, would also like to see more projects or potential projects that integrate urban and



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community forestry with climate adaptation and resilience – especially flood and heat resilience.

- Having field trips correlate to issues the Council is trying to solve.
- Meeting Logistics:
  - Good to move the meetings to various locations throughout the state.
  - Current mix of quarterly meetings with one virtual, one longer with field trip; fewer full group meetings with topical subgroup meetings in between.
  - Subcommittee meetings in between larger meetings.
  - Member-driven agenda/more input on agendas.
  - Polling members to see when they are most available for meetings.
- Why are you involved with the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Council?
  - Allied profession, general interest, community support.
  - Networking.
  - Personal interest.
  - Program support.
  - Urban forestry critical to social and ecological well-being
  - To know what is happening around the state.
- What do you think the Council should consider doing?
  - 10: Advocacy, such as drafting a legislative letter
  - 9: Hosting events, such as the program's annual awards.
  - 9: Regularly contributing to the program's newsletter.
  - 5: Seeking sponsorship for UCF programming.
  - 1: Our membership doesn't have the capacity to take on additional activities.
- Executive/Leadership Committee:
  - Originally there was an Executive Committee with four members (president, vice-president, two other members) that set the agenda. There was a 2-year rotation that went through. Since the pandemic, the format has been eliminated and there is a 2-member Leadership Committee selected through an alphabetical rotation. Questions on survey were regarding the new format, and whether it is working well.
  - 53%: The system is working well.
  - 23%: Executive committee should be more involved in developing the meeting agenda and in the running of the meeting.
  - 12%: The agendas should come from the staff based on their needs.
  - 6%: Defer to staff as to what is most helpful.
  - 6%: New to board, so don't know.
- Meetings most useful when time is spent:
  - 0: Sharing UCF program updates and work.
  - 0: Learning from site visits or invited guest presenters.
  - 0: Networking with Council members.
  - 3: Participating in planning and strategic conversations.
  - 14: Balance of all these things.

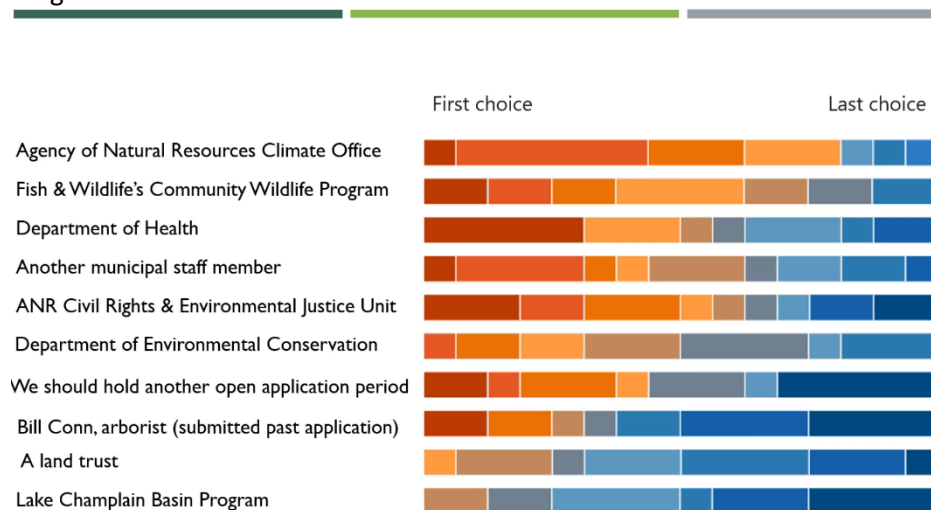


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- What is the balance between making this Council benefit the memberships vs. making the Council benefit the state program? At what point, if you focus too much on one of those goals, does it tip to make it so it's reaching the potential benefit to the program?
- One of the reasons for the survey is a little bit more information on why you are a member of the UCF – is it because you want to participate in strategic planning conversations, should this be more of a networking group?
- Topics you'd like to see incorporated into or removed from the 2024 Agenda:
  - Unsure whether Council itself should be directly involved in advocacy, sponsorship, or newsletter contributions.
  - How smaller communities in Vermont may be able to share resources to meet urban forestry goals.
  - How could the council help inform future legislation/funding opportunities. Immense opportunity for Council to engage more in climate/resilience/adaptation/equity space.
  - More time to discuss/interact – strategic conversations tricky in large group.
  - Explore urban and community forestry and its role in conserving, restoring, maintaining floodplain access and river, stream, lake, pond, and other buffers/corridors.
  - UCF Council to reach out to VTrans, VEM, ACCD, Ag, and other agencies for opportunities for collaboration, needs, and removing barriers to collaborations.
- 20-Member Council
  - 76%: 20 feels about right.
  - 18% 20 is too many.
  - 6%: Expand membership to include additional voices.
- Council Representation:
  - 62%: Current membership is relevant and accurate
  - 38%: Agree with some parts of membership breakdown and think others should be changed.
- Vacancy Ranking:



- Additional thoughts about Council membership?
  - Council operated on the principle of leveraging networks.
  - Potential value in having a student representative from UVM.



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- Is the UCF program getting what they need from the Council and its meetings?
- Clear breakdown of what everyone's roles are.
- What would make UCF Council more valuable to you?
  - More small group discussions structured into meetings would help better with information sharing and maintaining interest.
  - More opportunities to contribute in ways that are useful to UCF staff.
  - The UCF Council has impact as a catalyst for thought and action, the benefits of which might not be readily or immediately apparent.
  - Opportunities to help.
  - Feeling more like a network.
  - Broader application of its resources to climate adaptation and resilience.

### Strategic Discussion and Thoughts

- Richard Amore: drop one of quarterly meetings to three (December is usually challenging)
  - Having two in-person meetings and one virtual would also be more manageable by dropping some of the responsibilities of preparing and setting up meetings.
  - Would be nice to leverage this opportunity in flood resilience and climate change, and to think more strategically.
  - Programs can dive into this space with all the kinds of incoming realities of the world in which we live in with equity and inclusion, climate change, how can our programs support these issues which are rising in importance daily.
- Cecilia Danks: rather than asking if items are valuable to the individuals participating, we should flip this and ask if it is valuable to the mission of Urban and Community Forestry in general – one may not always serve the other but may be filling in different gaps.
  - Think of where our relative strengths are in achieving the mission, as opposed to one of those supporting the other.
  - While this is a volunteer committee, we have heavily relied on staff to develop and run these meetings, which may not be necessary (though there are limits to a volunteer committee).
- Bonnie Donahue: Council members should help staff more effectively; currently feel like it is unbalanced because members should contribute a bit more.
  - Not everyone has the chance to talk during meetings – some talk more than others, and it would be good to ensure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Chris Company: strategic planning process to Council useful – feels like there is a potential shift in the scope and scale of Council's mission and goals.
  - There will be a lot of shifts in what we consider to be community forestry, which may be urban-related, though not necessarily in urban areas.
  - Re-awakening at all levels: the roles of vegetation, public vegetation, keeping communities where they are, keeping roads where they are.
  - Currently the floodplain restoration project is owned and managed by a public housing organization, which will likely be more prominent.
  - If we start planning for compact settlement away and expanding it from floodplains and river corridors, also talking about community forests that benefit these compact





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settlements that are not even within the limit of those spaces – how do we talk about stewarding access to these places?

- Bill Jewell: Should look at the Ring River project, which is affecting multiple towns in Vermont and Massachusetts – currently far along in the planning and restoration process.
  - Potentially break down to smaller groups to hear from more people in Council.
- Adam McCullough: would like some feedback on articles for the newsletter, so that they're peer reviewed by members of Council before being published.
  - Some of the writing pieces are strictly localized to Vermont, or testing out theories, developing new ideas - feedback would be extremely appreciated.
  - UCF Council should be a place to dream big about forestry and not necessarily just come back to the nuts and bolts, and reasons why things can't be done.
  - UCF Council should expand outwards – increasing Council size is a way to work towards those larger goals.
- Joanne Garton: benefit to have so many different experts on Council.
- Gwen Kozlowski: attending the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Conference always beneficial – allows staff a chance to branch out.
- Sara Packer: How can the Council benefit the Urban and Community Forestry program in the most optimal way? What does that look like? How can that be structured?
- Darren Schibler: survey and discussion have not identified that there are a lot of things not going very well – unless there is something program staff has identified as not working well, then the biggest benefit to this Council would be to have smaller group-focused topic discussions.
- Josh Behounek: appreciate the challenge of crafting an agenda meaningful for attendees.
  - Further updates on how work within different agencies support the Council's mission and strategic plans. Will allow others to participate more.
- Elise Schadler: Council typically asks about 25-hours/annually in commitment – what is the most effective way each member can use those hours, knowing that everyone here appreciates the balance of the network, the field trips and face-to-face time.
  - Potentially reduce meeting time or alter the meetings.
  - Might make more sense to make the March meeting a full-day strategic planning meeting and potentially eliminate one of the other meetings.
  - Field trips can be more relevant to the work done by the Council.
  - Would love to make a subcommittee and ask for some help in a month or so to have a meeting around some of these ideas.
  - Reporting: currently doing 3 different kinds of reporting – there is another process improvement item that we need to do that will make our reporting a lot easier and might look like changing the quarterly program report,

### Program Updates

- Grants:
  - Had 49 grant applications in 3 categories that were due in January 2024.
  - Had \$750,000 from the Inflation Reduction Act – we had said we were going to give out half of that this year, but gave away most of it because of the volume of applications.
  - Funding needed to go to disadvantaged communities as defined by US Forst Service metrics.



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- Caring for Canopy: upped the minimum to \$5,000 – 9 projects selected.
  - Grants between \$5,000 - \$25,000.
  - Mostly towns - tried to recruit some nonprofits.
- Growing Urban Forests in the Face of Emerald Ash Borer: 7 projects selected.
  - \$126,000 towards ash removals and replanting.
  - All work is done within one-mile radius of designated center.
- Urban & Community Forestry Grants: 12 projects selected.
  - Mostly \$50,000 awards – no match
  - All happening in census blocks defined as disadvantaged.
  - Gave away \$510,000 – will have \$120,000 next year.
- Vermont Garden Network: fruit and nut tree grant program.
  - 50 applications for \$8,000. 12 projects selected.
- Block ARPA Grants:
  - More flexibility in how funds are used and distributed - looking to distribute \$630,000 in sub grants over 2 rounds.
  - First round: hope to launch April 1<sup>st</sup> – project deadline mid-May, awards out in June.
  - Second round: will go with annual UCF grant program in December, January, and February.
  - Hoping to bundle smaller projects to get a range of project sizes.
  - Need to plant 2,000 trees with a limited budget and want to ensure those trees end up in places that historically don't get funding.
  - Guide for grants almost finished webpage finished, working on application form – selection criteria for projects finished.
  - Looking for a couple members to serve on the selection committee – approximately 10 hours per grant round.
  - Can serve on first round, second round, or both = looking to make selection the week of May 20<sup>th</sup> for the first round.
- Growing Work of Arts Contest: voting round launched March 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Tree Stewards Awards – hosting at annual conference.
  - Looking for nominations for several categories
- Registration open for Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Conference
  - Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 8:30 am – 3:30 pm. Vermont State College – Randolph Campus
  - Keynote Speaker: Danielle Fitzko

### Planning for Federal Fiscal Year '24: Out Year of Responsibilities

- FY2024 – October 1, 2024 – September 30, 2025
  - Approximately \$500,000 has already been allocated to other grant categories, staff would like to try new initiatives.
  - Anticipate having \$85,000
- Considerations: lean years ahead, political landscape may change and support for urban forestry may go down. With increased staff, also want to do more.
- UCF Council Activity – Choose How to Spend \$85,000
  - UCF Staff pitched 26 possible projects.



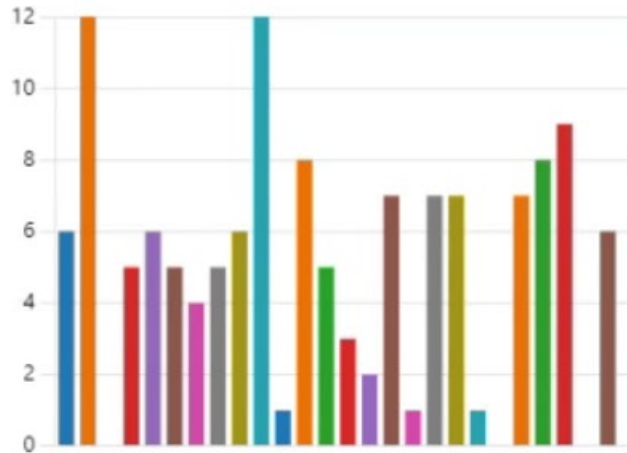


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- Goal for session is for members to review the pitches and provide thoughts, insights, and recommendations on how to spend this funding.



12: Affordable Housing Partnerships  
12: Growing Futures:  
9: Urban Forestry Teacher Tour  
8: Legislative Event  
8: UCF Tree Nursery  
7: School Tree Planting Program  
7: Strategic Planning: UCF Council  
7: Tool Library  
7: UCF Study Abroad  
6: Advancing Tree Equity  
6: Branching Out: Free Tree Program  
6: Fruitful Futures: School Orchard

5: Black Forest  
5: Climbing Gear to Get People into Trees  
5: Fruit and Nut Trees at Libraries  
5: Library Project  
4: Front Yard Tree Planting  
3: New Shade for Old Homes  
2: Pruning and Maintenance Services  
1: Implementing Justice and Equity  
1: Tree Guard Maker Prize  
0: Tree Vitalize  
0: Urban Tree Corps  
0: At Risk Ash Tree Removal

- Vincent Comai: many of these dollars could be stretched by partnering with other organizations (i.e. School planting initiatives with Branch out Burlington)
- Adam and Elise looking at technical centers and UCF staff's role in being a presence and exposing folks in those programs to the culture or urban and community forestry.