



VERMONT URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY COUNCIL

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

Elise Schadler, Program Manager
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Quarterly Council Meeting December 11, 2024 Montpelier, VT

Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Elise Schadler, Chris Campany, VC Comai, Bronwyn Cook, Cecilia Danks, Bonnie Donahue, Joanne Garton, Jens Hilke, Evan Horn, Emily Inoue, Katarzyna Janiga, Gwen Kozlowski, Melissa Levy, Adam McCullough, Bob McCullough, Tessa McGann, Ginger Nickerson, Sara Packer, Tim Parsons, Tim Smith, Joe Upter, Scott Wunderle.

Federal and State Program Updates

- Federal Program Updates
 - Haven't received FY24 funds (which funds Gwen's position)
 - Reason for lag: UCF receives \$1.6 billion annually, however the grants department has been slammed and unable to get everything; would like to bundle FY24 & FY25
 - IRA funding is out – UCF funding will be pushed out quickly
 - There is concern for the new administration; have sub-awardees invoice often and soon (expect an unpredictable first couple of months)
 - Administration change – the last administration awarded \$0 to UCD, however, strong advocates pushed for funding, which UCF received; need to lean on partners to push
 - Storytelling is a big theme so we can push our work and why it's important
 - National UCF Program is currently revising their 10-Year Action Plan
- State Program Updates
 - Staffing – UCF program is fully staffed (5 team members)
 - Forestry Division Strategic planning is in progress
 - ARPA - \$1 million
 - Funds Adam's position – not at risk of losing funding
 - FEMA Project
 - Navigation assistance with buyout properties
 - Not funded; small working group with Vermont Land Trust and Vermont Community Development
 - USFS Landscape Scale Restoration Project submitted
 - Continuation of Women in the Woods
 - One-time funding request: Vermont Community Canopy and Tree Planting Grant
- 2024 Highlights
 - Technical and educational assistance FY24
 - 132 Communities assisted
 - UCF Database made by IT to track community metrics (can give access to UCF Council members)
 - 112 district-assisted events
 - 11,000 volunteer hours



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- Grants
 - Over \$1 million to give out
 - UCF (IRA) - \$500,000 match-free – 12 projects
 - USFS eliminated Growing Urban Forests in EAB
 - Communities Caring for Canopy
 - Community tree planting events (ARPA)
- 2025: \$430,000 available; applications due January 10th
 - Two categories: Planting and Maintenance/Removal
- Savannah and Evan volunteered to serve on Communities Caring for Canopy
- Vermont Community Canopy
 - Gwen's program
 - Crested the 5000-tree mark; 1500 trees given out
 - ARPA funding extended to 2025; planning for contract growing in 2026
- UCF program had 3 interns over the summer: Lila Turner, Tate Mullins and Dominick, who worked on a storymap titled \$3 million over 30 Years, worked on arboricultural skills, and worked with an attorney to create a liability agreement
- Recognition:
 - Gwen: Leahy Institute Recognition, nursery tour at the Intervale
 - Ginger: Forest Pest detection for outdoor recreation organizations and trail managers (106 participants), Arrive Clean, Leave Clean campaign
 - Adz: inroads with BGS and AoT – led pruning workshops on BGS properties
 - Joanne: Town Forest Stewardship toolkit, will be attending the Green Communities Leadership Institute
 - Elise: New England ISA Vermont State representative, member of the ANR Environmental Justice Working Group
- Chicago Conference
 - [National Urban Tree Canopy Map/Layer](#): help guide communities on improvements
 - [Tree Equity Score](#) (National Explorer): places without tree canopy because of no investment
 - Equity Handbook: how to build stakeholder trust and investment
 - The Canopy Report: survey result – want more urban forestry and trees
 - Green Schoolyards America: push more strategic afforestation of schoolyards
- Affinity groups across – can look outside for Vermont for help
- Municipal Conference: technology to advance tree management and for social sciences

Vermont Town Forest Census Update

- 67,000+ acres in 168 municipalities in Vermont (as of 2007)
 - Provide information to assist organizations, universities and towns
- Census – try to get response from every member of the population
- Why census now?
 - Want to update the list of forest areas surrounding local government entities
 - Get perspectives from the communities themselves
 - Build community, share information and lay groundwork for peer learning



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- Multi-Step
 - Develop advisory community and guide definitions and focus
 - Census form developed in Qualtrics with iterative review
 - Outreach to every Vermont town: how many forests? Who is the 'steward' of each?
 - Deploy census by forest in cohorts
 - Match mapping efforts when census is returned
- Preliminary findings from Cohort #1
 - Sent to 135 forests in 10/25/24
 - 78 responses to date: 17,426 acres
 - Average 223-acre forests
 - Minimum: 7 acres
 - Maximum: 1650 acres
 - Preliminary analysis in highlights:
 - Challenges stewards face
 - Assistance needs/interests
 - Post-Covid trends
 - If time: casting too wide a net for "town forest" focus
- Challenges
 - 8 major challenges; 22 minor
 - Top challenges (major)
 - Ensuring access
 - Constructing and maintaining for managing trail network
 - Securing funding
 - Top challenges (minor)
 - Protecting ecological features and functions
 - Managing conflicts
 - Finding volunteers
 - Communities' awareness of forest
- Top interest topics
 - Invasive species
 - Monitoring wildlife and environmental impacts
 - Trail/road maintenance
 - Opportunities to learn from other town forests
 - Ecological assessment
- What is a town forest?
 - Lots of forest land not known as 'town forests'
 - Local definitions collected
 - Parks and conservation areas
- Land Management Records – Community owned forests in New England
 - Goes back 400 years
 - Community woodland part of town planning history
 - Town forests represent the first campaign on parts of towns
 - Introduced scientific forestry practices in the communities



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- Town forest movement (1915 in Vermont)
- Create solutions communities achieved in planning forests
- Challenges – separating natural and cultural resources
- Need more protected corridors of connectivity
- Types of records that exist this type of history
 - Annual reports of reforestation communities in town reports
- Beyond the Census? How to Best Support
 - Expanded listserv
 - Advisory committee
 - How to maintain website or online stop
 - Standing session at UCF Conference
 - Town forest summit?
 - Brave Little State podcast

Strategic Planning (Setting the State)

- Defined problem:
 - Program has changed and matured over the part of 30 years. The structure and function of Council adapted to meet these changes
 - Lack of clarity as to specific role of the Council is currently, there is a supply and demand issue: we have a supply of expertise in members but is unclear what is the demographic from staff and program
 - No strategic plan for program: 5-Year Action plan has been used since 2016 doesn't identify long-term goals

Revisioning the Council Format & Schedule

- Proposed changes to the Vermont UCF Council:
 - Eliminate the executive committee
 - Revisit council representation (14 assigned, 6 ad hoc)
 - Pilot UCF subcommittees
- Launch New Schedule
 - January – June: at least one subcommittee meeting
 - June 11th – field trip
 - June – December: at least one subcommittee meeting
 - December 10th – in-person meeting in Montpelier

Proposed UCF Council Subcommittees

- Agency Partnerships & Collaboration (Elise)
 - Cross-agency and organization collaboration
 - Gaps + funding
 - Coordination among tech assistance provides and reduces competition for limited volunteer capacity/bandwidth
 - Bring in county foresters more – we do so much with community forests – Tessa can help



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- Identify intersecting areas (Venn Diagram) – can help identify partner resources/expertise
- Understand relevant programs at other agencies and areas for connectivity
- Joint program (fund and design) to plant trees on VTrans municipal projects
- Connect funding sources that different departments/agencies offer to promote urban and community forestry
- Grown workforce with Eco AmeriCorps in December
- Identify conflicting goals/objectives between Agencies as related to urban and community forestry
- Money: Program Support & Sponsorship Committee (Gwen) & Non-Profit Model for UCF in Vermont (Joanne)
 - Provide program with increased flexibility for programming (Gwen)
 - Discuss current logistics and funding gaps presented by the lack of a Vermont-based non-profit on urban and community forestry to identify models of non-profit formats that could grow into filling the gap (Joanne)
 - Tap into organizations or nonprofits who have money and an overlapping mission
 - Small grant applications
 - Clearly identify what money can/will be used for
 - ACCD conference could be a precedent for this
 - Public/private partnerships – see conversation finance network
 - Draft fundraising letter – list of potential funders
 - Identify specific business/corporate sponsorships – meetings, conferences, initiatives, tree planting
 - Opportunities for investment – targets for investment? Who to ask?
 - Huge need for money/assistance for trailer parks!
 - Scan potential existing nonprofits with similar objectives, alignment with goals (look at USFS Stewardship mapping resources)
 - Understand demand – do we need more nonprofits?
 - Survey tree/community forestry non-profits with other similar states for their structure, etc. (NYC does public partnerships well)
 - Clarify what kinds of projects/activities this nonprofit would be involved with
 - Similar model as Vermont Parks Forever?
- Arboriculture Subcommittee (Adz)
 - Municipalities to integrate trees as infrastructure
 - Form network of ISA Certified Arborists willing to donate time to train and advise municipalities
 - Network for Vermont based arborists to share/promote training opportunities, could trickle down to local decision-makers
 - Hotline → centralized location for questions, group of volunteer arborists who respond
 - New specs for planting and maintenance for UCF grants
 - Maybe circle of arborists who go where needed
 - Ask town managers what they need, base outreach on needs
- Parking Lot



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- Need a “woo-woo” committee – the gap identified was in outreach (Facebook, etc.)
- Sort of related to above: committee to coordinate education effort with organizations like VWA & Coverts → how do we get VWA to include communities in their mission?
- Connections to research, both in Vermont and regionally
- Legislative Letter from UCF Council – messaging for a variety of audiences: why should people care?
- Ample opportunity for sub-committee work to re-integrate back into strategic work plan that aligns with and advances goals
- Tree nurseries
- Town Forest Support
- Ties with affordable housing for valuable communities