

## **Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Advisory Council: Agency Subcommittee**

Spring 2025 Working Meeting

April 15<sup>th</sup>, Catamount Conference Room of National Life Building

### Meeting Minutes

#### **9:30: Introductions & Review of Subcommittee Goals (see below)**

##### Introductions:

- Neva Cote: Dept. of Health; Chronic disease prevention. Healthy community design – walk and bike-ability, access to public green spaces, access to fresh healthy food. Works regularly with municipalities (parks/rec, walk/bike councils, planning commissions): provides data and working through processes to provide support. Asthma program (health systems down to community level – address air quality – works specifically with schools. Climate Smart Schoolyards partner; thinking about heat vulnerability, social vulnerability, pre-existing access to shaded places.
- Evan Horne: Climate Action Office; developing municipal climate framework for municipalities to create their own local climate plans, developing a climate toolkit, developing resilience strategy for state government.
- Emilie Inoue: Agency of Agriculture, Plant Health Team Lead; deals with introduced invasive plant pests; insects, pathogens, federal alignment (USDA) and work with other states, deal with imports of plant commodities into Vermont as well as exports of plants. Conduct pest surveys and run the nursery inspection program (500 registered nurseries). Close relationships with FPR. Hold statutes and policies around movement of pests – quarantines. DEI and environmental protection field are very important to their team; focusing on language shift and are drivers of this movement.
- Savannah Ferriera: Forest Health Team at FPR; focus on forest pests – outreach and informing land managers and municipalities about infestations and management options. Biocontrol agents (EAB and HWA), ramping up surveys for other pests. Intersect a lot of with municipalities – forests along the spectrum.
- Bonnie Donahue: AOT Landscape Architect; the sole landscape architect at VTrans – fits in as a subject matter expert in all things plants and grass in an agency whose focus is really safety and maintained roads. Reviews projects and works closely with the VTrans Biologist. Advocates for plants but has found that going with an ecological route has been successful. Project Delivery Bureau, Planning, Policy, and Intermodal Development, Municipal Assistance Bureau, Maintenance, DMV.
- Jeff Dube: Dept. of Housing & Community Development, walkable downtowns, walkable centers, character: policy level. Street tree requirements within the public realm but phasing out with Act 181 (Act 250 reform). Regional land use maps from the Regional Planning Commissions will recognize formerly designated areas; the designation program will be sunset and will live as areas now as part of RPC mapping.
- Chris Campany: Windham RPC; supports Windham regional towns – develop regional plans, establish land use policy (intersect with Land Use Review Board, Public Utilities Commission), work closely and very directly with municipalities. Each RPC director serves as a point person on certain topic; Chris covers emergency preparedness and response and conservation. RPCs serve municipalities in countless capacities; everything from how to run a meeting to accessing state and federal funding, convening town staff across topic areas. Supporting town access to hazard mitigation grants – increasing capacity. Engaged with assessing actual capacity of local government, which is a huge challenge for New England.

Really going have to figure out how to help towns achieve large conservation projects in light of diminished federal support. Plan for greater self-reliance.

- Jens Hilke: F&W Conservation Planner (268 municipalities!). Community Wildlife Program: technical assistance to municipalities in land use planning – patterns on the landscape of connected forests and waterways and planning for development. VT Conservation Design. 1) Webinars, 2) Environmental Leadership Training (technical science + soft skills), 3) Direct TA – one person for the entire state, so must be selective. Theory of change; mover/shaker + opportunity + the expertise/TA.
- Caroline Paske: VEM; coordinate and develop state hazard mitigation plan; connected, there are local plans that each municipality has. Town opportunity to develop risk-based action list to adapt to climate change. VEM also manages local emergency management plans (response). Manage grant programs – Hazard Mitigation funds connected to specific disasters; tend to focus on flooding here in VT. BRIC grant – recent sunset of this grant program by the new fed administration. Flood resilient community fund (ARPA): mostly focused on buy-outs. Encourage floodplain restoration, culvert replacement, anything that reduces risk.

#### Review of Subcommittee Goals:

1. UCF is known and recognized across agencies and departments, and appropriate collaborations can occur to advance programmatic goals.
2. Messaging about urban and community forestry in Vermont is consistent across state agencies and key NGO partnerships.
3. Progress towards urban forestry and related goals is more streamlined and efficient because of better collaboration between partners.

#### **10:00:** Discussion: Impacts of recent and forthcoming federal actions and priorities on our collective work

##### Caroline:

- VEM is continuing to plan, planning for an optimistic future for nature-based solutions for risk reduction re: climate change. This includes trees and playgrounds, green infrastructure, buffers, UHIE.
- Caroline will share guidance from FEMA on hazard planning requirements; we need to be consistent with what FEMA is doing/use FEMA's guidance and several big changes including deletion of underserved population as a focus audience for outreach – this no longer a requirement. Towns need to follow open meeting law but there are no longer any teeth to require targeted outreach for underserved populations.
- Additionally, towns no longer need to include climate change in future projections. Risk/hazard can be based on just historic events. The aspects that made the plans meaningful for future plans have now been removed.
- Despite this, VEM will continue to keep messaging the same to towns. May coordinate with RPCs to introduce requirements at the state level, in the absence of federal requirements.
- Loss of FEMA BRIC funding source; this was funding used to hire RPCs to write the town hazard plans – 30 towns that thought they were getting FY23 funding will not. This is impacting very small towns and individuals (seeking buy-outs). Will also impact RPCs.

##### Elise:

- We are still waiting on federal fiscal year 24 funding; we are hearing that because of the continued resolution, we will likely receive level funding for FFY25 but beyond that is unknown.

- Largest felt impact so far is the loss of USFS staff; in the northeastern area (Region 9), UCF program has gone from 12 to 3 to cover entire 20-state area. Many long-term, impactful, passionate partners have taken the buyout. Our scaffolding/organization is crumbling.

Chris:

- Similarly seeing mass retirement/buy-outs of federal employees.
- He takes a very broad view of urban and community forests and feels we will need to be expansive and creative.
- FEMA is at risk, at some point we have to believe they're going to do what they say they're going to do.
- Ambiguity: maybe the grants we've counted on will exist, maybe they won't. Transportation funding – assume it will be safe (second biggest source of funding). DHCD funding is the primary source of funding for RPCS. Will we still have emergency planners? At the town level, he's seeing lots of denial. Encouraging towns to be more self-reliant, trying to prepare them for what is likely coming. RPCs tend to be 90-95% grant funded.

Jens:

- F&W Conservation in VT – overwhelmingly funded by hunters and fishers through taxes on guns and rods, with 80:20 fed/state match.
- Non-game work (state wildlife grants) are very much at risk; 1/3 of the division.
- They are not evening hoping to do anything more than keep the lights on for the foreseeable future. If we can keep the lights on, that would be amazing. Work plan for the next 4 years: go local. Don't look up.

Emilie:

- Ag – concerned about APHIS/Plant Protection Quarantine – communication with fed partners has been off and on.
- They did decide that surveying for emergent pests might be a good idea to continue so funding streams okay for now.
- ~25% cut in staff with federal plant protection/quarantine. Feeling fortunate in the Plant Health section but seeing impact with audiences and other work in the Agency.

Jeff:

- DHCD – has historically shied away from federal funding, so has not hit the program directly.
- CDBG grant – has had to change language in the narrative.
- Richard Amore took the buyout – loss of connection with USDA Rural Development. That was a big loss.

Savannah:

- Pathologists have taken the buyout, approved for 7 biocontrol releases, largely moving ahead but trying to shift from dependence on USDA labs.

Evan:

- >80% climate funds are federal. Many efforts are on pause right now.
- Guided by an interagency board – big conversation about funding – can follow up. State office as the CAO – staying the course.

- NOAA climate capacity eliminated. VT was also called out in an EO last week for the climate superfund act. Current work is proceeding on that, but the CAO is also currently being sued by CLF (for not meeting greenhouse gas targets) so it's a lot.

Neva:

- Climate & Health Program: infectious disease and health disparity funding sources (\$1mil?) eliminated.
- CDC grants – COVID related – have been cut. Like everyone else, waiting to see.

### 10:30: Urban & Community Forestry and Green Infrastructure in Vermont: context and history

We'll review program history and primary audiences and activities, and will consider the program's strategic plan, which is in development (refer to bottom pages).

### 11:00: Building the Web: Past, Existing, and Potential Agency Collaborations

Get ready to use the whiteboard, whip out the sticky notes, and get the creative juices flowing.

AOT = Agency of Transportation

Ag = Agency of Agriculture

FPR = Dept of Forests, Parks & Recreation

UCF = Urban & Community Forestry

DHCD = Dept Housing & Com. Development (ACCD)

CAO = Climate Action Office

F&W = Fish & Wildlife

DOH = Dept. of Health

VEM = Vermont Emergency Management

RPC = Regional Planning Commissions

#### PAST COLLABORATIONS

##### AOT – FPR

- Past: Tree of heaven on 89
- VT Technical Design Standards – 2002; referenced in policies

##### AOT – Ag

- Current: Pollinator habitat plantings

##### AG- UCF

- Outreach (2010 – now) Forest Pest Outreach Project.
- Rules and quarantines, policy

##### AG – VEM

- Language shift in state hazard mitigation plan from invasive to introduced

##### AG – F&W

- Plant health work with State Biologist

##### UCF - DOH:

- Free Tree Giveaway/Heat Vulnerability

##### UCF - DHCD:

- Green Streets Guide
- Village Greens

#### EXISTING & SUSTAINED COLLABORATIONS

##### AOT – UCF

- Transportation Planning Initiative – UCF invited to attend
- Road Foremen meetings
- Established 1111 permit process for planting trees in state ROW
- Riparian planting toolkit for planting

##### FPR-UCF

- Forest Health meeting
- VTInvasives

##### UCF - CAO

- Municipal vulnerabilities indicator tool

- Interagency advisory board support (potential)

- Resilience implementation strategy

##### VEM – RPC

- RPCs help munis develop their hazard plans

##### F&W – UCF

- AVCC – serving conservation commissions, volunteers
- Environmental leadership

##### F&W - RPC

- Direct TA with RPCs – Jens does a lot of this; to RPCs and direct to towns.

##### VDH – UCF

- Using DOH youth risk behavior survey and SVI to guide planting decisions
- Climate Smart Schoolyards pilot

#### UCF - DHCD

- Better Places grant program (it is in statute – no funding but will come back!)

- Moving towards physical master planning; if it's in the master planning documents, it's a lot easier to implement and support.

#### DHCD – AOT

- Better Connections Grant Program (ACCD) VTrans funds planning work for complete streets programs. DEC kicks in extra funding for Green Infrastructure (*who at DEC is this?*)

### POTENTIAL COLLABORATION

#### AOT - UCF

- Advocacy vs. partnership: how can it be mutually beneficial?
- Empowering municipalities (1111, pre project planning – learning to ask for spaces for trees or for trees )
- AOT builds things, there is potential to test things out – reach out re: nanocellulose

#### UCF – F&W

- Highways and Habitats training

#### CAO – UCF

- Broad research and collaboration
- MOU w/UVM and other institutions – for support and research
- Net Zero framework: emphasizing carbon storage and sequestration. Potential here.

#### VEM – RPCS

- Integration of storm impacts in hazard planning
- Experience with climate disasters across the spectrum and harnessing that towns are motivated right now, inter-related. Interconnectedness; more receptive right now.

#### RPCs – UCF

- Utilize RPCs more! VTrans believes in RPCs over towns; more leverage. RPCs are the towns whisperers
- RPCs and tree information for towns – educating towns. Subject matter experts
- Regional Conservation Partnerships – broader strategy
- Councils of Governments – getting towns to talk to each other at the elected official level. There's legislation in place that won't pass this year but keep an eye on it.
- Act 181 – compliant plan. Designated growth areas – design details.
- RPC planners get together twice a year (~100 of them). DHCD plans this.
- VLCT – how can we all work together

#### UCF – DHCD

- Biannual downtown conference (in Rutland next year)
- Municipal planning grant program has the ability to fund tree planting planning
- Engaging arborists and municipal staff with biology

#### Closing thoughts:

RPC meet 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month

What are the long hanging fruits? Seed the discussion.

Add value for what we're already doing.

#### Next meeting:

Focus on Messaging: HEALTH & SAFETY – how do we connect to health? Connect to the public. Find ways to work together towards common messaging and common good. Coordinated messaging, coordinated work.

## UCF Program Draft Goals & Strategies – April 2025

<b>External Goals</b>	
	<b>Primary Strategies</b>
People, organizations, and local governments understand the essential contributions of trees and forests to the health, resilience, and sustainability of urban, village, and rural environments.	
	Maintain and engage audiences through updated program websites, email listservs, e-newsletters, and social media
	Lead recognition programs - Tree Stewards Awards, Growing Works of Art, Big Tree Program - and support national Arbor Day Foundation award programs and VT Public Places Awards
	Host annual VT Urban & Community Forestry Conference
	Offer free educational opportunities to a variety of audiences, such as: Backyard Woods, winter webinars, FPFs, Tree Warden School, WOW, EAB/ash trainings
	<i>Missing: Resource development?</i>
Healthy and well-managed urban and community forests grow in Vermont's downtowns, village centers, and public spaces.	
	Support municipalities, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations with financial assistance through grant programs
	Provide direct technical urban forestry and arboricultural assistance to municipalities, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and community volunteers
	Administer and support a free tree inventory tool for municipal use
	Offer technical workshops for municipal staff and volunteers
	Collaborate with state agencies and departments to train staff on proper arboricultural practices
	Coordinate reporting systems for introduced invasive species
Urban and community forests are increasingly incorporated into state, regional, and community planning processes.	
	Support and coordinate with the VT Urban & Community Forestry Advisory Council
	Participate in the Forest Pest Advisory Council and the Division of Forests Emerald Ash Borer Working Group
	Support development of municipal tree ordinances, policies, shade tree preservation plans, and the integration of urban forestry concepts and arboricultural best practices in municipal design and development standards, public works specifications, and other relevant policies and ordinances.
	Seek and maintain collaborations with state agency, departmental partners, and regional planning commissions to integrate and advance urban forestry concepts, adoption of green stormwater infrastructure, and arboricultural best practices.
All people benefit from urban and community forestry and have opportunities to work or volunteer within the field.	
	Through targeted local partnerships, offer a free tree giveaway program for private properties.

		Strategically identify priority communities and establish community partnerships to advance urban and community forestry programs statewide.
		Work with youth statewide with the explicit intention to expose VT youth to the field of arboriculture and urban forestry.
		<i>Pull from JEDI principles?</i>
<b>Internal Goals</b>		
	VT UCF is a <b>financially (?)</b> sustainable program.	
		Seek funding to sustain and grow the UCF Program, including identifying grant and partnership opportunities, and developing applications
		<i>Missing: understanding staffing levels and needs?</i>
	Staff have autonomy and fulfillment in their work.	
		Communication channels and schedule are developed and adhered to in order to support and empower staff.
		Programmatic <i>Guiding Principles for Collaboration</i> and <i>Guiding Principles for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion</i> are formally revisited annually.
		Staff identify annual professional development goals and are supported in pursuing them.
	Decision-makers know what VT UCF is and what it does.	
		Staff participate in meetings with agency, municipal, state and federal officials, and with private organizations on urban and community forestry issues.
		Compile, review, and evaluate annual accomplishments through reporting systems and conduct and prepare special reports, federal narratives, and conformance reports for compliance with federal cooperative program requirements, Forestry Division priorities, and annual financial plan.
		Monitor grants out to subawardees, and report on the impact of program funds distributed throughout the state on an annual basis.
		Serve on the Forestry Division Management Team and provide guidance and assistance across all program areas, as requested by the Forestry Director and FPR leadership.
	VT UCF's work and operations are equitable and inclusive.	
		Advance UCF Program's work around justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion by strategically pursuing new partnerships, prioritizing staff professional development and continual learning, and removing barriers to accessing funding and opportunities to engage in urban and community forestry activities.