OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Your Land, Your Water, Your Michigan

OTTAWA CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Minutes
Regular Meeting, USDA Service Center, Grand Haven MI
6 pm on Tuesday, Sept. 10th, 2024

CALL TO ORDER: 6:06

ROLE CALL:

Matthew Hehl Oct 8 2024

Becky Huttenga - Present
Tim VanDyke - Present
Rivka Hodgkinson - Not present in person or voting capacity (present virtually & participating in discussion)
Doug Grotenrath - Present
Matt Hehl - Present

Invocation: Tim VanDyke

REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES
Motion to approve minutes: Tim VanDyke **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Vote:** Passes
APPROVAL OF AGENDA
Motion to approve agenda as amended: Becky Huttenga **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Vote:** Passes
PUBLIC COMMENT

STAFF AND PARTNERING AGENCY UPDATES

Murielle Garbarinos- CISMA Coordinator – Report
Will Latham- Invasive Species Specialist - Report
Caryn Dawson- MAEAP Technician – Report
Morgan Anderson- Produce Safety Technician - Report
Forest Pest Technicians - Report
Ben Jordan, Watershed Programs Coordinator - Report
Sarah Bowman, Watershed & Conservation Specialist - Report
Alex Svoboda, RCPP Project Manager - Report
Tracey Weatherwax, Soil Conservation Technician - Report
Ben Savoie, Forester - Report
MDARD - Report

Staff give brief highlights of their programs.

Doug asks about a comment on Alex's report where he encouraged the board to move forward with MERS. Natalie mentions she will be bringing options forward in October.

Executive Director Report - Natalie Bekins

Natalie worked on finalizing the fy25 budget, annual reviews, work agreements, tree sale prep, and coordinating the NRCS work group. She has been trying to get ahold of the auditor and can't reconcile bank account until they sort through some things in quickbooks. She has also been busy with MDARD

reviews for operational grants and mentions that OCD needs to post FOIA policy on the website and review several policies, but overall we were exceeding MDARD expectations.

Monthly Program Highlight: ~~NRCS Recap of Fiscal year -~~ Annual Civil Rights Responsibilities for Partners

Natalie - NRCS requires Civil Rights to be shared with all partners organizations and provides a checklist with responsibilities and expectations between NRCS and partners. We are supposed to annually review the MOU between OCD and MDARD (MDARD has an agreement with NRCS) and she isn't sure if the conservation district has one directly with NRCS or just follows MDARD's. Natalie provides a packet with posters that need to be posted around the building.

- **Human Resource:** - (H/R Committee)
  - HR Committee Meeting (REPORT)
    - Becky and Rivka divided employee evaluations - overall they are finding that staff is going above and beyond but that lack of benefits continue to be a concern for them. Staff want to feel more supported and the board may need to provide more professional development opportunities for staff. The next HR committee meeting is set to continue to review policy and discuss professional development. Becky mentions she would like to see ALL board members sit in on employee reviews so they can see the interactions between ED and staff, hear all the things they're doing, etc.
  - Work Agreements (VOTE)
    - **Motion to approve work agreements in packet, contingent upon the discussed revisions:** Becky Huttenga **Support:** Tim VanDkye
    - **Discussion:** Natalie mentions minor edits will be made to the work agreements to fix the clerical errors. Tim asks about committee stipends and Natalie reminds the board that bonuses were removed last year and replaced with committee stipends - employees are now part of multiple committees & receive $500 in compensation for this. Tim asks why some employees are offered 5% vs 7% in health & retirement stipends and Natalie mentions it's based on length you've been here - under x amount of years you receive 5% and over x amount of years it becomes 7%, which encourages longevity. Tim has concerns that nothing is merit based and comments that some employees must be doing more, or better work, and should be compensated as such - Becky mentions that since we are a government agency we have rules about how we can compensate staff and provide benefits, and these things are very structured and prescriptive. Doug asks if these work agreements are basically the same as last year since no raises were given & Natalie says yes. He also asks if committee stipends are OCD money but the 5-7% for benefits are paid for under various grants. Natalie says yes.
    - **Vote:** Passes
  - Roll Over PTO (VOTE)
    - Natalie gives information - If voted on, staff can roll over up to 80 hours of PTO to the next year to be used by the end of the calendar year.

- **Motion to approve the rollover of PTO hours into the next fiscal year:** Becky Huttenga **Support:** Doug Grotenrath
- Discussion: There is a short discussion about why we don't simply make it an OCD policy that a certain amount of hours can be rolled over to be used by the end of the calendar year, and it's explained that eventually this can be put into policy, but for now it would be beneficial to vote on so that employees can retain PTO hours heading into the 2024 holiday season.
- **Vote:** Passes

- **Financial:** (Finance Committee)
  - Finance Committee Meeting (REPORT)
    - Doug - Met on appropriations budget. We're going to be tight on money and think we're going to run into a similar situation as last year. Rivka asks if we're taking full advantage of advances from MDARD grants and Natalie says yes. Doug mentions that they're making cuts & suggestions. Doug asks if we decided on a CPA and Natalie has a list of potentials and quotes - some haven't gotten back, and some don't provide the necessary services. The MDARD CPA is going to be able to help with OCD tax inquiries and can help for up to 5 hours.
  - August bank reconciliations and bill payment: *See the financial packet for our profit & loss, balance sheet, bill list, and account reconciliations.* (VOTE)
    - Natalie reminds the board that we do not have a bank reconciliation yet. All other relevant information is present. Ottawa County Monitoring money has been moved to a separate savings account for tracking purposes.
    - **Motion to pay the bills:** Tim VanDyke **Support:** Becky Huttenga **Vote:** Passes
  - Cash Flow Forecast
    - Natalie briefly goes over the cash flow forecast for the board - estimated expenses and reimbursements.
  - Public Comment on Budget
  - FY25 Appropriations Budget (VOTE)
    - **Motion to approve appropriations budget contingent on revising section 6, executive director description, to remove the words "or liaison" (all hotel and food/drink expenses approved prior to travel by board or liaison):** Becky Huttenga **Support:** Doug Grotenrath
    - **Discussion:** Natalie mentions that the service budget was reduced to 56k because last year it was higher than we actually received. Becky asks if we get any other support from local units of government and Natalie answers no. Rivka asks about charges for services and donations - includes cultivating resilience, donations, sponsorships through the year, charges for service include strike team & HWA, VA's. Natalie goes over the operations budget for fy24 vs. 25 and explains that we cut some costs for various line items but also had to create a new line item for possible federal audit or CPA and Quickbooks. Natalie asks if we need to put truck donation money into the operations budget for truck purchases and the consensus seems to be that it should be. Natalie also mentions that MACD will be paying some of Annaleese's hour's in order to help with MACD with some bookkeeping.
    - **Vote:** Passes

- **Operations:**
  - Truck Fundraising (UPDATE)

- We closed our fundraiser and raised about $6,120. We also received $6,290 in insurance. Will reached out to multiple dealerships to see if they have vehicles in our price range and found some possibilities. A local business may provide a truck for $12,000 and provide the rest of the value as a donation. Tim asks what we're doing now and Natalie mentions that we have all three other trucks back and we're ok for the moment.
- Budget for New Vehicle (VOTE)
  - **Motion to buy a vehicle for a maximum of $10,000 using donation and insurance money:** Doug Grotenrath **Support:** Tim VanDyke
  - **Discussion:** Tim asks if we were to find a vehicle for $15,000 should we hold her to it. Doug mentions if it's a good deal and a big upgrade over what we could afford for $10,000, we could hold a special meeting or allow the finance committee to make the decision.
  - **Vote:** Passes

- **Grants:**
  - **Preparing:**
    - CISMA
      - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (CWMA)- This grant will continue the surveillance and treatment of European Frog Bit in the West Michigan area as well as increase outreach and education to youth about the spread of this species.
  - **Pending:**
    - CISMA Funding
      - N/A
    - Watershed program
      - Midwest Glacial Lakes Lake Conservation Grant - Two-year grant requesting funds to support a shoreline naturalization technical assistance and cost-share program with accompanying water quality monitoring for Spring Lake and Crockery Lake. Request for $99,673.48 to support watershed staff, monitoring supplies, and landowner cost share.
    - OTHER
      - NFWF (National Fish and Wildlife Foundation) Conservation Partners Program - grant intended to increase the amount of regenerative agriculture principles and conservation practices on private working lands in priority geographic areas, which includes the Great Lakes Basin through FarmBill programs. Will sustain two existing positions for 3 years. Requesting just over $300,000.
  - **Executing:**
    - Great Lakes Restoration Initiative - for Hemlock woolly adelgid treatments. Request for $200,000.
    - Landscape Scale Restoration - for Hemlock woolly adelgid treatment in

Oceana, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Allegan. Fund implementation of HWA management workshops in counties from Allegan to Grand Traverse Counties. Facilitate the installation of browse exclosures to encourage natural regeneration. The request is for $400,000.

- EGLE 319 NPS for Sand Creek & Crockery Creek (Phase 2) - Two year grant to continue the Sand Creek & Crockery Creek project. Request for nearly $600,000 in funding for wages, technical assistance, septic & agricultural best management practices.

- **Not received:**
  - N/A

Board updates: (2 minutes)
Hehl, VanDyke, Grotenrath, Huttenga, Hodgkinson

Doug - Doug mentions one of the board reports, where it was noted that a truck required new wheel bearings and asked if we still have warranties. Natalie mentions that these warranties are expired.

Becky - Staff did a really good job of putting together the NRCS working group. She mentions the Ottawa Finance meeting and how a presentation regarding funding for Crockery Lake restoration efforts was put on the agenda without consulting or inviting Ottawa Conservation District Staff. She is still trying to learn what it means to be a board member & how she can contribute and mentions that we may have some tough times ahead but wants us to work cooperatively to solve issues.

Tim - He asks about a law that prohibits local government ordinances from preventing solar purchasing/leasing land and inquires about how local farmers push back against this? His concern is that local farmers can't compete with prices that solar companies are leasing or purchasing for. A short discussion is had about ways that conservation organizations & farmers can make their voices heard about this topic.

Rivka - She has been working collectively to get resolutions passed on the issue that Tim raised -starting with local through the State level. She also shares that cash flow issues are ubiquitous amongst districts and we are not unique in facing these problems. MACD is trying to put pressure on the state/nrcs to provide solutions for this.

Matt: He received several MAEAP verifications! He has been working toward this for several years and will be working to get his sign installed soon!

CORRESPONDENCE: N/A
PA 116:

- N/A

ADJOURN – next meeting: October 8th, 2024, 6 PM

Motion to adjourn: Tim VanDyke **Support:** Doug Grotenrath **Vote:** Passes