

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of December 11, 2023

- I. Roll Call.** Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, members Russ Barrett, Colin Bright, Kim Caldwell, Melody Currier, Jason Endres, Lucas Herring, Andrew Padilla, and Lydia Petty. Also present was Emily Lewis (Dubois & King).

Committee Chair Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

II. Public Participation (Scheduled):

- a. Emily Lewis, Dubois & King.** Please see below.

- III. Approval of Minutes: November 27, 2023.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Bright, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 9-0-0.**

IV. Discussion

- a. Review Feedback from Select Board Presentation on Wayfinding.** Committee Chair Zuaro noted that many of the suggestions that came from Select Board members and members of the public during the presentation are included in the minutes of that meeting (11/28/23). There were also some that were not included in the minutes and this included a suggestion that the new signage include a QR code that would provide information about Northfield businesses. Ms. Lewis said it was possible to have a QR code that directed the user to a website providing internet links to local businesses. Committee member Petty said there also was some discussion of making Town Forest trails more accessible to the public by installing new parking areas adjacent to hiking trails. Committee Chair Zuaro said that discussion included the possibility of creating parking spaces on or near Cheney Farm. Committee member Endres said there was a question about a possible memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Norwich University (NU) that would provide public access to NU forested property for recreation purposes. This MOU could have a fixed timeframe or provide this public access for an indefinite period.

At this time, there was an accident in front of the Brown Public Library that resulted in a dog being trapped under a vehicle. Committee members Bright, Petty, and Padilla exited the meeting to provide assistance. After a few minutes, Committee member Padilla returned to the meeting but Committee members Bright and Petty had to leave in order to help transport the injured dog to a veterinarian's office. It was later reported on Front Porch Forum that the dog ("Kevin") suffered only minor injuries and should make a full recovery. The dog's owner specifically thanked Committee members Bright and Petty for their valuable assistance in helping to free Kevin and then helping to get him to a local animal hospital.

It was noted that there had been some questions at the meeting about the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) winter trails located on Town Forest and NU property. The current plan is to only show the VAST system on the new trail maps only when they traverse public or NU property but not on private property, which usually requires annual permission. Committee Chair Zuaro will contact the local VAST trail master (David Ritzer) regarding other possible concerns with their seasonal trail system.

Committee Chair Zuaro said there was another suggestion to designate certain trails that are either completely inaccessible or very difficult to hike. In addition, there is a small trail near the Northfield Falls ballfield that should be included. Committee member Endres suggested showing this trail on the map insert showing details of the park. There also was some debate over whether the planned pedestrian path that would connect the NU campus with the downtown area by way of Freight Yard Way should be included in the wayfinding map. It was noted that this trail hasn't really been fully accessible since the July flooding. Perhaps any depiction of this trail should be put on hold for now.

- b. Vendor Quotes for Signage.** Ms. Lewis has prepared an Excel spreadsheet that includes potential vendors' quoted prices for building and installing the new signage. The four vendors are Wood & Wood, Timberhomes, Rule, and Flywheel. It was noted that Rule would only be capable of providing the front of the signage while Flywheel would only provide the sign structure. Therefore, their separate quotes should be combined together in order to get the full price for the completed product. In addition, Timberhomes only bid on producing the four (4) trailhead kiosks, which they could deliver unassembled for a total of about \$13,300. The committee members were pleased with this price. Committee Chair Zuaro noted that the other quotes for signage were more than had been originally budgeted for the signage and wayfinding project. Even if the VOREC grant budget was adjusted by shifting funds from other projects, there would be only about \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the signage purchase and installation. The total quotes for the entire project ranged from \$80,000 to just over \$100,000. Committee Chair Zuaro said additional funding will be needed to complete the entire project. She noted the current plan to apply for additional VOREC grant funds for next year. Therefore, this project will be split into at least two (2) phases. The first would make use of the funds now on hand and the second phase would be delayed until sufficient funding has been received through grant funds, donations, etc. There would be a prioritization of signage with the more important locations done first. Ms. Lewis suggested that allowing sponsorship of the signage by local businesses could bring in a few thousand dollars. That possibility had been considered earlier. Ms. Lewis said Timberhomes said their kiosk prices will be increasing in the coming year. However, they did agree to honor the cost estimate they have provided for this project. Committee Chair Zuaro thought it might be best to delay any decision on choosing a vendor (or vendors) to provide more time to review the options. Ms. Lewis said there were pros and cons associated with each of the vendor quotes provided. She felt that Timberhomes' quote for the kiosks is quite favorable and perhaps the committee members could decide to accept their offer as a way to begin implementing this project. The other signage could be purchased and installed at a later time. Committee Chair Zuaro said that there was considerable flood damage to the Lybrand Trail this past summer. Therefore, it might be wise to delay installing a kiosk at that trailhead as originally planned. That would lower the number of kiosks to be ordered in the near future from four (4) to three (3). This will free up funds for other signage purchases. Ms. Lewis noted that a consultant may need to be hired to conduct a structural engineering review before any of the bulkier signage is installed. Committee Chair Zuaro then asked Ms. Lewis to provide a complete quote analysis for the next meeting (01/08/24), at which time the committee members may be able to decide on which vendor(s) to hire. She added that this is a lot of information to digest in such a short time.

- c. Working Group for Signage Implementation.** Since the committee's agreement with DuBois & King will expire soon, Committee Chair Zuaro said it might be good to assign a working group that would interact with the project vendors and take care of other logistical matters. This will be discussed again at the next meeting when more committee members are present.
- d. VOREC 2023 Request.** As indicated earlier, Committee Chair Zuaro plans to submit a new VOREC grant application in order to provide additional funds to complete the wayfinding masterplan project. The application is due the end of this week (12/15/23) and Committee Chair Zuaro noted that the experience of applying for the initial VOREC grant made the process much easier this time. In addition, although a signage vendor has not been selected, it was very useful to have cost estimates for the new signage and its installation. At Committee member Herring's recommendation, purchase of the new signage will be the only item listed on the grant application. The minimum grant request amount is \$50,000 and, based on the price quotes received, Committee Chair Zuaro thought \$70,000 would be the appropriate amount to request at this time. Ms. Lewis said some additional cost savings might be found if less expensive materials were used for the signage, if the signage dimensions were reduced, etc. Committee Chair Zuaro noted that the quote from Rule provided an option of purchasing vandal-resistant materials and options at a higher price. Motion by Committee member Barrett, seconded by Committee member Currier, to authorize Committee Chair Zuaro to apply for \$70,000 in VOREC grant funds in order to complete Phase 2 of the Wayfinding Masterplan project. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

Committee member Padilla reported that he would be submitting a separate VOREC grant application on behalf of NU. The funds would be used to build a skill track near the Shaw Outdoor Center. Committee Chair Zuaro noted that the VOREC application will be accompanied by letters of support from the Select Board Chair and from the Chair of the Town Forest Stewardship Committee. Committee member Barrett said that the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation also has a grant program that could cover the cost of new trail signage, etc. He believes the next grant application deadline is in January 2024 and he will research this further. Ms. Lewis noted that there are six (6) directional signs that have not yet been attached to a specific location. Perhaps they should be considered part of Phase 3 of this project. Committee Chair Zuaro said the various phases of the signage project can be discussed at more length at the next meeting.

- V. Other Business.** Ms. Lewis reported that she and co-worker Kait Campbell have been working on updating the online component of the new maps. Committee member Padilla thought it might be useful to include trail surface conditions in the online descriptions. Committee member Barrett is willing to help with this. Ms. Lewis said once this information has been compiled, it will be forwarded to trail websites like www.trailfinder.info. Committee Chair Zuaro said they probably also should be informed that the Lybrand Trail is closed for the time being. Ms. Lewis said the trail information on such websites can be updated at any time to reflect current conditions.
- VI. Public Participation (Unscheduled).** There was none.
- VII. Adjournment.** Motion by Committee member Barrett, seconded by Committee member Currier, to adjourn. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of January 8, 2024.