

Community Engagement Meeting #2 — In Person at Falls River Yoga Studio

June 4, 2022

11:30am-12:30pm

Present: Lydia Petty (facilitator), Kaitlyn Keating (note-taker), Stevie Balch, Tom Bright, Dan Anderson, Matt Rolland, Jessica Rolland

Discussion began at 11:35

Introductions

Stevie: Funds do not need to be obligated until December 2024, so “we have a lot of time to get this right”

Lydia: Introduction regarding ARPA funds; Funds can be spent broadly on any municipal projects or expenses; Keep intent of the funds in mind, but use them with broad allowance; Select Board has the final say on how the funds are spent; Public input and transparency are requirements; 10% of the population is a goal for the survey response; Select Board decided to take it all as “revenue lost” which allows it to be used very broadly and makes the reporting much easier; \$1.9M is just about 40% of Northfield’s total budget – the impact can be huge for our community.

Tom: “I’d really love to see that arts come alive in the community.”

General discussion about arts in the community; increasing venues for artists to *do* their art and showcase it.

Lydia: Refers to “Route 12 Communities” and how we can improve the communities right along the main route; We could look to, and learn from, the town of Bethel and all the great programs they are running and initiatives they have in motion there; Northfield is building a stronger relationship with Bethel; Important to look at, and learn from, similar towns along rivers and railroads, off the beaten path/out of the tourist routes.

Dan: Beach by the Cox Brook covered bridge right by Falls General Store – improve access to that part of the river to increase safe use

Stevie: Having an established path that the folks in town can ‘own’ and feel responsibility for will encourage respectful use of the river and the path to the swimming hole

Dan: Sidewalks in the Falls all the way down to White Road

Lydia: Raises the potential for using the ARPA funds to generate even MORE funds; the Town doesn’t apply for some grants that are otherwise available because the Town can’t meet the match – having ARPA funds set aside for this purpose could help the Town access those *other* funds

Kaitlyn: We also have an Economic Development Fund – could some money be used to help increase that ED Fund for ED use? Or perhaps the Revolving Loan Fund? Then the town could increase loan opportunities for Northfield businesses

Stevie: This would be a step toward sustainability; Investment is an option; Funds must be spent/“obligated” by 2026

Kaitlyn: Can the funds be held in a trust account?

Matt: Route 12 to Montpelier is “an absolute embarrassment” – putting funds toward improving our main road into Montpelier would be helpful and encourage folks to make their way to/through Northfield

Dan: Extending Town wastewater, sewer north in the Falls

Trail connecting Falls with downtown

Jessica: Public water fountains at our parks

Tom: Community Room is used extensively and needs updating, especially the kitchen - whatever we can do to update the space and make it more comfortable for people would be welcome

Broadband – perhaps donation to CV Fiber – looking to expand service to rural towns

This is especially a problem between Northfield and Randolph on Route 12A

Jessica: The funds could help provide subsidies for low-income families to access broadband to help them get connected

Tom: Gather the community together for social events, much like Randolph; Anything we can do to help bring people together and help build that sense of community would be great; see e.g. “First Friday Nights” in Randolph – this gives people a chance to gather

Places for arts – expand the activities that folks can be involved in; “There’s so much potential in this town”

Dan: Has anyone ever mentioned putting up a stage on the Common? Having a stage could enable the public gatherings

Jessica: Commission public art downtown or at the parks – this draws folks in to our downtown

Dan: Something like the Treehouse at the library – having something like that downtown on the Common would be great

Jessica: Buy tablets for the library to loan out to people

Economic assistance fund for people’s emergency expenses

“Making Northfield ‘new’ again” – painting, fixing up roads and storefronts

Stevie: Norma Rooney of FSG brought forward some simple/“very small” things that would be very helpful for businesses – Ex. Install signs up on the interstate that tell people on the highway that these facilities are here – those things make an enormous difference; Google directs everyone going from I-89 Northbound to the valley through Roxbury; We should pay for SEO Search Engine Optimization for the Town that helps draw folks here when they are visiting neighboring towns

Develop information on the kiosk that has information on all of the wonderful things in this area

Jessica: Town map/placemat style (Jason Endres and the Energy Committee are creating this map now)

Jessica: Enrich the local elementary school programs

Matt: Spruce up downtown; "I heard from an outsider that the downtown should look 'new' again"; perhaps Norwich could sandblast the brick on the armory buildings downtown; and the funds could be used to wash storefront windows and walls

General discussion regarding the empty storefronts downtown. We need enough places to stop downtown. Folks don't generally stop for one thing – they want multiple things to do at once.

Jessica: Donation to the local animal shelter or otherwise address the stray animal issue

Tom: Royalton's "Mud Season University" – listing of 20-30 things that can be done during mud season; Very similar to "Bethel University" – free classes for people in the town; Some of these 'events' were one-session things at the library; some were open mics; some were a 3-4 weeklong introduction to pastels

Town arts committee – could this be established with the funds?

Dan: Extend that "Mud Season University" idea further – it's a LONG winter here. We could create programs for stuff to do in February

Matt: An easy cross-country ski trail/off-road path

More general discussion regarding improving off-road paths and recreation paths, particularly connecting the Falls to the downtown/schools/the Common

Stevie: Safety is truly an issue on Route 12.

Dan: Families with school-age kids in the Falls have no safe place to walk from their homes.

Lydia: There was a bike path study conducted in 2005 – it's been a while so this would be worth revisiting.

General discussion regarding sidewalks and pathways and other possibilities for funding.

Stevie: Cages of rocks to help physically support a safe path

Lydia: There is a playground for young children, but there is a gap in activities and opportunities for teenagers and slightly-older young children in town

Emergency fund for residents

Discussion regarding obtaining opinions from different socioeconomic groups in town – hearing from folks with low income, perhaps little resources, and/or folks who benefit from services like the food shelf and CERV – what do *they* want to see in Northfield? What would benefit *them*? And the more challenging question – how do we reach those folks to solicit a response to that?

Jessica: Mail out survey with raffle prize involved?

Tom: CERV – perhaps they could ask the folks who are in person at the service locations where these folks are reaching out for services (ex. at the Food shelf – the staff person could ask what the consumer would like to see improved in our town)

Jessica: Idea box for people to write their ideas and stick it in a box. This could be put at the food and clothing shelves, and also at businesses in town.

Dan: This would be a lot of time, but door-to-door campaigns can be very successful, asking folks what they want to see in town

Jessica: Set up a table at events, farmers market where we could obtain these ideas

Donation or grant to CERV

Tom: Coffee hour at the guesthouse; draw people together to solicit ideas and conversation

Kaitlyn: Barbeque at Dogwood or other apartments – drawing people out of their apartments and homes with a free meal to then start discussions and obtain ideas about what folks would like to see improved in town; “Pop-up grills”

Obtain responses via paper survey, online survey, and in-person conversations