

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of December 12, 2022

- I. Roll Call.** Present were Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, committee members Russ Barrett, Kimberly Caldwell, Melody Currier, Lucas Herring, Colin O'Neil, Nancy Peck, Lydia Petty, and Jeff Schulz. Also present were Tom Davis (Economic Development Director), Chris Yuen (DuBois & King), and Emily Lewis (DuBois & King).

Committee Chair Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

II. Public Participation (Scheduled):

- a. Chris Yuen and Emily Lewis, DuBois & King: Wayfinding Master Plan Project.** Committee Chair Zuaro said the VOREC Committee members are very eager to get this project started. Ms. Lewis said DuBois & King already has been working on this project with Committee member Schulz, who serves as Town Manager, even though the State of Vermont has not yet provided the final grant award agreement. Committee member Schulz said the state grant administrators now should have all the information they require to finalize the grant agreement. The last remaining hurdle was to obtain landowner agreements and Economic Development Director Tom Davis has been working on this. Committee Chair Zuaro added that there was the need to add the Norwich University (NU) Shaw Outdoor Center to the list of worksites that would benefit from the grant funds. This required a NU signoff that Bizhan Yahyazadeh (Facility Operations) was able to provide. Mr. Davis will scan and email this remaining documentation to the state tomorrow and that should complete the process. The municipality should receive the finalized contract before the end of the month. Ms. Lewis then noted this project schedule, which had to be revised due to the delay in receiving the approved grant agreement. For example, tonight's kickoff meeting originally was scheduled for two months ago. The next step will be to start work on the Trail Network Plan, which will begin next month. The first review meeting will be held in mid-February. Ms. Lewis would like some committee feedback at that time to confirm they are proceeding correctly. An additional progress meeting would be held later in the spring. A site visit will be scheduled for early January, preferably on a Wednesday. Committee Chair Zuaro and Committee member Schulz will be the municipality's contact persons for this project. The other VOREC committee members will receive periodic updates by email. Committee member Petty noted that since this is a municipal body, decisions can only be made at a properly warned meeting. Any interim reports can be discussed at the next regular meeting. Mr. Yuen then discussed GIS Data Resources and asked that any existing GIS files be forwarded to him so there is no duplication of past work. Committee member Barrett said almost all of the existing trail system has been GIS mapped and the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) has these files. Acting Director Christian Meyer and/or Planner Jon Ignatowski should be contacted for this information. Ms. Lewis also would like copies of existing trail base maps. Mr. Yuen noted that larger trail maps would be posted at trail kiosks and there needs to be decisions made rather soon about their format, i.e. size, orientation, etc. Committee member O'Neil thought it might save time if DuBois & King provided a list of logistical questions that the VOREC committee members can address at a single meeting. Mr. Yuen felt the upcoming site visit should answer a number of these questions.

Mr. Yuen showed online a rough draft base map of the trail system in order to see if enough of the surrounding area of Northfield was included. Committee member Barrett believes any overall trail system map should extend northward to include Turkey Hill and extend southward to include Kingston Road, which is a trail access road. Other VOREC committee members suggested including potential trail access parking areas, possible river route connections, etc. Ms. Lewis noted that additional features could be incorporated into the base map as the project advances. Committee member Petty believes the GIS maps CVRPC has will include some trails not included in the current base map. There also may be some that have been discontinued in recent years due to withdrawal of landowner permission, etc. Committee member Barrett added that the municipality purchased some property at the summit of Paine Mountain some years ago and that also might not be reflected in the base map. It should, however, be indicated on the CVRPC maps. Mr. Yuen said another logistical matter that needs to be determined early in the process is the directional orientation of the trail map, i.e. whether or not the map's top will be pointing north. Committee member O'Neil noted many trail maps, including Randolph's, show the trailhead at the bottom regardless of compass point. Committee member Petty thought that since the project schedule has been revised, these questions could be answered at the next regular meeting (01/09/23). Ms. Lewis offered to provide some trail map examples from other communities to show what options are available. Committee member Barrett felt anyone working on this project should review the Paine Mountain Guidebook (1997), which was written by William E. Osgood. Good amounts of our current trail system maps are based on the information contained in that short book. Committee member Petty thought this was a very good suggestion.

Ms. Lewis then turned to the Wayfinding Signs part of this project. She also can provide examples of signage from other communities in order to indicate what's available for possible designs. Committee Chair Zuaro noted Northfield resident and professional graphic designer Jason Endres has been very helpful with local projects that required original designs. He would like to get involved in this part of the project as he would like to be sure that its aesthetic is in keeping with designs he already has created for the community. This would include the logo he created for the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) that has been incorporated into many subsequent community projects. Ms. Lewis has no objections and asked that Mr. Endres' contact information be provided to DuBois & King. Committee Chair Zuaro said that would be done.

Ms. Lewis said online mapping is a significant part of this project and said there are several options regarding how this could be made available to community members. Mr. Yuen said it probably would make sense for this information to be hosted on the municipal website and/or the CVRPC website. Ownership of the maps will be transferred to the municipality when the project is completed. There are several versions of online mapping, including optimized versions that could require use of a separate computer application. However, Mr. Yuen felt there should be PDF versions that could be downloaded by trail users, preferably before going onto the trail system and thereby going offline. These downloadable PDFs might not be the same optimized versions available online elsewhere. It also is possible these maps could be used for GPS positioning (given sufficient signal strength). The optimized maps also could have ArcView type layers that would indicate trail features, kiosk locations, etc.

Committee Chair Zuaro noted Nelson Hoffman from the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) also has indicated interest in becoming involved in this project. Committee member Barrett said the DuBois & King proposal spoke of its interaction with a municipal “steering committee.” He assumed this would be the VOREC Committee but this group could be expanded to include other interested parties. Committee member Petty thought the municipality certainly can decide the composition of this steering committee. Committee Chair Zuaro believes as this project proceeds and logistical decisions need to be made regarding the Town Forest, such as the proper placement of signage, kiosks, etc., it is perhaps preferable that TFSC members become more directly involved in the process. Committee member Barrett said there also will need to be coordination with Norwich University to make sure that trail systems don’t disconnect when they cross over onto NU property, etc. Committee member O’Neil noted that the NU Mountain and Cold Weather Rescue Company has its own trail system that is used for training purposes. It was confirmed that these trails are not part of the public trail system. There being no other matters to discuss tonight, Committee Chair Zuaro said the committee will have answers for any specific questions Ms. Lewis or Mr. Yuen will have at the next regular meeting (01/09/23) if those inequities can be forwarded beforehand. She then thanked Ms. Lewis and Mr. Yuen for attending tonight’s meeting and getting this important project started.

III. Approval of Minutes: November 14, 2022. Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 9-0-0.**

IV. Discussion

a. Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grant. Mr. Davis said based on past conversations, it is his understanding that he will be heading up the grant application process. He noted that he will be submitting a separate grant application on behalf of Northfield public schools. Mr. Davis is hopeful both grant applications will be successful. He will be receiving guidance from Committee Chair Zuaro on the application that he will be submitting for the municipality. After some discussion, it was decided that he will communicate directly with Committee Chair Zuaro while writing the application and she will forward information to the other committee members. Mr. Davis said one aspect of the grant application that needs to be determined is the extent and nature of in-kind services the municipality will be providing to offset the grant’s local match amount. He noted there are a number of physical project tasks, such as removing brush, etc., that don’t necessarily require engineering or planning expertise. Committee member O’Neil said he spoke recently to Tom Baker, the NU Supervisor of Grounds, Vehicle Maintenance, and Transportation. Mr. Baker has confirmed NU will provide a new gate at the Lybrand/Slate Avenue trailhead as its in-kind services donation. Mr. Davis warned that this purchase should be delayed until the grant has been awarded so that it can be properly designated as an in-kind service. He added that there is a compelling case for a grant award in this instance but it will be necessary to submit the best possible application to be sure. He is more than willing to accept any advice during the drafting process. As for the application on behalf of Northfield schools, the purpose would be to restore the old trail system in the area, which would include sections of Garvey Hill. Extensive work would be required with new bridge work, drainage, trail clearance, etc. Removing debris from the trail system would be their in-kind service. The restored trail system would be used by the cross-country team and also for educational purposes.

Committee member O’Neil thought VOREC grant funds could be used to provide local match funds for either project. Committee member Petty thought it also is possible American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds could be used. Local feedback did show support for enhancing/expanding our local pedestrian trail systems with ARPA funds. Mr. Davis noted there are a couple years still available to make decisions regarding use of ARPA funds. Committee member O’Neil said there also are state grant funds available through its Buildings and General Services (BGS) program. This would be for a lesser amount than through the RTP grant program but the application process is less arduous and funds received could provide the local match amounts. Mr. Davis said he does keep an eye out for grant opportunities but is grateful for any suggestions. As a longtime Northfield resident, he is very pleased personally with the trail rehabilitation work done to date. Committee Chair Zuaro thanked Mr. Davis for all the work he has done and will do for the RTD grant application process.

- b. Proposed Equipment Purchases for the Brown Public Library (BPL) Outdoor Lending Library.** Committee Chair Zuaro asked if the committee members should move forward on these purchases so the equipment will be available this winter. The other members thought this was a good idea. The amount of grant funds budgeted for this purpose is \$6,000 and a list of possible purchases has been developed along with price quotes. In addition, storage space is being prepared at the library, which includes specialized racks for snowshoe storage. There was some debate whether hok skis, which are hybrids of snowshoes and cross-country skis, should be part of the initial purchase given uncertainty over their potential usage. This will be researched further. Without objection, it was the recommendation of the VOREC Grant Implementation Committee members that equipment for the BPL Outdoor Lending Library be purchased for an amount not exceeding \$5,000.

V. Updates

- a. Vista Clearing and Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal.** Committee member Barrett said the initial work was done a couple weeks ago. There wasn’t quite the vista improvement he had anticipated but the invasives were cut down fairly close to the ground. The project contractor was able to get his equipment to the work site without damaging the trails and will be back at least three (3) times next year to apply herbicide to prevent invasive regrowth. The project cost was very reasonable and partial payment has been paid for the work done so far. Committee Chair Zuaro then thanked Committee member Barrett for spearheading this effort.
- b. VOREC Contract: Status and Budget Reorganization.** As previously indicated, the grant agreement should be finalized soon as the state has been provided with all the information and documentation it has requested. It should be ready for the next regular meeting in January 2023. The final agreement wording might necessitate some revision of the project budget and timeline.

VI. Public Participation (Unscheduled). There was none.

VII. Adjournment. Motion by Committee member Barrett, seconded by Committee member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 9-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes are subject to approval at the next regular meeting.