

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of April 11, 2024

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

Committee Chair Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

- II. Public Participation (Scheduled):** None.

- III. Approval of Minutes: March 25, 2024.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Herring, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 6-0-0.**

IV. Updates

- a. Request for Amendment to Contract.** Committee Chair Zuaro said she, Committee member Petty, and Town Manager Jeff Schulz recently had a remote meeting with VOREC grant administrator Lauren Pyle. Ms. Pyle requested additional grant budget information but did approve a grant contract amendment that would allow for funds that had been allocated for parking upgrades to be used for other purposes. In regard to the economic impact study, Ms. Pyle felt this was a grant necessity. After the meeting, Committee Chair Zuaro did submit the revised grant budget and Ms. Pyle will formally approve the contract amendment. Committee member Padilla asked what information Ms. Pyle wanted contained in the economic impact study. Committee Chair Zuaro said just the basic requirements in the grant agreement. The SE Group has submitted a quote to perform the study and reiterated the study requirements, which include statements from local businesses, trail users, etc. Committee member Petty thought it would be useful to review the grant agreement and check off those requirements that have already been accomplished. Committee member Herring asked if it were really necessary to hire an outside consultant to produce the economic impact study. Committee member Petty thought the committee members could provide some local information and perform some legwork but she didn't feel they had the expertise to produce a study that would meet all the grant criteria. Committee member Barrett agreed that would be a very difficult task.
- b. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Request to Select Board.** Committee Chair Zuaro has prepared an ARPA funds request for \$20,000 in order to fund signage purchases. This request will be presented to the Select Board members at their meeting of April 23, 2024, and Committee Chair Zuaro will be present to answer any questions. She believes there is a reasonable chance that the request will be approved.

V. Discussion

- a. SE Group Proposal for Economic Impact Study.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to accept the SE Group proposal to produce the economic impact study for an amount not to exceed \$10,000 and to direct Manager Schulz to work with them on a contract. Committee member Petty then read the section in the SE Group proposal that specified what information would need to be included in the study. This included documented outreach to local businesses and trail users, metrics from the counters installed along the trails, numbers regarding usage of the recreation equipment lending library, etc.

Committee Chair Zuaro noted that the trail counters were to be reinstalled on April 1, 2024 but this was delayed due to Mud Season trail closures, etc. The current plan is to reinstall them in the late spring or early summer. The collected data will be provided to the SE Group this fall. Committee member Currier asked if the Brown Public Library (BPL) keeps track of how often the recreation equipment stored there is lent out. Committee Chair Zuaro said she did receive a report on this from BPL Director Sherri Brickey and learned that the snowshoes have been borrowed thirty-three (33) times and the walking poles fifteen (15) times. The MICROspikes and the lighted helmets have not yet been used. It was felt the equipment lending library could be better promoted next winter that that might significantly increase those numbers. Committee member Petty felt better use of local social media could better inform residents of what is available. **Motion passed 6-0-0.** Committee Chair Zuaro thought it might be a good idea to invite SE Group employees to a future meeting in order to introduce them to the committee members and also further clarify how the tasks involved in creating the study would be distributed.

- b. Programming Proposals.** At the last meeting (03/25/24), two separate proposals for VOREC grant funds were received and discussed by the committee members. One was from Cara Gauthier and Rebecca Pearish and included requests for funds to cover the expense of four (4) suggested programs that could be provided to residents that involved outdoor wildlife themes. One suggested program was to bring a “Caterpillar Lab” to Northfield to mainly inform and entertain local youth by showing how caterpillars transform into butterflies, etc. Another suggestion was to bring a Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) demonstration to Northfield, which could include live birds of prey. The other two proposals focused mainly on local birdwatching excursions. The total cost of these four (4) proposed programming events is \$2,008.92. Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Herring have a separate request for an additional \$878,21 to purchase children’s backpacks, child carriers, and other materials that would be used for three (3) Storywalks with one each in the spring, summer, and fall. Committee member Herring asked if there were sufficient funds in the VOREC grant programming budget to pay for this. Committee member Petty said there was about \$5,800 remaining in this budget. Committee Chair Zuaro said there was a separate request from Jeanne Bright for about \$340 in VOREC grant funds to purchase art supplies for outdoor group painting events. The art supplies would be stored at the BPL when not being used.

Committee member Petty said there were a number of questions regarding the requests made by Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish, such as who would receive the funds, who would be responsible for arranging and publicizing the programming events, etc. She thought it might be worthwhile to invite them to attend the next VOREC Grant Implementation Committee meeting (04/22/24) to answer any questions that the committee members might have. Committee member Currier agreed that she had a number of concerns that needed to be addressed before she would agree to authorize the release of VOREC grant funds. Committee member Petty did not feel the Caterpillar Lab and VINS demonstrations really met the grant criteria for only funding programming events of promoting outdoor recreation. It was felt the birding events better met this requirement provided they were held along the trail system. After further discussion, it was agreed to invite Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish to the next meeting. It was noted that the only issue regarding Ms. Bright’s request was where the art supplies would be stored. Now that this has been answered, it was not seen as necessary to ask her to attend a future meeting. It was suggested that should these group painting events are held, Norwich University (NU) students should be specifically invited to attend. This could include those students attending summer sessions. Committee Chair Zuaro will contact Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish and ask them to attend the next meeting. She will also let them know of the specific concerns some committee members have raised about their requests.

- c. Prioritize Signage for RFP.** Committee Chair Zuaro would like to work with Manager Schulz to get the RFP for signage purchase sent out as soon as possible. The amount set aside for these purchases would include the ARPA fund request amount. Committee member Petty, who also serves as a Select Board member, said that the ARPA requests that she and the other Select Board members have favored in the past have included detailed information on how these funds would be spent and how they would benefit the community. Board member Petty noted that the Phase 1 signage purchase plan developed by DuBois & King included: 1 large informational display sign; 3 kiosks; 6 Village wayfinding signs; and 2 basic trail signs with map displays. Committee member Herring noted that the original plan called for the purchase of seven (7) kiosks. Committee Chair Zuaro said this was brought up during the conversation with Ms. Pyle and it was agreed to scale this number back for cost savings, etc. Committee member Herring thought it would be good for the committee members to decide on the number and types of signs to be included in the Phase 1 RFP. The full discussion over where they would be situated could be postponed for another meeting. Committee member Petty thought the large informational display sign, which would be located in the downtown area, would be an important fixture in order to inform residents and visitors alike of the outdoor recreation opportunities in Northfield. She felt a good number of even long-time Northfield residents don't know very much about the Town Forest and the public trail systems that go through it and the adjoining NU forested lands. Committee member Petty also would like two (2) kiosks purchased as part of Phase 1. They could be situated by the NU Shaw Outdoor Center and near the trailhead located by Cheney Field. Committee member Padilla, who is the Manager of the Shaw Outdoor Center, said there already are some informational signs in the vicinity of the building. He suggested that the kiosk could be located a little farther up at the start of the nearby NU trail system. Committee member Petty noted that new trail blazes would be installed soon so perhaps the purchase of trailside signage should be limited to locations where different trails intersect. She also felt that the new trailside signage should focus on Town Forest locations as the NU trail system is already well marked. Committee member Padilla agreed with this, adding that NU recently received a \$2,000 grant to put in new signage near the Shaw Outdoor Center.

Committee member Currier left the meeting at this time.

After further discussion, the consensus was to specify in the RFP the intent to purchase one (1) Type A informational display sign, (2) two Type B trailhead kiosk signs, three (3) Type F basic trail signs with maps, and thirteen (13) Type G intersection trail signs. The cost estimate for this signage was \$47,000. It was noted that there is \$37,000 in the signage budget, which could be supplemented by additional ARPA funds if that request is successful.

- VI. Other Business.** Committee member Petty noted that copies of the large trail system maps are available at several downtown locations. She would like additional businesses contacted to see if they would like copies of the map available for pick up at their establishments. In addition, Committee member Petty would like to see some postings on local social media to inform residents where those maps are available.
- VII. Public Participation (Unscheduled).** There was none.
- VIII. Adjournment.** Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 5-0-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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