

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
NORTHFIELD RIVERWALK PROJECT
WORKING GROUP MEETING**

Minutes of May 21, 2025

Full meeting recording is available at

<https://youtu.be/ofXLYSsUiPg>

- I. ROLL CALL.** Participants: Michele Braun (Friends of the Winooski River), Janan Hamm, Taylor Litwin (Friends of the Winooski River), DeLane McIlvene, Simon Pearish, Merry Shernock (Select Board member), Carolyn Stevens (Northfield Community Development Network), and Tim Swartz.

The meeting started at 6:05 p.m.

II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):

- a. Michele Braun, Friends of the Winooski River (FOW).** Michele had reported at an earlier meeting that there are grant funds available for this project from the Lake Champlain Basin Program. There was a brief freeze in the funding but that has ended so FOW is now circulating an RFP to hire someone with community outreach expertise. The grant funds cannot be used to purchase project materials, such as signage, but will mainly be used for administrative assistance. Merry would like a sign installed near the Riverwalk path entrance below the Dollar General that would notify passerbys that this is an archeologically sensitive area. There also would be the need at some point to purchase handicapped-accessible picnic tables to be installed in this area. Michele said it probably wouldn't be permissible to site picnic tables in the floodway area. Tim said the tables would be installed at a higher elevation at the start of the riverbank access trail before it begins its decent to the Dog River. This area would be a gathering place where groups could meet first for riverwalk excursions. Simon thought that making sure that there is regular trash removal there would alleviate potential problems with littering and vandalism. Michele thought that if the site is kept in good condition, this would discourage any bad behavior. Simon noted that the Dog River Park sees regular trash removal as well as periodic removal of riverside knotweed and this has become a popular location for residents. Merry thought it might be possible to get groups or individuals to "adopt" a section of the river in order to remove any litter, etc. on a regular basis. There also could be some crowdsourcing funding to support future maintenance of the new riverwalk trail. Michele has worked with the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) on the original riverwalk path proposal and perhaps a workshop could be set up with its members in order to streamline the current process. She also would like to learn more about what Northfield residents feel should be outside recreation priorities, especially with the Dog River. Merry feels establishing greater walking traffic along the Dog River would make it a better experience for all. There also is the need to make sure any new walking paths will be accessible to all regardless of age, physical mobility, etc. Merry also thought this riverwalk project might be a good subject for local student projects. Michele noted that Mad Dog Trout Unlimited does have student programs through which the students raise trout hatchlings for later release in the river. The upcoming Cross River Dam Removal Project also will help with future trout migration along the Dog River. Michele added that Mad Dog Trout Unlimited will be holding a "Dog River Day" event on the Northfield Common on Saturday, October 18, 2025. There will be demonstrations showing the recreational opportunities available at the Dog River and also provide information about potential threats to its future sustainability. It is possible that local groups can provide their own river-related presentations at that time.

Janan has indicated her interest in holding riverside walks on summer weekends in coming months. She thought July would be the best time to start this. Michele said Taylor would assist the working group members with the outreach for these events. She also suggested that some of these walks could focus on a specific theme like birdwatching, etc.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: April 16, 2025. Motion by Tim, seconded by DeLane, to approve the minutes. The minutes were approved without objection.

IV. OLD BUSINESS/UPDATES

- a. Status of Dollar General Land Transfer.** Merry reported that Tom Davis told her that Town Attorney William Smith has prepared the quick claim deed for Dollar General approval. We hope that we will hear back from them sometime next month.
- b. Cross Brothers Dam Removal update.** Michele noted that the dam removal might need to be delayed until mid-August due to concerns about endangered bats that are nesting in the area. She added that the permitting process for this project is ongoing. The project RFP has not yet been advertised but Michele said this could be done before the permitting process is complete.
- c. Scheduling Displays Around Town.** Merry said the project display now in the Municipal Building will be moved so it can be viewed tomorrow night's "Community Dinner" held at the Methodist Church. These are free dinners (donations accepted) that are available to all. DeLane volunteered to deliver the display herself. Merry noted that the Northfield Senior Center has offered to host one of the displays after their tag sale is held next week. Another upcoming event where the display could be made available is the Strawberry Festival that will be held at the United Church on Saturday, June 21, 2025. It was noted that this coming weekend is the artists' Open Studio. DeLane offered to deliver a display to an artist willing to have it in their home.

V. NEW BUSINESS

- a. Review of Path Proposed by Transportation-Oriented Design "Visioning."** Merry said the "Northfield Vision Plan" that was presented at the last Select Board meeting (05/13/25) includes a possible riverwalk path. The full report is available on the municipal website (<https://www.northfield-vt.gov/plans>) and this map is on page 36. This proposed plan is not the same as the one originally proposed by NCDN members when the proposal was first drafted. Carolyn said she was told by the report's author (Geoffrey Ferrell) that the trail map was only one possibility. She added that NCDN had hired a wetland consultant who had proposed a much different route. The route proposed in the vision plan detours around the railway tracks to the sanctioned crossing at Wall Street. However, Merry felt many people will probably use the shortcut across the tracks near Fernandez Hardware even though that would not be encouraged in any way.
- b. Reports from the Field, i.e. updates from other committees, projects, etc.** Michele noted that representatives from Barre, Winooski, and Northfield attended a Lake Champlain Basin Grant Program meeting this past February. Northfield was represented at that time by NCC members David Miers and Jeremy Whalen but it is possible members of this working group could attend their next meeting. Merry felt Norwich University also should be involved in this process as it owns a lot of riverside property in Northfield. Michele then noted that this coming weekend there will be an organized knotweed removal event held at a riverside park in Winooski. FOW will be there to provide additional information about invasive riverside vegetation, etc.

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled). There was none.

VII. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: June 18, 2025.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT. Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 7:32 p.m.