

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of March 25, 2024

- I. Roll Call.** Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, members Russ Barrett, Colin Bright (absent), Kim Caldwell, Melody Currier, Jason Endres, Lucas Herring, Andrew Padilla, and Lydia Petty. Also present were Town Manager Jeff Schulz, Jeanne Bright (Community Center Task Force), Cara Gauthier (Welcome Home Northfield), and Rebecca Pearish (Brown Public Library Youth Librarian).

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

- II. Public Participation (Scheduled): Jeanne Bright (Community Center Task Force), Cara Gauthier (Welcome Home Northfield), and Rebecca Pearish (BPL Youth Librarian): Proposals for Programming.**

Jeanne Bright had submitted a proposal for group outdoor painting parties. She does some painting herself and would like to combine this activity with her outdoor excursions. Ms. Bright would like to help organize group events where local artists of varying levels of expertise can get together at outdoor venues, such as Cheney Field, for group painting sessions. He is asking that the committee authorize the use of VOREC grant funds for the purchase of painting "kits" with paints, brushes, and easels that could be used by novice painters at these group events. Ms. Bright did a little research and found that these kits can be purchased for about \$85 each. She thought it would be best to have four (4) of these kits available for these events and this would be a total cost of about \$340. There might be costs to publicize these events in advance but that should not be very much. Committee member Herring asked if she had any dates for these events at this time. Ms. Bright said she did not. She first wanted to know if the committee members would authorize the purchase of the painting kits. Ms. Bright thought group painting dates and locations could be determined rather quickly afterwards. Committee Chair Zuaro asked where the painting kits would be stored. Ms. Bright was not sure. She would be willing to store them at her house until a location with more public access is found. Committee member Caldwell asked about the painting skill levels of those who would take part. Ms. Bright felt these events could bring in painters of varying experience and expertise. She added that more seasoned painters would be able to bring their own painting supplies and perhaps provide some guidance to others. Committee member Caldwell definitely would be interested in taking part in such events herself. She thanked Ms. Bright for bringing forth this proposal. Committee member Barrett asked if there were any chances of splitting the cost of these paint kits with the local schools. Committee Chair Zuaro said that was something we could look into. Committee member Padilla felt the local schools should already have all the art supplies that they need. This request for VOREC grant funds will be discussed further by the committee members before a decision is made.

Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish both work with local youth and have prepared a written proposal for programming events. Ms. Gauthier currently conducts an outdoor play group for the Brown Public Library (BPL) and Ms. Pearish is the BPL Youth Librarian. They have provided a proposal for four (4) suggested programs that would "encourage people to interact and explore the outdoors." The first is setting up a local visit from the Caterpillar Lab, which provides informational presentations about caterpillars that demonstrate how they develop into butterflies. They bring in live examples and the demonstration is suitable for all age groups. There also is the possibility of arranging similar demonstrations from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science, which provide programs on Vermont birds and other local fauna and flora. The total costs of a visit from the Caterpillar Lab and three (3) from the Vermont Institute of Natural Science is about \$2,008.92.

Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish also looked into the possibility of using VOREC grant funds to purchase "Kids Nature Adventure Backpacks." These backpacks would have nature scenes and would be available to borrow through the BPL Outdoor Recreation Equipment lending library. Their proposal is for the purchase of eleven (11) of these backpacks along with some writing materials, magnifying glasses, etc. for a total cost of \$210. Another possible use of grant funds would be the purchase of two (2) child carriers that would be part of the lending library and available for parents to borrow for hiking excursions with young children. The cost of this would be \$413.90. In addition, Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish thought it might be good to hold outdoor "Storywalks" for local youth with one each in the spring, summer, and fall. The supplies for these events would be picture books, garden stakes, etc. for a total cost of \$245.31. The total amount of all their programming events and equipment would be \$2,887.13.

Committee member Petty believe the committee had considered purchasing child backpacks at one time for the equipment lending library but that was never followed through. Committee member Herring believes all the backpacks that were purchased were adult sized. Committee member Petty believes the main intention of the VOREC grant program was to bring people together for common events along the trail system and other outdoors recreation venues, such as the Shaw Outdoor Center. Perhaps some of these events could be held in such locations. Ms. Gauthier said that the program events probably could be adapted and held at appropriate locations. Committee member Barrett said these sounded like very sound proposals. Committee Chair Zuaro said the committee members would need to discuss these proposals at greater length to determine whether the costs would be covered by the current grant budget. She added that it does seem that the committee members appear quite positive about all the proposals brought forward tonight. There will be a further discussion of these proposals at the next meeting (04/08/24) and Ms. Bright, Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish will be informed of the committee members' decisions.

III. Approval of Minutes: February 26, 2024. Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

IV. Discussion

a. Review Budget and Proposed Transfer of Funds between Categories. Committee Chair Zuaro sent the other committee members a document that indicates the balance of remaining grant funds as well as her proposals for reallocating funds from one grant category to another. She noted that the remaining budget for signage is about \$7,500 even though the estimated cost for purchasing and installing the first phase of signage is about \$50,000. Committee Chair Zuaro said there is \$25,000 in the grant budget for expanding parking at the Shaw Outdoor Center even though there is uncertainty about this project due to stormwater permitting concerns. Committee member Padilla believes most of the local concerns have been addressed but Manager Schulz said the state now has a considerable backlog of stormwater permits to approve so the process might take much longer than originally thought. Committee member Petty thought it might be useful to prioritize the remaining grant projects due to the limited funds now available. For example, it might be best to focus more on installing the new signage rather than get bogged down in the parking permitting morass. Committee member Petty noted that transferring funds between the grant categories would require the approval of the grant administrator (Lauren Pyle). Committee member Herring likes the idea of reallocating grant funds for the signage purchase and installation given the great effort the committee members put into the process. Committee member Caldwell agrees with this. Given all the delays with the expanded parking, it probably would be best to focus on what can be done soon.

Committee Chair Zuaro said a quote for the economic impact study was received and the cost is listed as "a not-to-exceed sum of \$10,000." As this amount exceeds the current balance for this budget category (\$5,160), Committee Chair Zuaro recommends shifting \$5,000 from the parking category to fund this study in the amount proposed by the SE Group. It also is possible to shift \$3,000 from the Recreation Equipment & Programming category to the signage category. Even with this reduction, there would be sufficient funds leftover to pay for all the proposals brought up earlier tonight. Committee member Caldwell thought the \$10,000 figure seemed rather high. She asked if there were other less expensive options available that would meet the grant requirements. Committee member Caldwell would hate to sink all this money into a study that might be more than is actually required. Committee member Petty said completing this Economic Impact Study is a grant requirement and drafting it is beyond the capability of the committee members. It might be possible to negotiate with the SE Group to reduce the cost if the community members can provide some of the local legwork, etc. Manager Schulz said he spoke with Economic Development Director Tom Davis to see if this study could be done internally. Mr. Davis didn't feel an acceptable study could be completed with current staffing. Manager Schulz felt having a competent outside consult perform the study would be looked on favorably by the grant administrator and this could have a positive impact on future grant applications. Committee member Caldwell asked when all the grant funds had to be expended. Manager Schulz said it needed to be done by December 2024. Committee Chair Zuaro felt the SE Group proposal is good because they have worked in Northfield before on other outdoor recreational projects.

Committee member Caldwell doesn't feel the economic impact study would not be very useful if it is conducted before all the new signage has been installed. If it were not for the deadline this year, it would be better that the study be done next year at the earliest. Committee Chair Zuaro thought this could be discussed with the grant administrator. Manager Schulz thought it might be possible to get an extension on the grant expenditure deadline. This could be up to six (6) months. Committee member Herring thought the possible deadline extension could be discussed at the same time as out request to reallocate budget funds between categories. Committee member Barrett felt that would be a good time. He added that weather variations also would have a great effect on the local economic impact of the VOREC grant work done to date. Committee member Padilla said some conversation with the grant administrator should provide some invaluable information.

- b. Potential American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds Request to Select Board to Fund Signage & the Process for Signage Bids.** Given the limited grant funds now available for signage purchase and installation, Committee Chair Zuaro would like to submit a \$20,000 ARPA funds request to the Select Board members. With these funds, the first phase of the signage project could be completed this year. This request should be provided in time for the Select Board members to consider at their second meeting of April (04/23/24). Committee member Petty thought it might be useful to rebid the signage project in order to get updated and more accurate quotes. Committee Chair Zuaro felt there could be a more in-depth discussion at the next meeting regarding the amounts and types of signage to be purchased as well as updated location sites. Committee member Petty thought it might be good to increase the ARPA fund request amount to \$25,000 so no funds would need to be reallocated out of the programming category. It might be possible to receive preliminary approval from the Select Board members at the 04/23/24 meeting so that we can get a better idea of signage purchase numbers. Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to authorize Committee Chair Zuaro to submit a \$25,000 ARPA funds request to the Select Board members. In addition, the committee members approve the grant fund reallocation proposal presented by Committee Chair Zuaro with the change that only \$1,000 (not \$3,000) will move from the Equipment & Programming category into the Wayfinding & Signage category. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**
- c. Review Proposal from SE Group (Economic Impact Study).** Committee Chair Zuaro felt it probably would be best to hold off further discussion of this proposal until the grant administrator has been contacted regarding what is required in the study and whether a delay in the process is possible. The results of this conversation will be discussed with the other committee members at the next meeting (04/08/24). We will decide how to proceed at that time. Committee member Endres feels the full local economic impact of the VOREC grant work probably won't be accurately measurable for at least a couple of years so he hopes this study will not be a waste of \$10,000.
- d. Trail Counters (April 1, 2024).** Committee member Herring said the three (3) trail counters are scheduled to be reinstalled along the trail system in one week. Due to trail damage due to the July 2023 flooding rainstorm, there might have to be some relocation of the counters this time.

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

VI. Adjournment. Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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