

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of June 20, 2022

- I. Roll Call and Introduction of Committee Members.** Present were committee members Russ Barrett (Conservation Commission/Town Forest Stewardship Committee), Kimberly Caldwell (resident volunteer), Melody Currier (resident volunteer), Lucas Herring (resident volunteer), Nancy Peck (Planning Commission), Lydia Petty (Select Board member), Jeff Schulz (Town Manager), and Deborah Zuaro (Conservation Commission). Also present was Gerard LaVarnway. Committee members Colin O'Neil and Erin Viera were absent.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

- II. Election of Committee Chair.** Without objection, Ms. Zuaro was chosen as committee chair.

- III. Establish Meeting Time, Place, and Frequency.** After some discussion, there was a consensus that Monday nights work well for the committee members. The schedule was tentatively set at the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month at 6:00 p.m. Additional meetings may be scheduled should the need arise. The meetings will be warned at least forty-eight hours in advance. Mr. Schulz will work with Chair Zuaro on agenda items. There will be provision on the agendas for public participation and (for the time being) the meetings will be hybrid with both in-person and remote capability. Ms. Petty noted that in accordance with Vermont's Open Meeting Law, it is appropriate to use email to share information but not for discussion of issues that should take place at a public meeting. Meeting minutes will be posted on the municipal website.

- IV. Role of the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee.** Mr. Schulz said the committee's main role is implement the VOREC grant work plan and budget. A written work plan has been developed that will be followed as much as possible. Ms. Petty then asked about the municipality's purchasing policy. Mr. Schulz said purchases between \$5,000 and \$25,000 require soliciting quotes. Below \$5,000, you can seek quotes over the phone, by email, etc. Above \$25,000, sealed bids are required. Since as Town Manager he can sign contracts, Mr. Schulz will draft and distribute RFPs when sealed bids are required. Although bid awards are usually approved by the Select Board members, he has the authority to sign them unilaterally in emergency situations. As for the VOREC grant, Mr. Schulz said the state still has not provided the formal grant award agreement. This delay is due to staffing problems. He has been informed by some state officials that it is appropriate to proceed with bid awards, etc. even though no reimbursement funds will be available until the agreement is in place. It is unlikely that grant use conditions will change but one can never be certain. Mr. Schulz recently was told it would be about a month until the agreement has been finalized. This is unfortunate because five bids have been received for the trail restoration project. This matter is on the agenda later and it can be determined then whether or not to open the bids tonight. Mr. Herring saw no problem in the committee opening and discussing the bids since it will be the Select Board members who will make the final decision on the bid award. Mr. Barrett asked about potential conflicts of interest for committee members based on their past or current work associations, etc. Mr. Herring said any member who has a concern should bring it up at a meeting for discussion. The committee members afterwards can decide whether the concern is legitimate and if that member should be recused from discussing and/or taking action on certain matters.

- V. Questions and Discussion from Documents Sent Out.** These documents included a Vermont Open Meeting FAQ, the Town Forest Access Feasibility Study, and the VOREC Work Plan and budget. Ms. Petty noted the feasibility study and other documents related to the Town Forest are available for download on the municipal website. Committee members also can request hardcopies. Regarding the VOREC Work Plan, Mr. Schulz said this would be the guiding document for this committee as it describes its responsibilities, goals, project timelines., etc. Ms. Petty noted that due to the delay in receiving the grant agreement, certain items on the timeline regrading trail restoration and other action items might have to be put off. Some items targeted for this summer may have to be postponed to this fall or perhaps next summer. Mr. Schulz said it should not be difficult to get an extension on this grant due to the state’s own delays. Mr. Herring would not be surprised if this became a two- to three-year project. Ms. Zuaro said she would be working with Mr. Schulz on developing the RDFs when needed. Mr. Schulz said in addition to the current Trail Restoration RFP, he is working on an RFP to address the removal of invasive plants in the Town Forest. He will reach out to the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) for some assistance on this. Mr. Barrett said the Town of Berlin is working on a similar project in their municipal forest. He will contact those involved to determine who they are working with on this, etc. He added that local volunteers have helped with invasive plant removal in the past. Mr. Schulz asked if there were any cost estimates for this project. Ms. Petty thought the cost would be about \$8,000 spread over the next couple years. Mr. Barrett said it would necessary to return to the eradication sites after a few years for follow-up work. This matter has been discussed at recent Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) meetings and it was suggested that dog-safe pesticides probably would be used. Since this seems like a long-term project, Mr. Herring asked if this expense would be budgeted in coming years. Mr. Schulz noted the Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) has a budget so a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) could be established with funds set aside in coming years for this work. This would provide continued funding even after the current VOREC grant funds are exhausted. Ms. Petty said the committee members could assist Mr. Schulz in determining how much should be budgeted each year for this purpose. Mr. Schulz said the process for creating the next fiscal year’s budget usually starts in September of each year. Ms. Zuaro said the NCC is very supportive of invasive plant eradication and might pursue additional grant opportunities for this specific purpose. She will report any updates on this at future VOREC Grant Implementation Committee meetings. Ms. Petty noted there are a number of local volunteers who would be willing to assist as well. The upcoming Hawk Watch is an example of volunteers helping with Town Forest initiatives. Organized walks through the forest trail system is a good way to reach the public and inform them of the current situation and future plans.
- VI. Review of Bids for Trail Restoration Work.** Mr. Schulz said he worked with Ms. Zuaro and Ms. Petty to draft the RFP for this project. The intent is to restore the trail system at the entry point near the end of Slate Avenue. According to the RFP, this “work consists of the replacement of five culverts, swale ditching and seeding, and the filling and stabilization of two washout areas...” Five bids were received by the deadline (05/23/22) from Apex Trailworks (Braintree VT), Capitol Earthmoving (Barre VT), G&N Excavation (Bethel VT), Gillespie Fuels & Propane (Northfield VT), and Guilmette Landworks (Burlington VT). Mr. Schulz said the apparent low bidder is Gillespie Fuels & Propane at \$15,300. They are followed by Apex Trailworks (\$17,500), Guilmette Landworks (\$29,608), G&N Excavation (\$80,500), and Capitol Earthmoving (\$102,501). Ms. Petty asked how descriptive the bidders were in terms of the work to be done. Mr. Schulz said all did a pretty good job of this and the lower bidders had very similar descriptions.

The bid from Capitol Earthmoving is much higher because they included trail work adjoining the target area. Their bid for the Slate Avenue area alone is \$59,311. Mr. Schulz said it would be helpful if this committee could review the bids and perhaps provide the Select Board members a recommendation for their next meeting (06/28/22). Ms. Petty felt that because some of the trail work would be done on Norwich University (NU) property, perhaps this should wait until committee member Colin O’Neil, who manages the NU Shaw Outdoor Center, can attend. She felt it was important to have his views on this. Mr. Schulz suggested having this committee meet next Monday night (06/27/22) so there are no further delays. Ms. Petty said this could be a short meeting with the RFPs as the only agenda item. Mr. Herring also would like to hear Mr. Schulz’s recommendation at that time. Ms. Petty noted that only one of the bidders (Apex Trailworks) seems to have past experience in trail restoration. Other bidders have work on similar projects but not on forest trails specifically. Mr. Schulz said most of the work involved in trail restoration is fairly basic with installing culverts, putting down stone for drainage, etc. Ms. Petty is concerned that a contractor without previous trail restoration experience might miss some detailed work that might cause problems later. Mr. Barrett doesn’t want to end up with subpar work due to past inexperience with trail systems. Mr. Schulz will email the bid submissions to the committee members and this matter can be discussed fully at next week’s meeting. Ms. Petty suggested if the accepted bid amount is much lower than the project budget, perhaps the work area could be expanded.

Ms. Petty said Mr. O’Neil has said previously NU was willing to perform some trail work on its part of the forest trail system. This might include installing a new river crossing bridge. This can be discussed at a future committee meeting. Mr. Schulz said the municipality is fortunate that NU engineering (and other departments) students and their instructors have been willing to focus on local concerns as class projects in recent years (i.e. downtown travel kiosk, fountain replacement/rehabilitation, etc.). It is possible forest trail restoration could be the subject of a future engineering study.

VII. Next Steps. Mr. Schulz asked about other projects the committee could be working on at upcoming meetings. For example, he asked if we should start discussing the process for hiring a consultant to create the “way-finding masterplan.” Ms. Petty thought this was one of the major components of the grant work plan. Perhaps Mr. Schulz and Ms. Zuaro could start drafting an RFP that the committee members could discuss at the July 11, 2022 meeting. Mr. Herring believes it might be worthwhile to revise the project timeline since some aspects are no longer feasible due to the delay with the grant agreement. Ms. Zuaro felt this also would be a good time for the committee members to form some work groups so some complex matters can be further researched in detail.

VIII. Other Business. Ms. Petty has concerns about ATVs making use of the trail system. Mr. Schulz doesn’t believe these are members of the local ATV club (Lost Nation) as they do a good job of keeping on their own established trail system. Mr. Schulz will post a notice on Front Porch Forum should this remain an ongoing concern.

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

X. Adjournment. Motion by Mr. Herring, seconded by Mr. Barrett, to adjourn. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of July 11, 2022.