

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of November 14, 2022

- I. Roll Call.** Present were Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee members Russ Barrett, Kimberly Caldwell, Melody Currier, Lucas Herring, Colin O'Neil, Nancy Peck, Lydia Petty, and Jeff Schulz. Also present was Susan Barnard. Not present was VOREC Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

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

- III. Approval of Minutes: October 10, 2022.** Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

IV. Updates

- a. View Clearing and Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal.** Committee member Schulz, who also serves as Town Manager, has spoken recently to John Fogarty of Fogarty Forestry, which was awarded the contract for this project. He said Mr. Fogarty is eager to get started on the removal process before winter sets in. The application of herbicides to prevent regrowth probably will occur next spring. Committee member Barrett said he is willing to work with Mr. Fogarty on the initial stages of the removal process. He left a phone message for Mr. Fogarty a couple days ago but hasn't heard back yet. Committee member Schulz said a major part of starting the project is getting the vegetation removal equipment on site. Mr. Fogarty feels this might be a challenge and would like to have this done before any snowstorms. Committee member Barrett noted we are expecting some snow in the next couple days but it shouldn't be sufficient to disrupt our plans. He added that he will be heading south soon after Thanksgiving and hopes the project can get started before then. Committee member Barrett also will post on Front Porch Forum beforehand so trail users will be aware of the work to be done. Committee member Schulz said something could be put on the municipal Facebook page as well. He then asked if Committee member Barrett would like to address the Select Board members about the project at their next regular meeting (12/13/22). Committee member Barrett said he would be out of state by then but could attend the meeting remotely. Committee member Petty then thanked Committee member Barrett for all the work he already has done for this project. Committee member Barrett then passed around some photographs from when the site was last cleared with the assistance of Norwich University (NU) cadets in 2009. Committee member Petty noted that Committee Chair Zuaro is planning to maintain a collection of before-and-after images of the project area. She suggested Committee member Barrett should forward copies of the 2009 photographs to Committee Chair Zuaro in order to start the process.
- b. Additional Needs for Lybrand/Slate Avenue Trail.** Committee member Schulz said there was discussion of installing a new gate with lock as well as new fences/guardrails along some sections of the trail with steep drop-offs. Committee member O'Neil, who also serves as Manager of NU's Shaw Outdoor Center, asked for quotes on the new fences/guardrails but hasn't heard back. Committee member Petty noted that there also were questions about who owned the gate located at the trailhead. Committee member Schulz has asked employees of the Water Department but no one knows for sure. Committee member Petty asked if any NU employee might know. Committee member O'Neil will contact longtime NU employee Bizhan Yahyazadeh (Facilities Operations) to see if he knows. Former Chief Administrative Officer Dave Magida is another possibility even though he is now retired. Committee member Schulz said we probably should put any purchases until this has been resolved.

- c. **Wayfinding Master Plan Project: Dubois & King Contract.** Committee member Schulz said it remains a concern that the State of Vermont still hasn't provided a signed VOREC grant agreement document to the Town of Northfield. It is unsure whether DuBois & King is willing to go forward with this project without one. He will contact DuBois & King to see if one of their representatives can attend the VOREC meeting scheduled for Monday, December 12, 2022. We have been waiting about five (5) months for the grant award to be finalized in writing. Committee member Herring said there had been hopes that the grant agreement would be done in time for this meeting. Committee member Schulz said the delay is surprising because other state grants awarded over the past year have had the grant agreements come rather quickly. The last time he spoke to a state employee about this he was told that mid-November was the target date. He probably should reach out for another update. Committee member Caldwell said there seems to be a real lack of grant administrators working for the state at this moment. Committee member Schulz is hopeful this all will be resolved before the next meeting.

V. Discussion

- a. **Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grant.** Committee member Schulz said Economic Development Director Tom Davis has made him aware of another state grant opportunity. The funds could be used for additional trail enhancements. There was some debate over whether the Town of Northfield should apply because the Paine Mountain School District also was considering applying and there was concern that the competing applications might cancel out each other. Mr. Davis reached out to the grant administrator and was told that the Town definitely should submit its own application. The initial letter of interest is due next Monday (11/21/22) and if it passes muster, we then would be asked to complete the full grant application. Committee member Petty said Mr. Davis has been providing information about such grant opportunities to all interested parties. This particular grant would provide \$30,000 for shovel-ready recreational trails projects and could be used to further improve the upper sections of the Lybrand/Slate Avenue Trail, such as the stream crossing area. Committee member O'Neil said he has been in contact with Committee Chair Zuaro about this possibility and both agree that such additional improvements would make the trail more accessible to additional residents such as older and/or less experienced hikers. Committee member Petty thought it would be a good idea to have the letter of interest submitted by the deadline. Should this go to the next stage, the additional work required by the grant application could be delegated out amongst the VOREC committee members. She then asked if NU administrators would sign off on additional trail work on NU property. Committee member O'Neil hasn't asked this question yet but he doubts there would be any objection. Committee member Petty asked if there would be a local match amount for this grant. Committee member Schulz believes it would be twenty percent (20%) but it might be possible to have some or all of this amount offset by in-kind services. Committee member O'Neil said there also is a \$6,000 Buildings and General Services (BGS) grant available and those funds could be used to cover the local match amount. Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to authorize Committee Chair Zuaro and Mr. Davis to draft and submit a letter of interest for the RTD Grant. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**
- b. **Other Next Steps.** Committee member Schulz noted that this group has worked on a number of potential projects over the past few months that have either been completed or are now moving forward. He asked if this might be a good time to start discussing equipment purchases. Committee member Petty said this is part of the VOREC grant budget and \$6,000 will be devoted to this. This would include buying items for a lending library that would be housed in the Brown Public Library (BPL). Committee member Petty thought such purchases should be delayed until the grant agreement is in place. Committee member Schulz said we could start discussing what type of equipment would be bought and start collecting quotes.

There also need to be some decisions on how the equipment would be stored, how the lending process would work, etc. Committee member O'Neil said there is an equipment lending facility at the Shaw Outdoor Center. The amount of usage depends on outdoor conditions with snowshoe borrowing relative to the amount of snow on the ground. He added that lending "gravity-fed equipment" such as sleds, skis, etc. does require signing a waiver form that includes a helmet usage mandate. There is no similar risk with snowshoes, headlamps, etc. Committee member Petty said lending hiking backpacks, poles, etc. were other possibilities. Perhaps the committee members can discuss this further at an upcoming meeting and come up with a full list. Committee member Herring asked if these purchases would have to go through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Committee member Schulz said the Town Select Board recently passed a more flexible purchasing policy so just quotes will be needed. Committee member Barrett asked if those borrowing snowshoes would be required to use them in specified areas. Committee member O'Neil said those borrowing snowshoes from the Shaw Outdoor Center are asked where they will be used but there is no restriction on usage location. He said this system has worked well so far. Committee member Herring said the first snowstorms of the season are coming so discussing this fully at the next meeting (12/12/22) is timely. If the grant agreement really is in place by then, the purchases could start soon afterwards. Committee member Petty asked Committee member O'Neil from whom the Shaw Outdoor Center equipment was purchased. He said there was an attempt to purchase from local sources first. If this could not be worked out, they would go further afield. Committee member Schulz said the municipality does try to work with local businesses whenever fiscally feasible. Committee member Petty said there also needs to be a discussion with BPL administrators about the plans to expand the current equipment lending program. Committee member O'Neil noted that some of this equipment, especially snowshoes, are difficult to store without proper storages racks, etc. Committee member Herring said he would start the conversation about this.

As for other actions to be taken, Committee member Petty has been speaking with Committee member Caldwell about possible outdoors educational programs for both children and adults. Noting that Committee member O'Neil soon will be leaving his position at the Shaw Outdoor Center, she asked if there have been decisions regarding his replacement and whether NU will continue to hold outdoors events to which the whole community is invited. Committee member O'Neil said the job hasn't been advertised yet but he is certain NU administrators will want to maintain and perhaps expand its community outreach programs. There was a recent event with on-campus distribution of Halloween candy to local youth. Committee member Caldwell said there would be every effort to keep the educational programs multigenerational and of interest for all age groups. Committee member Petty thought this could include finding experts who could conduct organized hikes that provided information on identifying animal tracks along the trails, etc. This could be volunteer work or perhaps compensated from grant monies. Committee member Petty also thought it might be good to starting planning winter events, which might include organized snowshoe hikes along the trail system. These might coincide with NU events, such as open houses, in order to involve the families of current or prospective students. Given past history, we are probably looking at February or March of next year when sufficient snow cover will be more certain. Committee member O'Neil said to keep in mind the possibility of getting student volunteer assistance through the NU Center of Civic Engagement. Committee member Petty thought we might have a better idea by the next meeting of whether there will be sufficient snow cover for any events during the December/January holiday season.

Committee member O'Neil thought it would be a good idea for widely advertise any Paine Mountain events beforehand because new residents and even those who have lived here for many years often are unaware that public use of "our mountain" is highly encouraged. These events could be true learning experiences. Committee member O'Neil knows of one recent arrival who moved here from Richmond, Vermont specifically because of Paine Mountain recreational opportunities.

Committee member O'Neil has a couple additional updates. He has spoken to Ann Plourde about the possibility of regaining access through her Turkey Hill property to restore an old trail. Unfortunately, she has no interest in this. On a brighter note, he said the Shaw Outdoor Center has new rules regarding leash requirements for dogs along the nearby trail system. Since these have in place, he has seen complete compliance and dogs are always under control. He is aware there has been some discussion of strengthening the language in the local animal control ordinance to ensure dogs are leashed and under control with the Town Forest.

VI. Public Participation (Unscheduled).

- a. **Susan Barnard: Questions about Trail System Access, etc.** Ms. Barnard has a hiking/snowshoeing group that meets at the United Church each Tuesday and Thursday at 10:00 a.m. for a two (2) hour organized walk. Her group now is avoiding the trail system due to deer hunting season concerns but looks forward to snowshoeing along the trail system once winter sets in. Ms. Barnard asked if it was permitted to park near the trailhead at the end of Slate Avenue near the Highland Avenue intersection. Her group usually meets at the church first and then carools to the trailhead. Committee member Schulz said there are a few parking spots but carpooling is a good idea. Ms. Barnard asked if hunting was allowed by the NU ski area on Paine Mountain. Committee member O'Neil said the land is posted and hunting is not allowed but he heard a bowhunter was out there earlier this year. Ms. Barnard asked if parking was allowed by the Shaw Outdoor Center. Committee member O'Neil said there were a few parking spaces there for public use. They do try to encourage people to park by the Green Mountain Family Practice parking lot but this should not be a problem for Ms. Barnard's group on weekday mornings. Ms. Barnard said she is looking forward to using the proposed new trail that would link the NU campus to the downtown area by way of Freight Yard Way. Committee member Petty then thanked Ms. Barnard for organizing these local excursions.

VII. Adjournment. Motion by Committee member O'Neil, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to adjourn. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of December 12, 2022.