

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of July 11, 2022

- I. Roll Call.** Present were Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, committee members Russ Barrett, Kimberly Caldwell, Melody Currier, Nancy Peck, Lydia Petty, and Jeff Schulz. Also present were Gerard LaVarnway, Jeremy Whalen, and Tim Swartz. Committee members Lucas Herring, Colin O'Neil, and Erin Viera were absent.

Chair Deborah Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

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

III. Approval of Minutes

- a. June 20, 2022.** Committee member Caldwell said the minutes on the discussion of the municipality's purchasing policy were a little different than what she remembered hearing at the time. Committee member Schulz suggested some minor corrective changes to the minutes. Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to approve the revised minutes. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**
- b. June 27, 2022.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

IV. Discussion

- a. Apex Trailworks Bid Award.** At the previous meeting (06/27/22), the committee decided to recommend to the Select Board that the Trail Restoration Project be awarded to Apex Trailworks even though another company submitted a slightly lower bid. It was felt the extensive experience Apex Trailworks has in creating/restoring forest trails justified the extra expense. The following night, the Select Board awarded this project to Apex Trailworks based on the recommendation of this committee. Committee member Schulz, as Town Manager, subsequently reached out to Apex Trailworks and learned they will be able to start the project within the next couple weeks. Committee Chair Zuaro said this was very good news. She then asked about recent work done on the trail by volunteers. Committee member Petty said Colin O'Neil, the Manager of the Norwich University (NU) Shaw Outdoor Center, did organize some volunteer work on the NU section of the trail last week (07/06/22). Some debris was left along the trail path to be chipped and removed later by Apex Trailworks. Committee member Petty asked if adjacent landowners would be notified before the trail work begins. She also asked if the trail system would need to be closed during this work. Committee member Schulz said the property owners would be notified and any trail closure should be brief. Committee member Petty noted there is a locked gate by the trailhead and asked who has the key. Committee member Schulz will check on this. He added we are very fortunate Apex Trailworks will be able to start work right away as it is difficult to get timely work from contractors these days due to staff shortages, supply chain problems, etc. Committee Chair Zuaro agreed with this assessment.

- b. Invasive Removal and View Clearing.** Committee member Barrett has been doing some background work on this project and had prepared a list of possible contractors. He noted there might be some problems getting heavy equipment to the higher elevation worksites. He also recommended that the municipality receive permission from the state to use herbicides for this project before finalizing the RFP and soliciting bids. The target areas also need to be identified. Committee member Schulz asked how many herbicide applications would be needed. Committee member Barrett said the first application should be done in late summer with a follow up the next spring. In future years, volunteers could help monitor the problem areas to determine when future applications are needed. Committee member Schulz said the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) probably would assist with mapping the project's target areas. Committee Chair Zuaro asked how inform the public of this project. Would a presentation to the Select Board members be best? Committee member Schulz felt that probably would be the best approach along with a posting on Front Porch Forum, etc. Committee member Petty asked if Committee member Barrett would be willing to explain the project to the Select Board members including the proposed use of herbicides. Committee member Barrett said he was willing to do this but felt it might be best to also have a qualified invasive species removal expert on hand to answer any questions he cannot. Committee member Schulz said this community has had some past experience with the removal of invasive foliage, i.e. Japanese knotweed, along the Dog River. He will review the documentation for this past work to see what needs to be done for this project. Committee member Caldwell asked what were the main invasive plants in the Town Forest. Committee member Barrett said honeysuckle was the main culprit followed by buckthorn and barberry. Committee Chair Zuaro said an RFP needs to be developed for this project and we also need to get the timing correct. Committee member Barrett said this will need to be a two-year project. Committee Chair Zuaro had thought of stating this year on this project but that depends on the timeline for drafting the RFP, conducting public outreach, etc. Committee member Barrett said if the RFPs are sent out by mid-August, the initial work could be done in September or early October, which are the optimal times. Committee member Schulz asked for a rough estimate of the project costs. Committee member Barrett said about \$8,000 has been allocated for this project out of the VOREC grant funds. Committee member Schulz said an amount that low would not require Select Board approval for the bid award. As for the presentation to the Select Board members, that could occur at one of their next two regular meetings: July 26, 2022 or August 9, 2022. The Select Board members probably would like some information on the project target areas, the types of herbicides to be used, etc. Committee member Petty thought it might be good to have a representative from Vermont Fish & Wildlife present to answer any questions. If that has to be arranged, Committee member Schulz said we probably are looking at the early August meeting. Committee member Petty asked how the public would be informed of this presentation beforehand. Committee Chair Zuaro thought postings on Front Porch Forum and the municipal website should be sufficient. Committee member Petty thought some historic photographs of how the area used to look could be part of the presentation in order to show how the area has changed over time. Committee member Barrett will research this. He added the RFP probably should include an organized site visit for potential bidders. It might be necessary to car pool to locations near the target areas instead of asking them to hike the entire way. Committee Chair Zuaro then thanked Committee member Barrett for all the work he already has put into this important project.

- c. RFP for Wayfinding Masterplan.** Committee Chair Zuaro said the RFP for this project has been developed and was distributed to this committee's members for comment. Committee member Barrett asked if the RFP would be sent to potential bidders or if it would be publicly advertised. Committee member Schulz said it would be a combination of both. He asked if the committee members had ideas about who potential bidders might be. Committee Chair Zuaro thought they might be the same companies who were contacted about the Better Connections grant project. Committee member Barrett asked if CVRPC might be interested. Committee member Schulz said that probably was unlikely due to the amount of work already on their plate at this time along with their staffing problems. However, CVRPC might have some good suggestions about potential bidders. Committee Chair Zuaro said Committee member Petty added exceptional detail in helping draft the RFP. If there are no major concerns, she is hoping the RFP could be sent out by this Friday (07/15/22). Committee member Petty would like this masterplan in place by next spring but wonders if the December 15, 2022 deadline for project completion is feasible. Committee member Schulz said it is possible to extend this deadline into January 2023. Committee Chair Zuaro said this might attract a larger pool of bidders. There was further discussion of perhaps involving local graphic designer Jason Endres in the RFP discussion. Mr. Endres designed the Northfield community logo for the Northfield Economic Development Network (NCDN) and this logo probably will be included on any new trail system signage. After additional discussion, it was committee consensus that since some members needed additional time to review the RFP and there are significant questions to be answered, approval of the final RFP will be delayed until the next meeting (07/25/22). In the interim, Committee Chair Zuaro will contact Mr. Endres regarding his views on the subject.
- d. Review Revised Timeline for Implementation.** Committee Chair Zuaro distributed by email a revised timeline to the committee members last week. However, as tonight's meeting has now exceeded its expected one-hour length, she felt it best to delay any discussion of the revised timeline until the next regular meeting. There was no objection.

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

VI. Adjournment. Motion by Committee member Barrett, seconded by Committee member Schulz, to adjourn. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of July 25, 2022.