

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of October 10, 2022

- I. Roll Call.** Present were Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, committee members Russ Barrett, Kimberly Caldwell, Melody Currier, Lucas Herring, Colin O'Neil, Nancy Peck, Lydia Petty, and Jeff Schulz.

Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

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

- III. Approval of Minutes: September 12, 2022.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to approve the minutes. **Motion passed 7-0-2, with Committee members Herring and O'Neil abstaining.**

- IV. Discussion**

- a. VOREC Grant Agreement.** Since the last meeting, Committee Chair Zuaro has been in contact with Lauren Honican, a VOREC Grants Program Specialist, about what needs to be done before the grant agreement can be finalized. Committee Chair Zuaro said several questions were asked but she was able to answer most of them. For example, she was able to assure Ms. Honican that none of the new trail kiosks would be installed on private property. They would be sited either on municipal property or Norwich University (NU) property. There is one remaining concern: the grant budget for establishing parking areas for greater Town Forest access has been set at \$25,000. However, in the Northfield Town Forest Access Feasibility Study drafted by DuBois & King, the cost of this is estimated at about \$45,000. Ms. Honican would like to know if there are plans to scale back this project to meet the budget projection or seek other sources of funding. Committee Chair Zuaro told her this would be discussed at tonight's meeting. Committee member Schulz, who also serves as Town Manager, said there had been some discussion of having municipal employees provide some in-kind services for this project, which should reduce some of the expense. Committee Chair Zuaro noted that in their proposed project budget, DuBois & King set aside \$15,000 for state permitting expenses. Committee member Schulz said this seemed to be a rather high. Committee member O'Neil also felt this was too much. Committee member Petty noted the feasibility study looked at two expanded parking areas near the Shaw Center but perhaps this could be cut back. Committee member O'Neil agreed this could help reduce the project's estimated cost. In addition, DuBois & King's cost estimate includes about \$1,000 for installing kiosks and other signage. He believes this expense probably should come out of the budget for the Wayfinding Master Plan project. Committee member Herring said by reducing the set-aside for permitting and other savings, project expenses probably should come within the proposed \$25,000 budget. Committee member O'Neil, who also serves as Manager of the Shaw Outdoor Center, said NU is developing a masterplan of its own that could include establishing new parking areas that could provide improved forest access. Committee member Schulz felt the state would consider this a feasible explanation for the disparity between the proposed cost estimates. In addition, as the project moves forward, there should be the ability to obtain an amendment to the grant agreement should the current cost estimates prove inaccurate once materials are purchased, etc.

Committee member Petty concurs that the state should see this as a good faith effort to comply with the cost estimates in the grant application. Committee Chair Zuaro will contact Ms. Honican tomorrow regarding tonight's discussion. Committee member Petty then noted that the state is looking for "before and after" photographic evidence that the grant funds are being spent properly. She asked who would maintain this documentation. Committee Chair Zuaro said she will keep the photo database herself. There also should be a review of all deliverables the state wants submitted with the periodic progress reports to make sure nothing is missing. Committee member Petty asked when we should expect the grant agreement to be finalized. Committee Chair Zuaro said probably not until early November.

Committee member O'Neil asked if the new gate at the Lybrand/Slate Avenue Trail entrance has been purchased. Committee member Schulz has spoken to a contractor about installing it but he felt it best to have this person first reach out to Committee member O'Neil as it would be located on NU property. Committee member O'Neil hasn't yet been contacted. Committee member Schulz will contact the proposed supplier again. He added that he has researched the ownership of the current gate but the documentation is unclear. Committee member Peck thought perhaps a gate isn't needed but rather just obstructions that prevent vehicular traffic. Committee member Barrett said we do need to allow for access for emergency vehicles in case there is an accident along the trail. Committee member O'Neil said a new gate was installed recently at the Shaw Outdoor Center. He will check on what it cost so we'll have a good idea of the possible expense of this one.

- b. Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal and View Clearing Bids.** Committee Chair Zuaro said two bids were received for this project by last Friday's deadline (10/07/22). One is from Fogarty Forestry (West Newbury VT) for \$4,100 and the other from Guilmette Landworks (Burlington VT) for \$13,333. Committee member Barrett, who has been spearheading this project, said he is unfamiliar with either company but both participated in the required site visit. He added that Fogarty Forestry, which submitted the much lower bid, seems to be capable and they appear to be more flexible in terms of scheduling the various phases of the project, i.e. vegetation cutting, herbicide application, etc. Committee member Herring asked if references or evidence of past similar work experience had been submitted with the quotes. Committee member Petty said they had not but perhaps could be requested before the project award. Committee member Schulz said it might be possible to make the project award conditional on whether any red flags are discovered with further background research. Committee member Barrett has done some research into Fogarty Forestry and there were some glowing references. He could look into this further if the committee members prefer. Motion by Committee member O'Neil, seconded by Committee member Herring, to award the Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal and View Clearing project to Fogarty Forestry for a cost not to exceed \$4,100. Committee member Caldwell hasn't had the opportunity to review the project bids so she will abstain on this vote. **Motion passed 8-0-1, with Committee member Caldwell abstaining.**

Committee Chair Zuaro asked if the Select Board members would have to approve this bid award. Committee member Schulz said the project cost was low enough that he has authority as Town Manager to approve it under the municipal purchasing policy. Committee member Petty felt there should be some public outreach to inform residents of what will be involved with this project. Some people have especial concerns about herbicide applications, brush clearing, etc. Committee member Schulz said postings could be put on the municipal Facebook page, Front Porch Forum, and perhaps the local newspaper when we get closer to these phases of the project. Letters also could be sent to adjacent property owners to inform them of what will be done. Committee member Herring noted since the project bid is lower than expected, there should be funds in the project budget to cover this expense. Committee member Schulz agreed that these would be considered administrative expenses. Committee member Petty just doesn't want anyone surprised by the project and felt a full explanation should be provided for the herbicide use and tree cutting. Committee member Barrett noted the approved Town Forest Stewardship Plan does encourage pro-active "forest management activities" to remove invasive shrub species and clear brush to "secure panoramic vistas" (p. 52). He added that the project timeline in the RFP required brush removal by the end of March 2023 but he expects the work to probably start by mid-November 2022. Committee Chair Zuaro said once we know Fogarty Forestry's own timeline, we can start the public outreach campaign. Committee member Caldwell suggested putting signs near the project target area so that trail users are made aware of the upcoming work and the rationale behind it. She then asked what was the budget for this project. Committee Chair Zuaro said it was \$8,000. Should there be any cost overruns, it might be possible to use savings from other VOREC grant projects. Committee member O'Neil noted the figures now being considered are just rough estimates at this time.

- V. Kick off Meeting with DuBois & King (Wayfinding Master Plan Project).** Since this project was awarded to DuBois & King about a month ago (10/13/22), Committee Chair Zuaro was hoping an initial meeting with them could be held later this month. However, due to delays in receiving the final grant agreement, perhaps this should be delayed to next month. Committee member Schulz said that as Town Manager, he does get nervous about putting additional municipal funds into these projects before the grant documentation has been finalized and there is complete assurance that these funds will be reimbursed with grant monies. However, it might be possible to sign an agreement with DuBois & King by early November should it become clearer that the finalized grant agreement is forthcoming. Committee Chair Zuaro believes we are getting closer each day to addressing all of the state's concerns that are contributing to this delay.
- VI. Other Business.** There was nothing additional at this time.
- VII. Public Participation (Unscheduled).** There was none.
- VIII. Adjournment.** Motion by Committee member Herring, seconded by Committee member Petty, to adjourn. **Motion passed 9-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 6:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

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