

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of October 9, 2023

- I. Roll Call.** Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC) Grant Implementation Committee Chair Deborah Zuaro, members Russ Barrett, Colin Bright, Kim Caldwell (absent), Melody Currier (absent), Jason Endres, Lucas Herring, Andrew Padilla, and Lydia Petty.

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

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

- III. Approval of Minutes: September 18, 2023.** Motion by Committee member Barrett, seconded by Committee member Endres, to approve the minutes. Committee member Bright had one correction: the liability issues he had with municipal employees installing the new signage was not that they might install it improperly and create a public hazard. His concern was that the signage might be damaged by them during the installation process and he wanted to be sure that it could be subsequently replaced at no charge. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

IV. Updates

- a. July Flooding Storm update.** Committee member Padilla has met with FEMA representatives about the storm damage on the Lybrand Trail and other parts of the trail system. They walked up to the duck pond where most of the storm damage was located. The FEMA representatives did some measurements that will be included in the reimbursement forms. The committee members might be able to provide their own estimates about the extent of the trail damage. Committee member Padilla now is seeking trail restoration estimates in order to return the trails to their pre-storm condition. The FEMA representatives seemed to accept this full restoration as the ultimate goal.
- b. Parking at Norwich University (NU) Shaw Outdoor Center.** Committee Chair Zuaro had been hoping Town Manager Jeff Schulz would be able to attend tonight's meeting but he was unable to be here. There seems to be some remaining uncertainty regarding whether all the permits, including Act 250, are in place for the expansion of the parking area near the NU Shaw Outdoor Center. Manager Schulz was to speak to consulting engineer Ronald Lyon about this. Mr. Lyon is now semi-retired but was DuBois & King's Director of Site and Land Development Division when the original parking lot was constructed so he should be familiar with the past permitting process. Committee Chair Zuaro is hoping this matter can be resolved sooner rather than later.
- c. Town Forest Access.** Committee Chair Zuaro believes the Town Highway crew have completed the emergency road repairs necessitated by this summer's flooding so this would be a good time to coordinate with Manager Schulz and Highway Foreman Trent Tucker about grading Kingston Road. This is an important access point for the upper Town Forest and NU trail system. Manager Schulz will be reaching out to Committee member Padilla about this since the road adjoins NU property. Committee member Padilla said there is a location about halfway up the road that has room for a couple of parking spaces. Committee member Barrett said if this road suffered considerable storm damage, perhaps FEMA would reimburse for grading the whole road up to the trailhead. Committee Chair Zuaro also would like this project addressed soon.

- d. **Other updates.** Committee member Barrett has heard back from John Fogerty (Fogarty Forestry) regarding the View Clearing and Invasive Species & Vegetation Removal. It seems the second treatment of the target area was done a couple of weeks ago (09/25/23) after some delays due to wet weather. Some trees also were removed to improve the vista views. Mr. Fogerty plans to be back in about three (3) weeks for the third treatment. Board member Herring would like to get the trail counters from Committee member Bright so he can pull off the electronic data. Committee member Bright will provide them as soon as possible.

V. Discussion

- a. **Economic Impact Study.** Committee Chair Zuaro noted that (unfortunately) both Manager Schulz and Economic Development Director Tom Davis could not be here tonight as both will be integral to developing this study. Manager Schulz has said that it probably would be best for an outside consult to be hired to draft the study, which is a requirement of the VOREC grant award. The data from the trail counters will be an important part of this study to illustrate the number of Town Forest users. Another study component could be to conduct a survey of trail users to determine how often they use the trail system, for what purposes, etc. It also might be useful to contact local businesses to see if they have seen any increase in their custom due to out-of-town visitors being attracted to Northfield for Town Forest usage, including organized events. Committee Chair Zuaro noted that \$7,500 in grant funds have been budgeted for this study. It might be possible for members of the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) to become involved in this project. Committee member Endres noted that Local Motion conducted such a survey for Walden VT so they might be willing to perform this one as well. Committee Chair Zuaro will contact Local Motion about this. Committee member Petty thought if there is consideration of hiring an outside consultant, there first should be a review of the municipality's purchasing policy as well as the development for a project RFP. She would be willing to help if some parts of the project were done internally, such as the outreach to local businesses, etc. Committee Chair Zuaro would favor hiring an outside consult since this expense already has been budgeted. She would be willing to meet with Manager Schulz regarding the drafting of a project RFP. Committee member Barrett thought it might be useful to have sign-in logs along the trail system. That way we would have information beyond the basic numbers that the trail counters would provide. This would include the number of repeat users, what people are doing along the trail system, i.e., birdwatching, hiking, biking, etc. Committee member Herring thought perhaps this could be done electronically with signs with QR codes. He will provide the trail counter data at the next meeting (10/23/23).
- b. **Programming.** Committee Chair Zuaro said this topic hasn't been discussed much at this committee meetings lately as the focus has been on the wayfinding and mapping project. She has spoken to Leslie Striebe and Cara Gauthier from the group Welcome Home Northfield, which organized the concert series in Memorial Park this past summer, about helping organize future events about Northfield outside recreation. Committee member Petty thought that was a good idea. There might be other local groups that might be willing to put together education events that involve the Town Forest or other Northfield natural resources. Committee Chair Zuaro said it might be good to choose dates and specific date that would engage both the NU community as well as the general public. The recent Paine Mountain Trail Race was a good example of this. If there is interest in organizing a wintertime outdoors events, perhaps Ms. Striebe and Ms. Gauthier should be invited to a future committee meeting for their input. There is grant funding for this so we probably should work with existing groups to help with the heavy lifting.

Committee member Petty asked if NU has any outdoors events planned for the near future or if he knows of any future events on NU property. Committee member Padilla, who manages the Shaw Outdoor Center, said a mountain bike group would like to hold a trail race on Saturday, October 28, 2023. He added that he took a course last week in order to qualify to lead local fishing excursions. These would be three (3) hours long and would be funded by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. These could be held along the Dog River and excursion participants would not be required to obtain fishing licenses for these events. There will be other organized fishing events scheduled for this winter, including ice fishing on Berlin Pond. Committee member Padilla also is looking to hold organized events at or near the Shaw Outdoor Center. NU could provide any needed special equipment for these events, i.e., snowshoes, etc., or participants could bring their own. Committee member Petty said VOREC grant funds could cover the cost of refreshments or other provisions.

Committee Chair Zuaro thought it might be useful to speak with Brown Public Library (BPL) officials, especially the Youth Director, about outdoors educational programs that could take place in the library or in the Town Forest itself. Committee member Endres suggested a type of scavenger hunt along the Town Forest trails that might include items that could be exchanged for free or discounted items from local merchants. Committee Chair Zuaro said there had been some talk of recreating the “Hundred Years Walk” to the Paine Mountain summit that was held in 1914. Committee member Barrett said there has been some discussion about holding this event next summer. Committee Chair Zuaro asked if NCDN might be interested in programming these events. Committee member Endres is an NCDN member so he will bring this up at the next meeting. However, he doubts there would be much interest as the NCDN members have indicated some reluctance in becoming an event planning group.

Committee member Padilla reported that a NU cadet company has volunteered to help clear fallen leaves from the NU trail system in coming weeks. He added that there also has been some discussion of NU cadets and students from other schools holding a group camping excursion on Cheney Field. Committee member Padilla will provide more information about this possibility to the committee members when he learns more. There might be a need for a discussion on what permission for this would be required and from whom it would come. Committee member Bright thought that anyone helping to organize such an event should first interact with the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) as well as Manager Schulz. Camping in the Town Forest is by permission only and this is specified in the Town Forest Stewardship Plan. Committee member Padilla noted that unauthorized camping is forbidden on NU property. He felt that any permission from should include a list of rules regarding what activities would be allowed and which would not. Campfires are already strictly forbidden in the Town Forest. Committee member Bright is concerned about the possibility of trash and human waste being left on site. Committee member Padilla said these matters could be discussed at the TFSC meeting to be held next week (10/17/23).

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

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

The meeting was adjourned at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of October 30, 2023.