

**TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**  
**NORTHFIELD RIVERWALK PROJECT**  
**WORKING GROUP MEETING**  
**Minutes of March 19, 2025**  
**Full meeting recording is available at**  
<https://youtu.be/4O4RFQz5Pk>

- I. ROLL CALL.** Participants: Michele Braun (Friends of the Winooski River), Kahwa Douoguih, Kaitlyn Keating, Kristina Kiarsis, DeLane McIlvene, Mary Nadon Scott, Merry Shernock, Carolyn Stevens, Tim Swartz, and Debbie Zuaro.

The meeting started at 6:08 p.m.

- II. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Scheduled):** None.

- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** The January 15, 2025 meeting minutes were approved without objections.

**IV. OLD BUSINESS**

- a. Dollar General Gift and Status of Transfer.** Merry provided a brief update on the recent interactions with Dollar General regarding access to the Dog River behind their building. They had been asked for an easement in order to create a river access path but instead decided to donate the land to the municipality. The land has been surveyed and it starts about fifteen feet (15') from the Dollar General building. Merry thought that was good as that would be above the one hundred (100) year flood plain.
- b. Northfield Town Meeting 2025.** Merry thanked Patrick Meehan for bringing the large design concepts prints to the Open Meeting on Monday night as well as leaving them at the Northfield Middle & High School building for display during the next day's Australian Ballot voting. She added that Mike Gonneville saw these displays, which were also printed in the Northfield News article, and he would like to get involved with the project. Mr. Gonneville is locally famous for leading a group of Northfield youths walking to school on Wednesday mornings (weather permitting).
- c. Cross Brothers Dam Removal Community Comment Event (03/12/25).** Tim said he attended this informational meeting from 5:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. He noted that some people were there already when he showed up and a fair number of people trickled in and out while he was there. Mary attended the meeting remotely. Tim added that the large Riverwalk Project display easels were in the Community Room during the meeting and attendees looked at them along with other displays directly related to the dam removal. He said that the dam removal project engineers were very informative and had friendly interactions with those looking for more information about the project. However, there really wasn't any new material other than what had been presented at the Select Board meeting the previous night. Carolyn said the engineers appear to be largely supportive of the Riverwalk project but also seemed to be more focused on the dam removal process and not so much on what would happen afterwards. Merry is very encouraged that the dam removal will help spur action on the creation of a future public path in the area.
- d. Review of Recent Public Relations Efforts, i.e. Town Report Submission, Northfield News Article, Public Placements, etc.** Merry said the wording of the newspaper article was basically the same as what had been printed in the Town Report. The placement of smaller versions (11" x 17") of the design concepts around town at restaurants, businesses, etc. has been very successful in obtaining public support for the project.

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

- a. Reports from the Field, i.e. updates from other committees, projects, etc.** Debbie is a Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) member and she said NCC Chair David Mears thought it would be very useful for her to attend tonight's meeting because there is a great intersection in their shared goals of providing additional outdoor recreation opportunities in Northfield. She added that the NCC members are willing to assist with their own particular skill sets and past experience as the project progresses. Debbie said there are other shared interests between the groups such as the need to remove invasive vegetation (i.e., knotweed) from the banks of the Dog River.

In addition, the NCC is now involved with the Friends of the Winooski River in a grant-funded river access project. Michele is the Executive Director of Friends of the Winooski River and she also worked for several years as Northfield's Zoning Administrator. During her tenure here, she worked extensively on the post-Irene FEMA buyout process that led to the creation of Dog River Park. Therefore, Michele is very familiar with Northfield concerns and is willing to assist with the Riverwalk project even though this is a new subject to her. Merry then provided a brief overview of the project including the current focus on the segment that would commence behind the Dollar General property. She felt that the Dog River is a valuable resource that has never been properly developed for recreational purposes. This project would like to correct that deficiency. The dam removal project will help with establishing the initial segment by providing some access paths, etc. Michele said Friends of the Winooski River has been a partner in this dam removal project for several years and is pleased it will finally happen this year. Tim said the initial impetus for the Riverwalk project came for the Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN) a few years ago. NCDN did make a successful application for \$50,000 in local American Recovery Act Plan (ARPA) funds to cover the initial engineering and other expenses. Merry noted that during the ARPA public outreach effort to determine how residents would prefer to spend these funds, expanding local outdoor recreational opportunities was a popular choice. Michele noted that Friends of the Winooski River has received a grant from the Lake Champlain Basin program to work with local communities like Northfield on improving public access to Lake Champlain and its tributaries. This grant would provide staff support for locating grant funds, conducting public outreach campaigns, etc. The Riverwalk project definitely would meet the criteria for this grant and there would be a staff person hired to assist Northfield in pursuing this project. Michele said that the federal funds were recently frozen so that staff person is not in place at this time but she hopes this matter will be resolved soon. She added that the grant title is "Reconnecting with Rivers" and Friends of the Winooski River will take feedback from Northfield officials, committee members, etc. regarding how any community engagement project would be conducted. Merry noted that one segment of the Riverwalk project would pass in close proximity the senior housing units known as Green Mountain Apartments. Residents there have expressed privacy and other concerns about the proposed public path and the grant could help with addressing and resolving these issues so the project can move forward. The funds also could be used to organize group walks along the proposed riverwalk paths.

*Kaitlyn left at this time.*

Tim suggested that other group walks could be arranged so that the actual dam removal can be witnessed while it was underway. This would help demonstrate that real progress is being made in the overall goal to improve public access to the Dog River. Merry noted that the public path is intended to be universally accessible and this should be emphasized in future outreach efforts.

- b. Future Public Relations Efforts.** Merry doesn't see the immediate need for extensive PR efforts in the near future as there shouldn't be any new project developments in the next few weeks. Tim thought another article should be prepared for the Northfield News that would focus on the Dollar General land donation as this would keep this project in the public eye while also providing Dollar General with some deserved good publicity. Michele thought this summer's "Night on the Common" would be a good venue for spreading the word about the Riverwalk project and its recent progress. Merry noted that this was done last year and there were many positive interactions with the public. There also could be some additional interaction at the regular Northfield Farmers Markets held on Tuesday afternoons from late spring to early fall. If there is a significant building of public support for this project, that might help when private property owners are approached in future to provide easements for the trail system. Michele thought it would be good to eventually develop a trail connection between the Dog River Park and the possible new parklet that could be created after the removal of the Cross Brothers Dam.

Merry said it was good to have all the new attendees here tonight (along with the usual participants).

**VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (Unscheduled).** There was none.

**VII. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:** Wednesday, April 16, 2025.

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT.** Without objection, the meeting adjourned at 7:04 p.m.