

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of April 22, 2024

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

Acting Committee Chair Petty called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

II. Public Participation (Scheduled):

- a. Cara Gauthier, Programing Requests Follow Up.** Acting Committee Chair Petty said the programming proposals provided by Ms. Gauthier and Brown Public Library (BPL) youth librarian Rebecca Pearish were discussed at the last meeting (04/11/24) and it was thought best to ask them back in order to answer any unresolved questions. Ms. Pearish was unable to attend tonight but did send back an email that addressed some of these concerns. Acting Committee Chair Petty noted that the main concern the committee members had was whether the programming proposals submitted could be properly linked to outdoor recreation venues, which would be more in keeping with the intention of the state's VOREC program. There also was a question regarding whether, should the grant funds be provided for these programming proposals, Ms. Gauthier and Ms. Pearish would be willing to work out the organization and logistics of the programming events and if they would handle the publicizing and marketing of them. Ms. Gauthier said she and Ms. Pearish had discussed these concerns and agreed that the programmed events either could be located in the Town Forest or could have separate components that involved the Town Forest and/or the trail system. For example, the Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) presentation on birds of prey could be accompanied afterwards by an "Owl Night Hike" in the Town Forest. Similarly, the Caterpillar Lab could be followed by a scavenger hunt along the Town Forest trail system. Ms. Gauthier felt such programming would achieve the general grant goal of getting more local youth better involved with the Town Forest and other local outdoor recreational venues. Acting Committee Chair Petty asked if there would be any additional costs that would be associated with adding these addendums to the wildlife presentations. Ms. Gauthier thought the extra expense should be minimal. There would be small costs for purchasing the scavenger hunt items but the BPL could absorb the costs of event flyers and other publicity. Committee member Caldwell likes all the programming proposals that have been presented so far. Committee member Barrett agrees with the value of providing wildlife education programs for local youth. Acting Committee Chair Petty said if the committee members did approve these programs, there would need to be some tracking of the number of participants. There also could be some photographic documentation of what age groups are taking part in these programs, etc. She added that the committee members have expressed some enthusiasm about the proposal to have kids' backpacks include as part of the BPL outdoor recreation lending library. The availability of this equipment could be advertised along with the programming publicization. There also was a suggestion to include more information about the trail system, such as laminated maps, included in the kids' backpacks. Ms. Gauthier thought it would be good to both enlighten and encourage local families to make more use of the Town Forest trail system.

As several committee members aren't present tonight, Acting Committee Chair Petty didn't feel it would be proper to take action on these proposals tonight. However, this matter will be revisited at the next meeting when more are present. She also thought it might be possible to approve some of the requests on an individual basis should there be remaining concerns about others.

III. Approval of Minutes: April 11, 2024. Given the number of committee members absent tonight, approval of minutes was tabled until the next meeting.

IV. Discussion

- a. Review and Finalize Signage Phase 1 for RFP.** At the last meeting, there had been a general discussion regarding the number and types of signage to be included in the Phase 1 Signage RFP. At that time, there seemed to be consensus to include the purchase of one (1) Type A Info Sign and two (2) Type B Kiosks. The plan is for the Info Sign to be located in the downtown area and the kiosks at as yet undetermined sites along the Town Forest trail system. There also was a consensus at that time to include the purchase of three (3) Type F Map/Trail Signs that would be located at the Green Mountain Family Practice, at the Kingston Road trailhead, and at Butternut Junction. There also was a suggestion for the purchase of thirteen (13) Type G Intersection Trail Signs that would be installed at various points of the trail system. The committee members now looked at an on-screen map of the Town Forest Trail System to review and perhaps finalize the signage listing. During this discussion, icons indicating various signage types were added to the map to show where the new signage should be located. Many of these new signs were located at the various identified "Points of Interest" highlighted in the map legend. Acting Committee Chair Petty noted that the signage budget now has a \$34,000 balance. This amount would be supplemented by an additional \$25,000 if the committee's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) fund request to the Select Board members is successful. This request will be discussed at their regular meeting tomorrow night (04/23/24). It was tabulated that the signage purchases suggested tonight would total about \$43,500. Acting Committee Chair Petty noted that sign installation costs also should be included as part of the project budget. It was previously estimated that this would cost between \$8,000 and \$10,000. Committee member Caldwell suggested holding off on the purchase of one of the kiosks for the time being and using those funds to purchase more of the less expensive trailside signage. Acting Committee Chair Petty thought that was a good suggestion. She noted that it was noted at a previous meeting that the existing signage located in proximity to the Shaw Outdoor Center could mean that an informational kiosk was not needed there. Since so many committee members are not here tonight, Acting Committee Chair Petty suggested making recommendations that could be acted upon at a future committee meeting. Committee member Bright thought it might be useful to have recommendations for new signage that could be purchased for the current \$34,000 signage budget as well as for the \$59,000 proposed signage budget that would include ARPA funds. Acting Committee Chair Petty then used a different color scheme for additional signage purchases that would be accommodated by the higher amount. The recommendations for the amount of signage to be purchased as well as their proposed locations will be presented at the next committee meeting for full discussion. The on-screen trail map that was updated tonight will be provided to the committee members absent tonight before the discussion.

- b. Economic Impact Study: Questions for Trail User Survey and Customer Survey.** Acting Committee Chair Petty said that the SE Group would like some initial recommendations from the VOREC committee members regarding this local survey before they started working on the finalized process. The SE Group envisions three (3) distinct categories for this process that would include: Trail Intercept Survey, Customer Intercept Survey, and Stakeholder Interviews. Committee member Bright said for the Trail Intercept Survey, he would start with asking whether the trail user was a Northfield resident or from elsewhere. If they were non-resident, they would be asked how far they travelled and how they came to learn of the Northfield Town Forest and its trail system. They also would be asked how often they have used this trail system, how comfortable they felt navigating it, which trailhead they used to access the trail system, what activities they are doing on the trails, and what was their frequency of usage. Acting Committee Chair Petty said if anyone else has any suggestions, they should forward them to Committee Chair Zuaro by email. This survey would be distributed to those encountered on the trail system. We could also ask visitors to Northfield if they plan to patronize any of the downtown businesses while they are here.

Acting Committee Chair Petty said the second category, i.e. Customer Intercept, probably would involve written surveys made available at local businesses. She asked what type of questions should be included in this survey. Committee member Bright thought there should be questions about how frequently they patronize these businesses, whether they were there as individuals or as part of a group, would they be at this business if not visiting the Town Forest, etc. He also felt there should be the same questions as in the previous category, i.e. if they are not Northfield residents, where did they come from, how did they hear about the Northfield Town Forest, etc. Committee member Caldwell thought it might be useful to look at the earlier Northfield Ridge & River Routes project to see what kind of survey questions were used then. Acting Committee Chair Petty thought that was a good idea. Any additional suggestions should be emailed to Committee Chair Zuaro as soon as possible as SE Group would like to get started on these surveys very soon.

The third category, i.e. Stakeholder Interviews, would involve two or three gatherings of local business owners. The SE Group would like to know who to include in these discussions and what they should be specifically asked about at these gatherings. Acting Committee Chair Petty believes the local restaurateurs definitely should be involved, esp. the Good Measure, the Falls General Store, Depot Square Pizzeria. Committee member Bright suggested involving those operating the local gas stations/convenience markets as those establishments get a lot of customer traffic. Other suggestions for inclusion included the Margaret Holland Inn, Green Mountain Family Practice, and (if the timing works) vendors from the Northfield Farmers Market. Committee member Barrett asked if these meetings would occur before or after the new signage is installed. Acting Committee Chair Petty said the process doesn't really have a before and after component as regards to VOREC grant spending. The intention is to get some idea about how the local community is impacted by the outdoor recreation opportunities available in Northfield. The SE Group would like to start working on the economic impact study right away and have it completed by this September. Acting Committee Chair Petty then asked what the stakeholders should be asked at these meetings. Committee member Bright thought there could be general questions about how the availability of outdoor recreation opportunities affect local businesses and their clientele. Committee member Caldwell felt there also should be some discussion about how these outdoor recreation opportunities attract people to live in Northfield.

V. Updates

- a. SE Group Kick Off Meeting and Follow Up Meeting with Committee.** The SE Group representatives have suggested holding the initial meeting during daytime hours. Committee Chair Zuaro has suggested it might be best to have this meeting with limited committee member involvement first and at that time determine when SE Group representatives might be able to attend a future nighttime regular committee meeting. This suggestion was acceptable to the committee members.
- b. Contract Amendment Approved.** Acting Committee Chair Petty said the state grant administrator has approved the committee’s proposal to shift funds from the parking budget to the signage and economic impact study budgets.

VI. Other Business. Acting Committee Chair Petty said a new programming proposal has been received from Tara Cariano for yoga hikes. This will be discussed at the next meeting. Committee member Caldwell thought this might be another approach to introduce more people to the Town Forest. Acting Committee Chair Petty agreed that this type of activity could appeal to many age groups. Committee member Bright thought it might be useful to look into whether local businesses might be willing to provide funding to cover any gaps in the current programming budget.

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

VIII. Adjournment. Motion by Committee member Bright, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to adjourn. **Motion passed 4-0-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of May 13, 2024.