

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
VOREC Grant Implementation Committee
Minutes of September 12, 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, Nancy Peck, Lydia Petty, and Jeff Schulz. Also present was Jeremy Whalen. Committee members Lucas Herring and Colin O'Neil were absent.

Chair Deborah Zuaro called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

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

- III. Approval of Minutes: August 8, 2022.** Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Peck, to approve the minutes. Committee member Peck would like the reference to "stockade fencing" removed. This had been mentioned during the discussion but the decision was made to go with split rail fencing instead. **Motion to approve amended minutes passed 7-0-0.**

- IV. Discussion**

- a. Trail Opening Celebration.** Committee Chair Zuaro wanted thank all those who publicized, participated, etc. with this well-attended event, which celebrated the improvements made to the Lybrand//Slate Avenue Trail. There also was local coverage in the *Northfield News*. Committee member Peck said it was very fun event with lots of children running around.
- b. Review of Wayfinding Master Plan Bid Results.** Committee member Schulz, who also serves as Town Manager, said six bids had been received by the September 2, 2022 deadline. The amounts ranged from \$33,920 to \$90,000. One bidder did not provide a bid amount but rather submitted a fee statement with a "typical cost breakdown." It was noted the amount budgeted for this project is \$30,000. Committee member Petty noted in-kind services also were included in this budget amount, such as Jason Endres volunteering to serve as "Graphic Designer." The value of his services was estimated at about \$5,000. Committee member Petty thought it might be best to have committee members provide their initial impressions of the bids submitted and the qualifications of the applicants. She felt perhaps the committee members shouldn't focus too much on the bid total amounts but rather on whether bidders were qualified to provide an acceptable product at the end of the project. Committee member Petty personally felt only one applicant had truly addressed all the RFP requirements.

Committee member Peck agreed that a number of submissions did not really address specific local concerns. Committee member Barrett reviewed all six proposals and felt DuBois & King (Randolph VT), which submitted a bid amount of \$46,548.75, really rose to the top. They have worked in Northfield before and have great knowledge of local conditions. Committee member Peck agreed, noting they worked with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC) to produce the Northfield Town Forest Access Feasibility Study earlier this year. Committee member Caldwell also believed DuBois & King submitted the best proposal. If there are concerns that their proposal amount exceeded the proposed budget, perhaps the project scope could be reduced. Committee member Peck thought some of the other applicants, all located out of state, seemed to believe Northfield had an existing staff member who would be performing a lot of complicated work for them. They also planned to hold virtual meetings and didn't seem to want to "walk the woods" in person. Committee member Peck felt the DuBois & King proposal was the only one worthy of consideration.

Committee member Petty said there appears to be committee consensus favoring the proposal from DuBois & King. She did take a detailed look at the proposal from KMA Design (Canonsburg PA) since their bid amount was the lowest. However, Committee member Petty saw a lot of deficiencies in this particular proposal regarding what would be provided with the completed product. In addition, some applicants did not seem to understand that much of the project target area is split between municipal property and private (i.e. Norwich University, etc.). In its submission, DuBois & King did provide a copy of the "Adventure Map" it created for Montpelier VT. Committee member Petty felt this sample map was very similar to what we hope this project will produce. Committee member Schulz agreed much of the work they performed in Montpelier is applicable to this project.

Committee Chair Zuaro felt DuBois & King's local knowledge and their understanding that the municipality will have its own graphic designer on hand are very important factors. Committee member O'Neil, who serves as manager of the NU Shaw Outdoor Center, was unable to attend tonight due to a time conflict but he did email that the DuBois & King proposal is the only one worth serious attention. He also had no objection should this be the committee's recommendation. Committee Chair Zuaro also noted DuBois & King is located in the Central Vermont area and this would significantly reduce this project's carbon footprint (as compared to the out-of-state businesses).

Committee member Schulz said he has worked with DuBois & King engineers over the past twenty years on several projects in various capacities. This is a well-established firm with a strong reputation for professional expertise. Committee member Schulz does not believe they would produce anything that would disappoint or displease the committee members. Their employees work very well with their customers and the public. Committee member Schulz is fairly unfamiliar with the other applicants. Any of them might do a good job on this project but hiring DuBois & King is pretty close to a sure thing.

Committee member Barrett noted in their proposal DuBois & King committed to monthly "check in" meetings as the project progresses. He also felt it was important that they "know Vermont." Committee Chair Zuaro said there seemed to be committee consensus favoring the DuBois & King proposal. Noting this matter is an action item on the agenda of tomorrow night's Select Board regular meeting, she asked if the committee should make a formal recommendation tonight or postpone a decision until after the current budget shortfall has been addressed. Committee member Schulz said it is possible to postpone Select Board consideration of this matter since we have learned the State of Vermont will not provide a formal VOREC Grant Agreement before mid-November 2022. The contract for the trail restoration project was executed before this agreement was in place but Committee member Schulz would not like to do this a second time. There really is no reason to make a solid commitment at this time.

Committee member Barrett noted the trail restoration work did come in under budget so perhaps some of these funds could be shifted to this project. Committee member Petty said the current options are to move VOREC grant funds around to make up any budget shortfall or negotiate with DuBois & King to reduce the project scope in order to reduce the total cost. Another option would be to put the project out to bid again with a revised RFP. Committee member Petty then noted \$25,000 had been budgeted for a forest access parking project when it was thought additional parking spaces would have to be created. In the wake of the aforementioned forest access feasibility study, it now seems more likely that the less expensive option of installing directional signs for existing parking spaces will be taken. This also should free up some grant funds for this project.

Committee member Schulz said he could contact state officials tomorrow about the possibility of revising the grant budget. He feels there should be some flexibility in revising the grant budget. Committee Chair Zuaro said the DuBois & King project breakdown sets the cost of "sign design" at \$6,300. Since Mr. Endres will be providing internal assistance with this part of the project, perhaps this expense will not be necessary. Committee member Petty thought some of the sign design expense will include such factors as sign sizing, placement, etc. so not all of these funds should be removed from the project budget. Committee Chair Zuaro saw other possible project cost savings when it came to installing trailhead kiosks.

Committee member Petty thought it might be a good idea for this committee to recommend awarding this project to DuBois & King. If the Select Board members approve this action, it then would be possible to negotiate with DuBois & King on perhaps reducing the project scope and other possible cost savings. Committee member Schulz agreed that might be the best approach. He did feel it might be best to leave the bid submission as is and try to shift grant funds from other proposed grant projects to cover any shortfall. Committee Chair Zuaro asked how the Select Board members might feel about a recommendation for DuBois & King when two lower amount bids were submitted. Committee member Schulz believes this committee drafted an RFP that stressed the importance of providing an acceptable project instead of just accepting the lowest bid. He felt in this case the project cost was not the overriding factor especially when grant funds are involved and not taxpayer dollars. Committee member Schulz also believes the Select Board members have a good level of confidence in the ability of this committee to make sound recommendations. If endorsing DuBois & King is the unanimous view of this committee, he feels the Select Board members would be comfortable with this decision. Committee Chair Zuaro volunteered to attend the Select Board meeting to explain the reason for this recommendation and answer any questions. Committee member Schulz thought that was a good idea. There had been a recent situation recently when the trail restoration project was not awarded to the lowest bidder but to a slightly higher one with more relevant experience.

Motion by Committee member Petty, seconded by Committee member Barrett, to recommend awarding the Wayfinding Master Plan project to DuBois & King. **Motion passed 7-0-0.**

- c. **Review of Draft RFP for Invasive Species Removal.** Committee member Barrett said a draft RFP for this project had been prepared by Committee Chair Zuaro and Committee member Schulz. He has a few suggestions for revision. This includes adding "Vista Clearing" to the project title since this would be an integral part of the project. Committee member Barrett also would like adding "and other vegetation" (not just invasives) to the flora to be reduced "to knee high level" in the target area. There are some spruce trees that might have to be removed to restore vista views but this cannot be determined until after the site visit has taken place. The current schedule is for RFPs to be first distributed on Wednesday, September 14, 2022; the site visit held on Thursday, September 22, 2022; and a bid submission deadline of 4:00 p.m. on Friday, October 7, 2022. Committee member Barrett added that the mandatory site visit requires potential bidders to congregate at the Exit 5 Park & Ride at 9:00 a.m. Those unable to attend at this time would have to pay \$150 to have a special site visit arranged.

Committee member Barrett said the cut material would either be mulched or burned. Mulching would be preferable but that depends on whether proper machinery can be brought on site. Other changes he would like include reducing the project target area from two acres to one. Also, the bidder having a Pesticide Applicator License should only be required if it proves applicable to this project. Committee member Petty does not feel bidders need to submit five hardcopies of their proposals. Committee member Barrett has a list of potential bidders to whom RFPs should be sent. He doesn't want to disrupt the proposed project schedule so the suggested changes should be made and bid documents sent out this week.

Committee member Schulz said the project bid amounts should be low enough that he would have authority as Town Manager to award the project without Select Board approval. As there were no objections to proceeding with the revised RFP, it will be corrected and sent out as soon as possible.

V. Other Business

- a. Night on the Common 2022.** Committee Chair Zuaro noted the annual "Night on the Common" will be held on Tuesday, September 20, 2022 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The Northfield Conservation Commission (NCC) will have a couple tables in place to distribute information and she asked if this committee would like to participate as well. Committee member Petty is willing to help and suggested trail maps be made available and any questions answered. Committee Chair Zuaro noted the Town Forest Stewardship Committee (TFSC) is meeting that night in the Community Room and it might be possible to direct interested residents to attend that meeting. After further discussion, Committee Chair Zuaro and Committee member Petty agreed to attend and provide information on upcoming events, distribute forest trail maps, etc. It is possible some of the committee members not present tonight also would like to participate. This also might be a good time to notify residents there is one vacancy apiece on the NCC and TFSC.
- b. Lybrand/Slate Avenue Trail Needs: New Gate, Wooden Guardrail, etc.** Committee Chair Zuaro said the committee already discussed the need to install wooden guardrails on the trail sections where it narrows next to a steep drop off. She also feels the current gate at the trailhead is old, rusty, and too large for the purpose. Perhaps a replacement gate should be designed and installed. Committee member Caldwell agrees the current gate is very unwelcoming. Committee member Barrett noted the gate is on NU property but the municipality should have a right-of-way in place. Committee member Schulz will investigate to determine who installed and/or owns the gate. Committee Chair Zuaro said once that is known, we can move forward on designing a replacement. It is possible NU engineering students might be willing to help with this as a class project.
- c. VOREC Grant Implementation Process.** Committee member Schulz said even though the State has not finalized the grant agreement document, it did provide an updated sheet regarding the deadlines for expending grant funds, etc.
- d. Next Committee Meeting.** Since Committee Chair Zuaro and other members cannot attend the next scheduled meeting (09/26/22), it will be cancelled. The next meeting will be held on Monday, October 10, 2022. The bid proposals received for the Invasive Species removal and Vista Clearing Project will be discussed then.

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

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

The meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of October 10, 2022.