

**Town of Richmond ARPA Committee
Minutes for the meeting of June 21, 2023
Town Center and Via Zoom**

Members Present: Josh Arneson, Jeff Forward, Cara LaBounty, Molly Dugan, Denise Barnard

Members Absent: Jay Furr, Mary Houle,

Others Present: Grace Colbeth, Susan Wells, Colleen Flaherty, Angela Cote, Katelyn Macrae, Julie Thorpe, Betsy, Karen, Stefani Hartsfield, Jessie Heiser, Lisa Littwin, Megan Andrews, Pat Coulombe, Peg Coulombe, Marilynne Johnson, Mary Lefebvre, Elizabeth Lefebvre, Jon Kart

Call or Order: 7:00pm

Welcome by Forward.

Explained the origin or the \$1.2 million in ARPA money and roll of committee in community outreach for guidance on spending the funds. This committee only makes recommendations to the Selectboard. The Selectboard makes the decisions. Recreation was often mentioned as an item to spend funds on, including Volunteers' Green. Grace Colbeth has prepared a draft plan for Volunteers' Green which she will present followed by questions.

LaBounty: Grace is a family friend who created a plan for Volunteers' Green as a college project. Since then she has received input at the Recreation Committee and town staff and made changes based on that feedback.

Review minutes of the 5/10/23 meeting

Tabled

Presentation on draft plan for Volunteers' Green

Colbeth: This project came to me in a college course project to reimagine a public space. I grew up in Williston and enjoyed their parks. A lot of my ideas are influenced by these parks.

Displayed a map of the current layout at Volunteers' Green. This map became a working map where students could rearrange the map to reimagine the configuration at the park. The result is a reimagined layout. There is a paved path around the edge of the park to be used by people of all ages. There is also a gravel path next to the paved path to provide a second surface option. Pete Gosselin of the Highway Department said they would pave the path in the winter.

The playground area calls for the use of rubber mats to replace the woodchips. There may also be room for play equipment for older kids to keep them separate from younger kids. A GaGa Ball pit and ping pong table are included. Addition of a sign by the road. Some of the playground equipment at the park could stay but would need to be refurbished. There are also a lot of great new structures to consider adding to the park.

The design shows the t-ball field moving in between the two larger fields, beyond the outfields of each. Painting murals on the dugouts would be a nice addition. There is a pavilion added near the restrooms. The roof of the pavilion could have solar panels.

Beyond the soccer fields at the end of the park is a dog park. The Highway Department said they could clear the trees for this park.

There is a basketball court near the boat ramp where the ice rink would be installed in the winter. A changing station has been added to the area near the boat ramp. Currently the space where the ice rink is placed is not well covered by grass in the summer, which makes it attractive for a location for a basketball court.

Would provide upgrades to the bandshell and benches. Addition of concrete pads under the benches.

I created a small design for Browns Court. This calls for an expanded gravel parking lot. Two pickleball courts and a tennis court. A concession stand and rest room are also shown on the design. Revitalized softball field with all clay infield.

LaBounty: Reviewed the itemized budget. Highway was included as conducting some of the work to save on costs. The total for Volunteers' Green is \$634,500. The total for Browns Court is \$143,000.

Forward: Thanked Grace for her proposal. Reminded everyone this is an early draft. Please keep the questions general. Comments from the public may be more important than questions at this point. No decisions have been made at all at this time. Any changes that are implemented would have to go through a robust public feedback period. The cost numbers are very preliminary and could change quite a bit.

Colbeth: We know that all proposed ideas would be allowed in the flood plain.

LaBounty: We contacted the state on the flood plain.

Jessie Heiser: I live in the village. I and other community members have concerns about new paving and infrastructure. This is located in the floodplain. Increased additional paving and structures are not a good idea for the floodplain. Even if there are workarounds, using these workarounds are not consistent with Richmond's goal of being sustainable and resilient or limiting growth in the flood hazard area. On any given day you see all the green space used by sports and other recreation. More infrastructure would limit this space. People use this open space. I have process concerns as I look at past meetings. It is clear that this was not driven by pressure from the community. This is a proposal being pushed forward by one member of the Richmond Community.

Bruce LaBounty: Is this relevant? It is an attack on one member of the ARPA Committee.

Forward: This is not really relevant.

Heiser: I will direct my future comments to the Selectboard. The main parts of the recreation committee's proposal had prior support. I and many others have concerns about the playground.

Forward: We only have a little time left.

Heiser: I request this proposal not be furthered by the ARPA Committee.

Mary Lefebvre: I live in Richmond with my husband and children. I am a pediatric nurse. Richmond is one of the least accessible areas that I have visited. People with limited mobility do not have a place at Volunteers' Green. We want to be an inclusive community which includes all people who want to use the park even with mobility issues. People with mobility issues end up having to go to parks in other communities. The proposed path would benefit those with mobility issues.

Megan Andrews: I own a childcare in Richmond. The park is challenging for infants as they try to eat the mulch and there is not a good place for strollers. The rubber synthetic mats and the path would help solve these issues. Basketball would be great for the teenagers.

Lisa Littwin: The key question is why are we building in the flood zone? There is a lot of erosion in this area. Also, who is going to volunteer to maintain all the new things at the park. You need a lot of input. Even after

regular heavy rains the park can be half flooded. While it is great to have a paved path for handicapped people, this may not be the best place for it. Flooding and erosion are my main concerns.

Bruce LaBounty: We have done a great job of providing for kids ages 5 – 12. The proposal provides more activities for people of all ages and mobility. The path would reduce bike and pedestrian traffic on Cochran Rd. Basketball would be a wonderful addition.

Jon Kart: I visit Volunteers' Green almost daily year-round. We have done work on erosion including planting trees. Baseball and soccer were concerned about losing space. Ideally a process lead by the recreation committee to prioritize greatest needs and ensure current users are not displaced would be ideal. It would be great to see some money put into recreation, just follow a good process.

Cara LaBounty: The Recreation Committee has seen this and they have two members who are not Richmond Residents.

Mary Lefebvre: Before you decided on anything you would have to check on the floodplain?

Forward: Before we made any decisions we would need more public feedback. It would be useful to talk about process.

Heiser: Would the Town vote on it?

Barnard: A resident could ask for this to be on a ballot.

Betsy Hardy: I appreciate that there is green space in the park and this allows for flexibility. I am not so much in favor of the idea of a paved path. I don't think every town has to offer everything. I appreciate the path in Williston, and it is not a bad thing to go to the town next door

Colleen Flaherty: Bringing this back to process at this point makes a lot of sense. Getting more community input makes sense. We should be sure of what can go into the floodplain before we decide we want them. Seeking feedback from Vermont Adaptive may be helpful. I think it makes sense to step back to see what we can put in and what we want to put in.

Angela Cote: There has been a lot of concern on floodplain. We have allowed Umiak to build a ladder to the river. There are things happening in the floodplain and the Selectboard is approving it. It is kind of sad that we would not try to be more accessible.

Ed Wells: I too have spent a lot of time at Volunteers' Green. We love the park. I am struck by how filled the park already is with soccer and baseball. I don't know where we will find room for other activities. I do cherish the park as it is and I hope we are judicious about any changes and keep the character as it is.

Katelyn Macrae: I don't think anyone would want to frame a discussion about environmentalism vs. accessibility. I appreciate the process and thank you all for your work.

Forward: There is a lot of interest in Volunteers' Green. The Recreation Committee does not have the time to do the proper research to gather this public feedback. One of my suggestions is this is an issue to pay attention to, I would encourage you to keep your eye out for other ways to participate. This would be an appropriate agenda item to see what we would recommend to the Selectboard as a process. I suggest that we discuss what process should be used to evaluate this proposal.

Dugan: I would appreciate ideas in that meeting from the public on what they feel the process should be.

Forward: This could take some time. There needs to be a considerable amount of research. I think a committee could be formed to look into this.

Next meeting was decided to be Wednesday, August 16, 2023.

Chat File

00:21:45 Katelyn Macrae: Hello! Should the zoom folks introduce themselves too?

00:23:59 Katelyn Macrae: Thank you

00:49:54 Katelyn Macrae: I really appreciate the work that this UVM student put into this proposal- Wow! Something I really valued at the park this afternoon were the trees providing wonderful shade on the playground! I'd love to see a paved rec path like Williston, more swings, a dog park (but maybe closer to parking area), and perhaps playground design that is more natural like at the Waterbury School as opposed to Maple Street.

00:50:43 Katelyn Macrae: I also love the idea of replacing benches and picnic tables to make them more user friendly

01:21:41 Julie Thorpe: I have to sign off but thank you so much Grace for your thoughtful presentation - I am a proponent of expanding access to more recreational activities for our seniors and youth (and dogs). I am so glad this conversation is happening and hope that we can have forward movement towards a more vibrant downtown area. I am hopeful that these issues will be resolved and we will find a way forward for some if not all of these ideas (especially Pickleball!)