

## **Richmond Recreation Committee Meeting**

September 6th, 2022

Members Present: Kirsten Santor, Sheri Lynn, Kate Kreider, Mark Fausel,

Members of the Public Present: Jack Lazarowski (Board Member of the Community Senior Center), Lisa (Member of the Planning Board)

Meeting started at 7:04pm

### **Guest Speaker: Laura Arnesen, Executive Director**

#### **Brief background of the Mad River Valley Recreation District from Laura Arnesen**

The Mad River Valley Recreation district includes the towns of Warren, Westfield, and Fayston. Laura has been the Executive Director for almost 2 years. The recreation district started because the three towns decided to pool their money and let someone else decide to disperse it instead of each town having to decide how to support recreation in the area. The recreation district has a grant program where they give out money to various recreation groups through an application process. Each town contributes a certain amount of money annually and then the funds are dispersed through grants. Laura's position was created for the purpose of finding and applying for outside grants such as VOREC. The recreation district was awarded a VOREC grant and received half a million dollars. The recreation district also owns a 10 acre park that we purchased for recreation.

**Sheri:** How did you move from individual town committees to this district structure?

**Laura:** The recreation district was created 25 years ago. I did live in the area during that time, but I was not aware of the details related to making the transition to the district structure. When the recreation district was formed, it became incorporated as a municipal union and the three participating towns all voted for it. We have a 9 person board, with all three towns represented. In the beginning, each town contributed \$5-10,000 a year to the recreation district, approved through individual town voting. We are not a 501c, but individuals can make tax free donations. You can also look around our website for more information. We are also a member of the VT League of Cities and Towns.

**Sheri:** What was your annual budget before getting the VOREC grant?

**Laura:** It used to be \$10-15,000 a year from each town and then the amount was doubled to pay for my position. I think the reason we got the VOREC grant is because our grant proposal is really five projects in one. It will create a recreation hub and provide connectivity of trails, community connection, and support local businesses. We also stated in the grant application that we are going to also focus on balancing the development of trails with protecting nature. We also have seasoned executive directors to spearhead the five separate projects. Also, two years ago we started an initiative in partnership with local businesses to keep recreation areas clean.

**Mark:** It's interesting to see how well developed and interconnected your district is. You were talking about your relationship with businesses. Is there any conflict with that?

**Laura:** We have a lot of small businesses and some bigger ones. Each of the bigger businesses has a foundation and will grant money to some of our projects. The philosophy is that the better an individual business does, the better we all do. We started with donations from private companies first, then went to the town for help with keeping recreation areas clean.

**Mark:** Is there a reciprocal relationship with businesses? Do you promote or identify corporate organizations that support your district?

**Laura:** The Chamber of Commerce is partnering with our recreation district for the VOREC grant. They aren't a non-profit and they did promote the 3 major business sponsors online. We keep it separate for our organization though. We recently raised \$30,000 for an irrigation system but it was mostly private donations from individuals and sports teams that use the recreation field. The school PTOs also donated some money towards it. All of our sports in our area are volunteer organizations, so our recreation district doesn't take on a lot of programming. We partner with them to get funds or get things done.

**Mark:** So you're promoting the non-profits but you are not really bringing in companies for revenue?

**Laura:** Most of our funding comes from the contributions from the towns. We list the sport organizations on our website. We're the umbrella helping to promote them. We give out \$35-40,000 a year in grants. Some of our challenges are helping to advise different recreation groups/organizations as well as providing grants. We review grant requests and decide what to fund. We work with Local Motion and we did an E-bike lending program. UVM subsidizes bike helmets to purchase and we have utilized that program. There are some initiatives and programs already available that you can start with that don't take a lot of money or time.

**Jack:** You mentioned that there's a place in your organization for Moretown to be part of the district. Can any towns opt out of the district if they want to?

**Laura:** Moretown said that they can't afford to be a part of the district, but they did donate money for the purchase of the recreation field. They have their own recreation committee that is getting traction and they have gotten some grants for projects. We check in with our town selectboards every November and provide a presentation on what we have accomplished and what our future plans are so the taxpayers know what the money is going towards. I started presenting to Moretown too so they know what we are doing. Some individuals on Moretown's recreation committee are interested in joining the district, but the selectboard has been against it so far. Feel free to email me questions and I'm happy to be a resource.

**Sheri:** Thank you Laura and we will check out your website.

### **Public comments/non-agenda items**

**Kate:** I noticed that the volleyball net at Volunteer's Green is falling apart and needs to be replaced.

### **Approval of August Minutes**

Kirsten motioned to approve the minutes from the August 2nd meeting, Mark seconded. Unanimously passed, minutes approved.

## Halloween Event at Volunteer's Green

**Sheri:** The town received a request to have a Halloween event at Volunteer's Green again this year. It will be from 12pm-4pm on October 29th. They hope to have some food vendors again.

**Brief discussion, no opinions raised against this event.**

**Kirsten:** Clarified the process for the use requests: previously we were in charge of approving every single use request for Volunteer's Green. The language was changed so that town staff can approve events.

**Sheri:** I will let the selectboard know that we are fine with the event occurring.

## Recreation Feedback Form

Sheri created a draft feedback google form for committee members to review.

**Sheri:** I broke it down into the 3 towns (Richmond, Bolton, and Huntington) and listed available activities. People completing the form indicate their town of residency and what activities they have done and their satisfaction with the activities. Are there any additional ideas? The form could be emailed to park users for feedback, as well as being available on the town website.

**Kirsten:** What specifically are we trying to capture?

**Sheri:** We are capturing the activities that people are doing in the different towns. I'm not quite sure if that tells us anything to act upon. It could tell us usage and if people liked certain activities.

**Kate:** I think it is useful to know what people like doing so we can focus our time and funds on supporting those things.

**Sheri:** We could also ask other questions, such as if there are other recreation activities that people want to see.

**Kate:** Couldn't we just add a question to the current form asking if there are any other recreation activities people want to see?

**Sheri:** We could promote it on FPF and in the schools.

**Mark:** I wonder what type of outreach we can do for folks that aren't technologically savvy.

**Jack:** We could include the form in our Senior Center newsletter.

**Sheri:** I was thinking of it as a general feedback form, but now I feel that maybe we need to think more targeted and add a couple more questions. We could do printed copies too if needed. I think it would be good to have a simple assessment done on a yearly basis to inform our goals and strategies for our next year's work plan. I would use it as data to help inform where we go next, while still aligning with the town plan. It goes back to community engagement too. We only have a certain level of input and we really want broader input from the community.

**Mark:** Laura got me thinking about the trails committees and VMBA. Maybe we could send something to them to tie them into the whole recreation picture.

**Jack:** We don't have a mountain biking community, but we do have a very active hiking community. One question that has been coming up lately is the grading/ difficulty of the hikes. If more knowledge of the trails was readily available that would be helpful. We also have active kayaking and pickleball communities.

**Sheri:** Originally I thought that this would be on the website, but I don't know that people are going to look there. Do we take a slow approach to this and use this just as a feedback form and

possibly promote it during the halloween event? Or we can put it on hold and think more about what we are really trying to accomplish with this form.

**Mark:** I think you're right that it's tough to define all the questions that we want to ask. I like the idea of including it in the senior center bulletin, and reaching out to other committees to get input on what questions should be on the survey and to have them help us promote the survey.

**Sheri:** I like the idea of seeing if anyone has other questions that they want to add. I am wondering if it would be easy to ask Martha to send it out to the senior community to test out the form and see what we get for feedback.

**Kirsten:** What will we do with that information?

**Jack:** Our community definitely has some opinions and would provide feedback.

**Sheri:** It would be interesting to see what the senior population is utilizing. I feel that we're mainly just looking for a sense of usage regarding recreation.

**Kirsten:** My understanding is that the original idea was to create a general feedback form so people have a place to go with their comments.

**Sheri:** Okay, I misunderstood the intended purpose of the form.

**Kate:** Maybe it would be helpful to have two separate forms? One for more general feedback and one that is more focused?

**Kirsten:** Maybe there's a middle ground to serve both of those purposes. We can look at examples of other surveys.

**Sheri:** We should probably step back and think about what questions we want on the form then. I'll look at some other examples and rewrite the feedback form. Then I'll send it out for review.

**Kirsten:** Our purpose is to provide people the opportunity to give feedback and get a feel for what people want to see.

**Sheri:** I would love to know what people want to see for the playground. We may want to add some questions regarding that.

**Kirsten:** I think the playground/Volunteer's Green is our focus. Sheri and Kate agreed.

### **Building Better Communities Grant**

**Sheri:** they only have a 3 page application but we can't apply this year because the deadline is Sept 10th. It's a grant that you have to have a 1:1 match. I think that having budget discussions about Richmond town's capital improvement plan to get money from the town for Volunteer's Green would be great. Maybe in October we can strategize and think about what dollar amount we would ask for from the town.

### **Inventory at Volunteer's Green**

**Sheri:** Do we feel like we can do an inventory of needs at Volunteer's Green this month? I heard from Jon Kart who manages an ad hoc committee to help with Volunteer's Green. Some of the priorities of the ad hoc committee are: Help with dog walking rules, enhance garbage and recycling facilities, band shell and playground repairs, create a lost and found system.

**Kirsten:** Some things require grants and long-term planning, but there are some smaller things we can do now, such as adding wood chips to the playground. It may be good to have two different lists.

**Sheri:** We can't do an inventory as a group since that would be a quorum, so we can go independently to survey Volunteer's Green and report back next month.

**Mark:** I would add the schools to our list of who to reach out to with the feedback form. And as Laura stated, outreach is really important. Maybe we could reach out to the Western Slopes Businesses Association or other businesses to help fund projects.

**Next Meeting Scheduled for Oct 4th**

**Motion to Adjourn:** Mark motions, Sheri seconds. All in favor. Adjourned at 8:31pm.