

Mad River Valley Recreation District

Minutes for monthly meeting, Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Board members attending in person: Alice Rodgers, Mary Simmons, Cory Ayotte, Shevonne Travers, Doug Bergstein, Peter Oliver. Attending via Zoom: Laura Arnesen (Executive Director), John Stokes.

Non-board member in attendance: Matt Lillard.

Absent: Molly Bagnato, Luke Foley.

Meeting called to order at 6:34pm.

The first order of business was to approve minutes from the February meeting, passed by unanimous vote.

*** Review of Mad River Park irrigation project.** John reported that irrigation equipment -- reels, etc. -- was due for delivery at any time, and that excavation work by Kingsbury was scheduled to start in April, depending on snow and ground-saturation levels. John said that once the snow was gone, he and Mike Nucci would make a site visit to determine the optimal positioning of valve boxes. Matt Lillard of Mad River Valley Youth Lacrosse expressed concern that the excavation work might interfere with the spring sports season, perhaps encroaching on playing fields. John insisted that no holes would be dug on existing fields in the two days of excavation work, although Matt expressed additional concern about post-excavation work such as seeding and haying. Mary wondered whether perhaps the excavation work could be delayed until June or thereafter, when the spring sports season was completed, but John said that that would be possible only by finding a new excavating company, presumably meaning Kingsbury was fully booked and unavailable after April. It was determined to stick with the current schedule.

Doug reported that the irrigation project was staying relatively close to budget, with a current cost overrun of just a couple of hundred dollars. Given the MRVRD's irrigation balance of \$14,400, not including the more than \$13,000 pledged by Lawson's Finest Liquids, the recreation district could comfortably cover the additional project expense.

How, then, to manage the actual irrigation process? Hire a contractor? Have Kingsbury run the irrigation system when mowing the fields? Mary suggested that in the first year, it made sense for the Mad River Park Committee and park users (i.e., youth soccer and lacrosse) to oversee irrigation timing and execution in order to become fully familiar with the procedure before hiring a sub-contractor. Peter recommended taking guidance from users of the field on when to run the system and what specific areas of the park might need special irrigation attention. John said that when he and Mike Nucci site valve boxes, the boxes would be placed where need dictated, not necessarily according to an orderly grid pattern. When Peter asked about the sufficiency of water pressure from the well, John said that a wide selection of sprayers and nozzles was available to maximize well pressure.

Finally, the question arose about how much the park was used this winter for cross-country skiing (with grooming done by the Mad River Ridge Runners) and if usage was sufficient to

justify the \$1,200 spent during the course of the winter to plow the parking lot. It was agreed that it was an issue that warranted further review.

*** Needs assessment review.** Laura said that interviews, either in person or via email, needed to be conducted with representatives of all MRVRD grantees and that they needed to be completed by May 1. The board agreed to divvy up the interviews as follows: Alice -- Couples Field; Cory -- Brooks Field, Little League, youth basketball; Doug -- Mad River Path, Skatium; Mary -- youth soccer, youth lacrosse; Peter -- Bill Koch League, Mad River Sports, pickleball; Shevonne -- skate park, Mad River Riders; Molly (in absentia) -- Mad River Ridge Runners. Laura was to be in charge of tabulating interview/survey results. After that, a strategy for surveying the public on recreational needs and interests in the Valley remained to be determined.

*** VOREC grant update.** In a process she called "the most complicated thing in my life," Laura reported that the state had yet to sign the VOREC grant officially. One reason, due to the new placement of the path from the visitors' center and other issues, was that updated landowner agreements were in order. State officials also had additional questions about the project to make sure taxpayer money wasn't being wasted, and Laura said that Ross Saxton of the Mad River Path and Bob Kogut of the Mad River Riders had done a great job in providing answers. As Laura said, this was all a matter of simply grinding through the labyrinthine complexities of state bureaucracy.

The question then arose as to exactly how the financial disbursement of VOREC funds would take place. Laura said that the state would only reimburse expenditures according to receipts from the MRVRD. Hence, the MRVRD's VOREC partners -- e.g., the Mad River Riders, the Mad River Path -- would have to submit receipts to the MRVRD for reimbursement, after which the MRVRD would submit expenditure statements to VOREC for MRVRD reimbursement. Doug made a motion for a board vote on the following statement: "I move to set up a system in which the Mad River Valley Recreation District reimburses partner organizations for VOREC expenditures in anticipation of getting reimbursed by the state for said VOREC expenditures." The board voted unanimously to approve.

Concern was expressed about whether the MRVRD, effectively playing middle man in this process, might potentially face a cash-flow squeeze under the above arrangement. Shevonne suggested that perhaps the board consider a bridge loan to be sure there was always enough money available to cover VOREC partners' expenditures before the MRVRD had received reimbursement from the state. Laura said that she had already investigated the bridge-loan possibility and was disinclined to go that route because of the interest costs involved, potentially running to more than a thousand dollars. Both Laura and Doug agreed that a cash squeeze was unlikely, and even if there was a temporary cash shortage, project partners would be understanding if reimbursement were slightly delayed. Finally, Laura said that the likely target date for completion of the VOREC project was December 2024.

*** Community recreation Visioning (CRV) project update.** Laura reported that at least three public sessions were in order per the VOREC grant to investigate how to balance ecological integrity and recreation in the Mad River Valley. The first session was scheduled for June 15 at American Flatbread with other sessions to follow in the fall and then in 2024. Alice pointed out that a fundamental mandate for the MRVRD should be "mobilizing our energies around balancing environmental and recreational issues" and that the MRVRD should act as a

coordinator of different outlooks and commitments in terms of what recreation looks like within the context of the Mad River Valley's natural beauty and environmental integrity.

* **New Mad River Park committee chairperson.** Shevonne said that she felt that, as someone who was neither a park user nor the parent of a park user, she might not be well-qualified to continue on the MRP committee and wanted to vacate her position as Chair. Mary agreed to step in for the time being as interim chairperson as the MRVRD considered options for a full-time chairperson.

Meeting adjourned at 8:04pm.