

Mad River Valley Recreation District

Minutes for monthly meeting, Tuesday, December 13, 2022

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

Non-board member in attendance: Cory Ayotte.

Absent: Molly Bagnato, Derek Bennett.

Meeting called to order at 6:38pm.

- **Financial update.** Doug (Treasurer) reported \$134,546 in income, including funds raised for the Mad River Park irrigation project, and \$106,938 in expenses, excluding money yet to be spent on the MRP irrigation project. Of note among the line items was a \$2,800 insurance charge for the MRP well, a jump of more than 100% from the previous budget year. John asked what the insurance covered – liability? Fire? – and, with no one on the board able to provide an answer, Alice said that it was worth finding out how the insurance coverage was being applied given the substantial increase.
- **Funathon.** After the cancellation (due to weather) of this fall's planned Funathon (a.k.a., Mad River Park Appreciation Day), the event was rescheduled for a date, yet to be determined, in the spring or early summer. Alice said that a date needed to be agreed upon by February in order to allow sufficient time for planning. Peter suggested that perhaps an earlier event date would make sense to help in the recruitment of participant families as well as coaches. Luke said that, given conflicts with other events and school activities that the likely first available weekend was May 6-7. Luke also suggested that, to help insure a strong turnout, the Funathon be linked with the startup of other summer recreational programs. Among other Funathon components discussed were the recruitment of food vendors and the inclusion of musical entertainment. Mary wondered about the possible cost of hiring a band; Peter noted that the board last year designated \$500 toward Funathon expenses and that a still-unspent \$350 might go to paying for a band. There was the suggestion of a battle of the bands, featuring local, young musicians; Alice thought maybe that could morph into a talent show. Peter raised the concern that too much emphasis on music and/or other entertainment might divert the event focus away from its principal purpose – to promote appreciation of Valley recreational programs. It was agreed that the Funathon committee – Doug, Luke, and Peter – would meet to discuss event planning further and to report back in January's MRVRD board meeting.
- **Community Recreation Visioning.** Laura reported that a committee, comprising 15 to 16 members from various local recreation, conservation, and economic organizations, had been meeting. Committee co-chairs were Ross Saxton of the Mad River Path and Phil Huffman, Chair of the Waitsfield Conservation COmmittee. A big question, said Laura,

was when are enough trails enough trails? The key was finding a satisfactory balance between recreation and conservation, minimizing environmental impacts. Two principles enumerated in the VOREC grant stood out, Laura said: stewardship of the land and environmental sustainability.

In looking toward the future, the CRV team was trying, said Laura, to determine, “What’s the road map?” In other words, how should recreational development, incorporating a sensitivity toward conservation and sustainability, proceed? A community project manager, Emily Friedman, had been hired, for roughly 10 hours a week, to help coordinate logistics in CRV planning. About \$60,000 of the VOREC grant had been designated for CRV purposes, primarily to be spent on comprehensive mapping that combined recreational assets (primarily trails) with other land-use and conservation tracts and considerations.

Laura said the committee hoped to suggest community standards 2023, at which point committee deliberations and recommendations could be opened to public sessions. Alice said the CRV deliberations might provide a good opportunity to promote the MRVRD’s role in environmental stewardship through stewardMRV. Laura pointed out that one of the reasons the Valley received its full VOREC request was a sensible approach toward the fusion of recreation and conservation planning. She suggested that VOREC might have been looking at the Valley’s approach as a model for the rest of the state.

- **Community Assessment Planning.** Long-time board member Luke said, “We have a much stronger vision than we had” in the past, but a determination of what’s working and what’s not was still in order. In other words, how can the MRVRD sustain current programs in addition to recognizing and supporting new recreational activities? It was generally agreed that the survey on the MRVRD web site had so far produced a disappointing result, with fewer than 50 responses. Laura noted that other local organizations, such as the Mad River Path and the Planning District, had been more diligent in managing their own surveys, producing a much high response rate. Alice questioned whether a survey is “the best mechanism” for assessing Valley recreational demands and community feedback. Luke suggested that, rather than a more open-ended survey, perhaps the board could float specific MRVRD ideas in the community to determine their viability or level of acceptance. He also suggested setting up tables at town meetings to offer a brief, sharply focused questionnaire to meeting attendees. Alice liked the idea of a town-meeting presence, “making it known that we do care and that we do reach out to the community.” Finally, Mary thought that the MRVRD needed a stronger presence on Instagram – “more popular than Facebook for our demographic” – noting that Instagram posts automatically double as Facebook posts, supplementing the Rec District’s current Facebook page.
- **Staff Report.** Laura reported that fundraising for the Warren dog park had already gone over \$10,000 and was well on its way to assuring qualification for the 2-for-1 matching grant from the state of \$24,000. The question for the board regarding the dog park: How

involved should the MRVRD be? Laura suggested that the Rec District should stay on as fiscal administrator for at least the first year.

The principal news from the VOREC front was that the chamber of commerce had moved to its new location next to Stark Mountain Bike Works. The move, however, was still in transition in terms of finalizing the office appearance and layout.

- **Board member nomination.** Cory Ayotte, recommended by Mary to replace outgoing Fayston board member Derek Bennett, introduced himself to the board. He has been a Valley resident since 2013 and was a communications and marketing professional who had worked for Sugarbush, among others, and is currently working with the Vermont cannabis industry. He and his wife are the parents of two children, two and four years old. The board unanimously agreed to nominate Ayotte to fill the board opening, pending approval by the Fayston select board.

The meeting adjourned at 8:13pm.