

Mad River Valley Recreation District

Minutes for monthly meeting, Tuesday, September 19, 2023

Board members attending: Laura Arnesen (executive director), Alice Rogers, Doug Bergstein, Luke Foley, Gina Gaidys. Attending via Zoom: Mary Simmons, Peter Oliver, John Stokes.

Late arriving via Zoom: Molly Bagnato.

Absent: Cory Ayotte

Meeting called to order at 6:35pm.

First order of business -- minutes from August meeting unanimously approved.

Mad River Park Update. Mary reported that there had been a request for another port-o-let -- a request that could not be fulfilled because it wasn't in the budget. She also reported that there had been a somewhat dramatic port-o-let malfunction (high winds turned the units on their sides), apparently to the great entertainment of kids present, but that all was back in order after a prompt repair by the port-o-let company. Mary said that more signs for parking control had been ordered and that a field committee meeting was planned for the fall to discuss, among other matters, responsibility for parking control and port-o-let cleanliness.

On Mary's to-do list was to talk to Kingsbury about taking over 2024 irrigation management which, due to the unusually wet summer, was not an issue this year. The 2024 budget should also cover the cost of a calcium chloride treatment to reduce parking lot dust and a possible regrading of the parking lot.

John made the point that, in preparation for winter, pipes in the irrigation system need to be "blown out" -- i.e., cleared of water -- that the system needed to be turned off, and that equipment needed to be stored, simply covering it with a tarp being perhaps the easiest solution.

Dog Park. Laura reported that the dog park was "up and running," and while there was no formal opening ceremony planned, members of Vermont's Better Places program would be visiting the park on Friday (Sept. 22) as a way of celebrating the park's opening.

There was discussion about acquiring a rain barrel to collect water; Luke said that rain barrels were not expensive and that he might have one. He also noted that rain barrels are more effective in collecting water if positioned to gather runoff from a roof.

The discussion then turned to the topic of the rec district's role regarding the dog park. Should the MRVRD continue as the park's financial sponsor? A key component in that question regarded insurance. It was suggested that insuring the park through the MRVRD might be less expensive than the park acquiring insurance on its own at an annual cost of roughly \$2,000. The MRVRD could likely secure coverage at a significantly lower rate, but there was concern that this might put the rec district within the gunsights of any potential lawsuit.

There was also discussion about methods for securing fundraising donations and whether it made sense to set up a Pay Pal account specifically to cover such donations. Finally, Luke made a

motion for the MRVRD to continue as the park sponsor and to continue exploring possible fund-collecting methods such as Pay Pal. The motion passed by a unanimous vote of the board.

Budget Discussion. Laura said that, with the VOREC billing and reimbursement process now underway, the board should be cognizant of the ongoing cash flow situation. In addition to partner reimbursements, VOREC-related costs included expenses in conjunction with the CRV project, the stipend for the project manager, and a monthly consulting fee.

Regarding cash flow for the billing-reimbursement cycle, the state of Vermont promised to reimburse the MRVRD's reimbursement of VOREC partner expenses within a six- to eight-week time frame. This arrangement, Doug said, appeared to be manageable at least through the end of the year, although larger monthly expenses -- \$50,000 or more -- were expected to come in toward the middle of 2024, possibly presenting a strain on cash flow.

The big outlier was the Mill Brook bridge, being installed under the aegis of the Mad River Riders. The bridge, to be ordered by December and to be installed early next spring, was expected to cost \$140,000. Laura said that the state, because of the considerable cost of the bridge, was willing to make a "one-time exception" to its usual billing-reimbursement procedures. Nevertheless, depending on the timing of the bridge company's billing and depending on whether or not the state would provide reimbursement prior to the completion of the bridge installation, some stop-gap funding would likely be in order. That could mean the need for a short-term loan with a duration ranging from one to eight months. (Another suggested option would be to find some sugar daddy -- or sugar mama -- to carry the cost of the bridge until reimbursement was complete.)

Doug reported that about half of the 2023 grants (about \$22,500) were still unpaid. But with the budget currently in sound shape, he suggested that the board "see how things flow through early 2024" before making any budgetary adjustments.

Moretown as a MRVRD partner? Should the MRVRD board approach the town of Moretown to become a partner in the rec district? Moretown currently contributes annually to the maintenance of Mad River Park, but should its financial participation be more substantial? Mary pointed out that Moretown residents participate actively in MRVRD programs and that, in fact, Moretown participation typically exceed the number of Fayston participants. A chart on youth soccer participation confirmed Mary's observation. (Fayston, of course, is a full partner in the MRVRD.)

Luke suggested that, beyond simply making a presentation to the Moretown select board, an outreach to the citizens of Moretown might be in order, since many of the town's residents don't really know about the rec district.

If Moretown were to come in, what would the amount of its contribution to the rec district be? Lacking the tax base of the other three towns, it seemed to the board unlikely that Moretown would be willing or able to match the full \$40,000 share that each of the other towns contributes annually. Alice suggested a contribution "proportional to participation" -- something, perhaps, in the range of \$10,000 annually. Laura noted that if Moretown were to join the rec district, a benefit to the town would be the Moretown organizations or programs would be eligible to apply for grants. Finally, Peter asked if any other multi-town organizations

collected an annual contribution from Moretown in addition to contributions by the other three towns. Laura pointed out that one deterrent to approval of an MRVRD request might be that if the rec district were to receive an annual stipend, other organizations like the Mad River Valley Planning District might be encouraged to follow suit -- a heavy hit for Moretown's budget. Alice suggested that the board "lay the groundwork" for a Moretown presentation by February.

Community Survey. A total of 41 respondents had completed the survey to date, after participation in the survey had been solicited at the farmer's market and at the craft fair. In reviewing the survey results, Luke noted that word of mouth was by far the most favored way for people to get info about the rec district. Assets supported by the MRVRD that were getting the heaviest usage were the Mad River Path, the Mad River Riders, the Skatium, and the pump track. Not surprisingly, survey responses were heavily weighted in favor of maintaining a balance between recreation and conservation.

Ongoing efforts to solicit additional survey responses included postings on Front Porch Forum, articles in the Valley Reporter, postings on bulletin boards, and through the assistance of MRVRD grantees/partners. Gina also suggested school newsletters. For future solicitation efforts, Doug agreed to reach out to the bocce community, Alice agreed to attend the Ski and Skate Sale, and Peter agreed to set up a table in front of Mehuron's for two evenings in October.

Finally, Alice reported that she had engaged an attorney to finalize the board's personnel policy.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:08pm.