

## **Mad River Valley Recreation District**

Minutes for monthly meeting, Tuesday, December 19, 2023

Board members attending: Laura Arnesen (executive director), Alice Rogers, Cory Ayotte, Doug Bergstein, Mary Simmons. Attending via Zoom: Peter Oliver.

Arriving at 7:30pm via Zoom: Molly Bagnato.

Meeting called to order at 6:36pm.

First order of business -- minutes from November 14 and November 28 meetings unanimously approved.

### **Mad River Park Update**

Mary reported that Kingsbury has agreed to plow space for just three cars in the parking lot this winter, rather than plowing the entire lot. The money saved will be credited by Kingsbury. Mary also reported that she has started a conversation with Kingsbury about an irrigation plan for this summer, starting in May, which last year was an unusually dry month, when regular irrigation was necessary. A schedule for the irrigation program still needs to be determined; i.e., should be done on a regular basis or an as-needed basis. It was generally agreed that as-needed probably made more sense.

### **MRVRD Survey Review**

Survey results showed a roughly even distribution of respondents from the three main contributing towns (Fayston, Waitsfield, Warren). As for respondents' ages, 76 percent were 35 years old or older, with more than 35 percent older than 55. Peter noted that this reflected the demographic data from the Mad River Valley Planning District presented to the board in October, indicating an aging Valley population. Alice surmised that if out-of-state visitors were included in the survey, younger respondents would represent a higher percentage. (Both Alice and Peter indicated that, when they had solicited people to take the survey, they disincluded anyone who was not a local resident.)

An encouraging sign was that 85 percent of the respondents indicated that they knew at least a little about the rec district and what it did. This seemed to alleviate at least some concern regarding a need to raise awareness about the MRVRD among Valley residents. The main source, by far, of respondents' awareness of the rec district was word of mouth; 12.5 percent of respondents said that the MRVRD web site was a source of information. In order to drive more traffic to the web site, Peter suggested that perhaps rec-district partners be enabled to post information and updates directly onto the web site. Mary responded that the main objective of the web site was to provide accurate information about Valley recreational opportunities; such stuff as updates might be better suited within a social-media (Facebook, Instagram) context. Mary also questioned: "Is it a part of our mission to gain participants?"

Alice said that the survey should help stimulate more board consideration of "what we think the role of the district is beyond grants." An important bedrock of this consideration, said Alice, was to make it known that the Mad River Valley is a community that supports a balance

between recreational opportunity and environmental sensitivity. The survey indicated that the great majority of respondents -- 85%+ -- were in favor of a balancing of recreation and environmental concerns. Alice went on to say that the MRVRD should probably be "home base" for the Conservation & Recreation Visioning project.

The survey indicated that the great majority of recreational assets and activities supported by the rec district were never used or engaged in by respondents. The main exception was the Mad River Path, where frequent users outnumbered never-evers. Finally, when asked about recreational needs in the Valley, by far the two most requested additions were a paved bike (multi-use) path and an indoor recreation center.

Alice then asked whether it made sense to do a separate winter survey. Peter suggested that another survey might be done to ask Valley landowners how they felt about opening their property to recreational use. In using the posting of land for hunting, Alice said that the issue of what landowners might allow can get muddled in a question of "what's legal and what's culturally acceptable?"

Finally, Mary suggested that a regular, annual survey might be a good idea -- that "more information is better."

### **Executive Report**

After attending town select board meetings, Laura reported that, as far as the select boards were concerned, "the budget lined up" after grant requests were fulfilled. Select board members only had a few random questions, she said, and were mostly interested in the status of the VOREC project.

Laura also reported that all three member towns -- Fayston, Waitsfield, Warren -- had ante-ed up early with their \$40,000 annual stipends, meaning the MRVRD bank account was flush with a new \$120,000. Because there were relatively few imminent expenses to cover, the board voted unanimously to make available \$80,000 to finance the first phase of the Mill Brook bridge project. The board's decision was made with the understanding that reimbursement from the state, once a copy of the check to the bridge builder had been forwarded to VOREC, would be in relatively short order. Laura reported that \$49,000 in reimbursements from the state -- an initial \$13,000 for the bridge, \$14,000 for the project coordinator's salary, \$11,000 for the Mad River Path, \$8,000 for the Chamber of Commerce -- had been prompt.

Finally, reporting on the Conservation Recreation Visioning project, Laura said the recent community forum had "been a good kickoff." Another community learning session is planned for February. The CRV leadership team will also be participating in a retreat in a few days to discuss plans for moving forward.

Meeting adjourned at 7:43pm.