

**Mad River Valley Planning District
Steering Committee
June 16, 2016**

Present were:

Fayston: Jared Cadwell, Select Board; Carol Chamberlin, Planning Commissioner

Waitsfield: Kari Dolan, Select Board; Steve Shea, Planning Commissioner

Warren: Bob Ackland, Select Board; Jim Sanford, Planning Commissioner

CVRPC: Eric Vorwald

Sugarbush: Margo Wade

MRV Chamber of Commerce: Peter MacLaren

Moretown: John Hoogenboom

MRVPD: Joshua Schwartz; Kristine Keeney

Guests: Tracy Brannstrom, Laura Brines, Andrew Cunningham, Anne Marie DeFreest, Patricia Floyd, Laurie Klein, Lisa Loomis, Ed Reed, Melissa Roberts, Amy Todisco,

The minutes of the May 19, 2016 Steering Committee were accepted with the amendment of a typo.

J. Schwartz introduced the MRVPD's new Community Planner, Kristine Keeney, who started in the new position on June 6, 2016. Kristine was previously the Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Coordinator with the City of Portland, Maine for two years and did private transportation planning consulting before that for almost four years. She earned a Masters Degree in Urban and Environmental Policy & Planning from Tufts University.

MRV Community Economic Development Committee (CEDC) Presentation: an organized group of residents, consultants, business leaders, Chamber board members and elected officials presented their findings after conducting extensive research into evolving the governance and funding models for the MRVPD and the MRVCC.

The group's key messages to the Committee included:

- Mad River Valley has outgrown existing organizational capacities
- New funding options are achievable
- Consideration should be given to form a new entity between the MRVPD & MRVCC

The group identified economic contributors to the Mad River Valley in order to understand what type of funding options might make sense:

- Full-time residents
- Second home owners
 - Property management & construction a growing part of the economy
 - Non-resident property tax make up in MRV:
 - Warren: 65-75%
 - Waitsfield: 45-48%
 - Fayston: 36%
- Tourists & Visitors

The group highlighted several areas that need to be addressed to support economic development:

- Business support
- Destination marketing
 - Mad River Valley as the brand

- Sense of place: consistent signage/gateway areas
- Better web presence/advertising
- Festival support
- Additional support for expansion of the Mad Bus
- Strategic support for recreational initiatives/projects

The group highlighted considerations for future funding to support economic development:

- Recommending a total of \$505,000 in new funding
 - Community: Transportation, Recreation, Community Development, Staffing: \$280,000
 - Tourism: Destination marketing, event support: \$225,000
- Need to consider replacement of a portion of \$45,000 of funding for the MRVPD from Sugarbush

The group did extensive research into potential new funding sources:

- Municipal property taxes- 1-3 cent increase
- Local Option Tax- Rooms, Meals & Alcohol and/or Retail Sales (VT retains 30%)
- Grants- don't believe grants are a sustainable way to fund services

The group is recommending the implementation of new funding mechanisms:

- Phase I (FY2017) possible phase-in/program ramp-up over 2 years
 - Pass 2 cent municipal property tax increase for "community" expenditures
 - Reduce Sugarbush contribution by agreed amount
- Phase II (vote in 2017)
 - Pass room, meals & alcohol LOT for "tourism" expenditures
- Phase III (Optional- vote at a later date)
 - Pass sales LOT
 - Reduces municipal property taxes by about \$200k below current levels

The group also asked the Committee several open-ended questions to consider as the process moves forward:

- What should the role of the CEDC be?
- Are the proposals/funding concepts on-track or off-base?
- Do the boards of the MRVPD or MRVCC support the proposals?
- What approach do we think the public will support?

The Steering Committee and other attendees discussed the CDEC's recommendations and the merits of increasing property taxes or pursuing a Local Options Tax (LOT).

Ed Read, Fayston Select Board, expressed concern that a LOT or property tax increase would result in making things that are already expensive that much more expensive for people that already live here or for people who are thinking about moving here. Read stated that an increase in the property tax would exacerbate the affordable housing challenges in the MRV. He suggested that affordable housing may be an insurmountable challenge in a resort community- other disagreed saying there are many things that can be done going forward to increase access for affordable housing.

Peter MacLaren, Chamber Board, argued that he thought that pursuing just the rooms, meals & alcohol and not the sales LOT was a balance approach to funding the proposed services.

The discussion turned to the appropriate role and financial obligation for Sugarbush going forward.

Bob Ackland suggested that Sugarbush should not carry such a large financial burden for the MRVPD when they don't have a vote on the Steering Committee and when the Chamber does have a vote and they do not pay a share of the budget. Melissa Roberts pointed out that Sugarbush is paying their ¼ share of the MRVPD's annual budget but they are also paying property taxes as well.

The current state of the Chamber was discussed and if it would make sense to be absorbed into the MRVPD and potentially give the MRVPD the authority to receive tax money.

Jim Sanford stated that it sounded more like we were at a MRVCC Board Meeting than at the MRVPD Steering Committee meeting. He suggested that absorbing the duties of the MRVCC into the Planning District would create a situation where economic development is the key item of the organization which was never the original intent of the MRVPD's MOU with the 3 towns and Sugarbush. He suggested that this is a Chamber issue only.

Anne Marie suggested that the MRVCC's membership is dwindling because people don't "join" things anymore.

Andrew Cunningham stated that he thought the idea of LOT was going to be a hard sell to the public. He stated that the MRVPD would need an elected board rather than just a Steering Committee if it were given the authority to tax and receive money. He suggested that voters might not be comfortable with creating a new taxing entity in the community.

Those in attendance thanked the members of the CEDC for putting in so many hours and work to come up with the presented recommendations.

The Executive Committee of the Planning District will meet the week of June 20th 2016, where they will further review the presentation and make a recommendation for the Steering Committee as how to proceed with the governance and funding structures of the MRVPD and the MRVCC. Bob Ackland will send an email the Executive Committee members to select a date for the meeting.

Bob Ackland thanked Carol Chamberlin for taking the meeting minutes at past Steering Committee meetings.

Executive Director's Highlights: J. Schwartz provided the Committee updates on several areas including transportation, housing, and stormwater. Margo Wade also provided updates from Sugarbush.

Transportation

The Warren CDBG-DRII sidewalk/plaza RFP did not receive any responses from any consultants. Kristine and Joshua have provided changes/recommendations for the RFP and the PM will be editing and publishing it again for consideration in the near future by qualified firms.

MRV Transportation Advisory Committee met on June 8, 2016 with a focus on improving ridership on the Mad Bus during the 2016-2017 service season. Three staff members from GMT were in attendance and announced that no service reductions or cuts will be made this season, but if ridership does not improve that this will likely change for the SnowCap Commuter and the Valley Floor routes in 2017-2018. The MRVTAC successfully lobbied to keep the current service levels and the group brainstormed ways to improve marketing, mapping, schedule, signage, and Sugarbush polices to increase ridership on the underperforming routes.

Housing

The MRV Housing Coalition met on June 9, 2016 where Debbie Goodwin, Executive Direct of the Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity, discussed their current and past work in the area to build affordable housing. MRVPD staff stated that we would like to partner with Habitat in the future to potentially build additional affordable housing units in the Valley in the future.

Sugarbush

Sugarbush submitted an application to the State for a Stream Alteration Permit in order to repair a damaged concrete structure under the streambed that is used for their snowmaking operations. They are hoping this repair gets them through the 2016-2017 because a full replacement of the structure will likely cost approximately \$500,000. As part of their stream alteration permit they will be requesting permission to install an inflatable weir to raise the upstream water level. They say the current process to do this can be dangerous for employees and machinery in the stream especially when there is ice present. Sugarbush has alerted regulatory authorities about this permit request.

Sugarbush also recently submitted their data report to the MRVPD, which will be presented at the July 21, 2016 MRVPD Steering Committee meeting.

Sugarbush will be hosting the Vermont Mountain Bike Festival at Mt. Ellen in July. The Mad River Riders are organizing the event but they have been told to expect 450 people. Sugarbush will be providing some staff members to help out with the event but the Mad River Riders are looking for volunteers to help as guides and support staff as well. It is the hope that the MRV will host the festival for the next three years.

Bonnie MacBrien is the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission's new Finance and Office Manager.

The Old Business item of completing the MRVPD Identity & Outreach exercise will be discussed at the next Steering Committee meeting in July. J. Schwartz needs to receive committee members information in the next few weeks in order to develop something for review by the Committee in July.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Keeney