

**Mad River Valley Planning District  
Steering Committee  
September 15, 2016  
Notes**

Present were:

Fayston: Jared Cadwell, Selectboard

Waitsfield: not present

Warren: Bob Ackland, Selectboard; Jim Sanford, Planning Commission

CVRPC: Bonnie Waninger

Sugarbush: Margo Wade

MRV Chamber of Commerce: Peter MacLaren

MRVPD: Joshua Schwartz; Kristine Keeney

Guests: Chris Keating, Eugene Bifano

The discussion opened at 7:00pm. Bob Ackland, Chair, declared the absence of a quorum because a representative from Waitsfield was not present, resulting in no official meeting - no official action (motions or voting) will occur unless a quorum is recognized.

**Executive Director's Highlights of Staff Report:** J. Schwartz provided the Committee with an update on several areas including economic development, flood resilience/water quality, hazard mitigation, transportation, recreation, historic resources, energy, and other topics.

Economic Development

Progress on Vermont Downtown Action Team (V-DAT)/CDBG-DR2 Implementation Grants:

- The Warren Main Street Improvement Project had its kick-off meeting on 8/22 when Kristine took detailed notes and provided them to the Planning Commission, Town Manager, Zoning Administrator, and project manager. A preliminary design meeting will be held on Monday, 9/26, 7:30pm during the regularly scheduled Planning Commission meeting.
- The Waitsfield Pocket/Lovett Park Project had its kick-off meeting on 8/30 and the first public meeting is scheduled for 9/28, 6pm, at the Waitsfield Town Office where the 30% design will be reviewed.
- The August MRV Dashboard was printed in the 9/15 edition of the Valley Reporter.
  - Building permits up (Aug '16 vs '15). 18 more for the year to date.
  - Rooms (41% higher than May '15 – still down year to date)
  - Meals & Alcohol (5% up compared to previous May)
  - There have been challenges related to collecting data from The Bridges due to staffing changes. Kristine and Bob will reach out again next month to see if they can participate in the September Dashboard.
    - Peter suggested reaching out to additional inns and B&Bs in the area. Jerad Cadwell specifically mentioned the Mad River Barn as one property to contact.

The first meeting of the Mad River Valley Community Vitality Project took place on Wednesday, 9/14.

Flood Resilience/Water Quality

Ridge 2 River (R2R) and the MRVPD is working together to organize a community forum to talk about the work that has been done since Hurricane Irene and is going to serve as a kick-off for the Ridge 2 River work on stormwater at the Big Picture Theater on October 26th, 2016.

- Bob suggested that it's important to emphasize the work of the PD in this effort

## Hazard Mitigation

Joshua attended a meeting with FEMA officials from the Washington, DC office to talk about what happens pm the municipal level and how FEMA can do better in assisting post-disaster. Joshua thought it was a productive conversation that will hopefully help FEMA to improve their processes going forward.

## Transportation

Sugarbush Access Road Path Scoping Study-Kristine provided comments and edits on the proposed alternatives for the alignment of the Sugarbush Access Rd Path. She also attended the 9/7 Advisory Committee meeting which focused on further refining the proposed alternatives and discussed options on Inferno Road.

- A public meeting with landowners is scheduled for Tuesday, 9/27, at 7:00pm during the regularly scheduled Selectboard Meeting/Public Meeting at the Warren Municipal Building. Kristine is assisting the Committee in getting the word.

The Waitsfield West Sidewalk Project is at the conceptual engineering phase; Kristine will be working on pedestrian counts for proposed crosswalks as part of the Waitsfield West Sidewalk project, per Vtrans crosswalk warrant standards. The counts will provide data to inform the striping of crosswalks in conjunction with the sidewalk project. This base data will also serves as an opportunity to document performance of the facility (once completed).

- Kristine met with VTrans representatives on 7/22 regarding restriping bike lanes along Rt. 100 and design of parking/sidewalk/bike lane in the heart of Waitsfield Village.

Vtrans is nearing the completion of paving of the east side of the Route 17 with the final course of pavement scheduled for the end of September. Kristine also reiterated to Vtrans the Valley's desire for repaving the east side in the near future and Bonnie from CVRPC took note as well for their consideration on the CVTAC.

MRVPD will also be working with Middlebury College students to inventory town owned parcels that may be suitable for park and ride lots. Kristine is working on gathering the data from all three towns.

## Housing

Kristine is focusing a lot of time and effort on updating the 2006 Housing Study. The MRVHC has been providing guidance on the data sources and will be discussing the past strategies at their next meeting on 9/22. The goal is to present the updated Housing Study at the Valley Leadership Meeting in mid-November.

## Recreation

MRV Moves Plan will be presented on October 10/20 at the Waitsfield Elementary School as part of next month's MRVPD Steering Committee meeting.

- MRV Moves was presented to its funders, Vtrans and ACCD, by the project team that suggested ways for Vtrans to make it easier for towns to implement active transportation infrastructure.

The Mad River Path Association will hold a ribbon cutting for Waits Way on 9/27 at 5:30pm during the School's open house.

Kristine and Joshua are working on a 5-year update on the 2012 MRV Trail Map, with the expectation of a new version ready for the spring. The older version doesn't currently have Blueberry Lake trails on it.

- Joshua pointed out that this map update should be easier given all of the data collection done for the MRV Moves project.
- Peter mentioned that many of his guests utilize this map and that it would be helpful to have an updated version for next season.

## Historic Resources

Joshua assisted with the nominating of Lareau Farmstead to be added to the National Register of Historic Places. This designation makes them eligible for a variety of different funding sources and since it's outside of the Waitsfield or Warren districts they need their own designation.

## Energy

Joshua went to a workshop offered by the Public Services Board (PSB) to discuss the forthcoming rules for energy siting. The discussion turned to the possibility of collaborative planning between the three towns related to energy, which would give the municipalities more standing at the PSB for siting decisions.

- The Towns of Fayston and Waitsfield have contacted the MRVPD about doing a Valley-wide plan
- Jim said that Waitsfield and Warren do not have similar opinions when it comes to energy siting
- Bonnie mentioned that the Valley does have similar commuting patterns, which lends itself to a more regional look at energy use
- Other communities have done potential wind or solar mapping, which makes more sense to do on a larger geographic scale
- CVRPC is doing a regional plan, doing data gathering and looking at a long range energy model to establish where we are now, where will we be in the future and how to get there in terms of energy usage and generation.
- The plans will need to include generation, commuting, geothermal
- Bonnie also wanted people to keep in mind that new technologies are evolving, for example in wind energy, "kite wind" generation is new option, so we shouldn't limit our thinking to just ridge lines.

## Other

- Middlebury College Geography Dept. Professor Peter Nelson interviewed Joshua on 8/15 related to his research with a group of scholars from the US, UK, and France that examines rural socioeconomic change in the three countries. The US team has selected a set of communities for a series of case studies, and the Mad River Valley is one of them, along with Jackson Hole, Wyoming, the Finger Lakes Region of New York, and parts of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.
- One of the outcomes of the discussion is new collaboration between MRVPD and Middlebury College on a host of student projects. In particular, Peter Nelson's fall Rural Geography course will include MRV research on 5 projects:
  - Undertake a bed-base inventory.
  - Document and quantify agricultural productivity in the MRV and update previous data on land use and ownership. This is in collaboration with the Mad River Watershed Conservation Partnership and the MRV Food Group.
  - Inventory the MRV's recreational opportunities. This is in collaboration with the MRV Recreation District and will include recent MRV Moves research.
  - Upload appropriate existing active transportation infrastructure to Google Maps. This builds upon MRV Moves Research.
  - Examine approaches taken by other rural communities in providing transportation to the elderly/disabled. This is in collaboration with the MRV Transportation Advisory Committee.
- The MRV Chamber of Commerce's new Executive Director, Jasmine Bigelow, begins on 9/26.
  - Peter spoke about other changes at the Chamber including the election of a new board member, Brad Long (formerly of Mad River Canoe) and Amy Todesico will become the new chair of the Chamber board.
  - The annual meeting was well attended and their new executive director said that her goal is to listen to local people and businesses before making any changes.

The discussion turned to new business for the Steering Committee.

Bob Ackland provided an update on the Community Vitality Project's first meeting on 9/14. The meeting was well attended and the group will be meeting every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of the month.

- Jared Cadwell brought up the new Total Maximum Daily Load for Lake Champlain is going to be difficult for the towns to deal with in terms of capacity and funding. The Vermont League of Cities and Towns said it's a state imposed mandate that's putting an unfair burden on local communities that they don't have the resources to meet the requirements.
- Peter pointed out that if the towns were to pursue additional funding sources, people need tangible things that will come out of a LOT
  - He said he has heard some concern about the 30% of an LOT going to the State rather than the money staying in the community

Eugene Bufiano, Warren Constable and former member of the Warren Fire Department, explained his proposal for increased collaboration between the three towns in terms of fire service. He has been involved in emergency services for 30 years and stated that he is always looking for ways to streamline and save money on services.

- He said that increased collaboration is possible in terms of ordering equipment and supplies in larger quantities to get lower prices from vendors, and reducing the number of new fire trucks that need to be purchased in the future.
  - He claims that the Valley has more fire trucks than the City of Burlington
- He said the fire service from all three towns would benefit from collaborative training
  - If all the fire fighters were trained using the same equipment they would be even better prepared to respond to fires in neighboring towns instead of learning while a fire is in progress.
  - He also highlighted the fact that all of the Valley's fire fighters could benefit from training from Dave Roberts of Waitsfield.
- He believes response times would improve because the whole fire department in the Valley would be notified rather than just Warren or Waitsfield-Fayston, and then one department has to call the other if needed for mutual aid.
- Working on collaboration or possible integration might be difficult at first but that there are ways to overcome these issues and he has experience in doing this in the past.
  - Margo mentioned that the Valley emergency responders worked together last year on a mass casualty event training and that they are hoping to do it again in the future.
  - Eugene also pointed out that the Valley towns currently collaborate through the Mad River Valley Ambulance Service (MRVAS) in terms of resources and training.
- League of Vermont Cities and Towns have worked on merging departments before and could be of assistance if this was pursued.

Joshua then described where the Planning District is currently in its work plan and budget as we are about half way through the fiscal year (February to March). He expressed that the MRVPD is in a good place financially and work-wise and has made progress on most all of the items of the FY16 work plan. He proceeded to describe the proposed work plan for FY17. Some of the possible undertakings in the work plan include:

- 2017 MRV Transportation Study
- Implementation 2016 Mad River Valley Housing Study
- Community Vitality Project
- 2017 Trail Map Update
- V-DAT project (Warren Main Street Improvement Plan & Waitsfield Pocket/Lovett Park) implementation/construction.

- Assist municipalities in development of an MRV approach to meeting Act 174 energy planning criteria
- Work with Waitsfield PC on Irasville rezoning
- Develop 2017 Data Report

Margo Wade suggested that the MRVPD needs to work on updating the Sugarbush/VHCB housing agreement and Kristine confirmed that this would be part of the recommendations and implementation steps of the 2016 Housing Study.

The Steering Committee noted that they thought a Recreation Plan might be something the MRVPD should focus on in the next fiscal year and that they will engage with the other officials in the respective towns to gauge their interest in this work.

- Joshua explained that he has tried to get a Recreation Plan for the Valley funded before and that MRV Moves was an attempt to cover a big portion of that planning work.

In addition to the Irasville rezoning, there was a suggestion that working with the Waitsfield Planning Commission to create a sense of place in this area was important as well.

Joshua went over the proposed agenda for the 2016 Mad River Valley Leadership Meeting in November.

- Some members of the Committee thought there might not be enough time for all of the presentations and that some things might need more discussion time including recreation (i.e. fields) and the Community Vitality Project. There was also a feeling among the group that the Planning District should provide an update on solid waste and any projected increases but not dedicate a presentation slot to this topic.

The Old Business item of completing the MRVPD Identity & Outreach exercise was discussed. While Bob Ackland thought the “why” statement for the belief or purpose of the Planning District made sense, Jim Sanford thought it needed to be simpler and closer to what the Steering Committee came up with at their previous meeting. Jim also suggested that the “how” needs to focus on the uniqueness of the Planning District and how it brings the three towns and the community together to work on important issues. Bob is going to work a bit more to flesh out the “why” and circle back with Joshua and send it around before the October meeting.

The group adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristine Keeney