



# MAD RIVER VALLEY

## PLANNING DISTRICT

Fayston • Waitsfield • Warren

### Staff Report

February 16, 2023

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#### Recreation

- **MRV Recreation Hub | VOREC**

- Project website: <https://www.mrvrd.org/rec-hub>
- Staff have been participating in regular planning meetings with Rec Hub project partners via Zoom as available.
- Staff is participating in monthly Community Recreation Visioning sub-committee meetings and quarterly Community Recreation Visioning Steering Committee Meetings.
- Partners are working on final elements in anticipation of finalizing VOREC grant agreement by 4/1.
- MRVRD have taken the lead in drafting an MOU to formalize ongoing coordination of the MRV Recreation Hub and related VOREC-funded activities.
- On 2/13 the Waitsfield SB will hear a MRV Rec Hub update and consider a proposed northern crosswalk as part of the Fiddler's Walk alternative.

- **MRV Trailhead Kiosks**

- Mad River Path led a successful effort to secure funding from the FY22 VT Building & General Services Recreational Facilities Grant Program to add 8 kiosks to the existing MRV Trailhead Kiosk program in 2023 (47 developed in Phase I of the project).
- On 2/13 the Waitsfield SB will hear a request for a zoning fee waiver for the trailhead kiosks planned for Waitsfield as part of Phase II of the effort.

- **Mad River Path Director Transition**

- Ross Saxton is stepping down as Director of the Mad River Path this spring.
- With Ross's departure, MRPA has begun the search for its next organizational leader. Please share widely, and click the link below for a full job description and details on how to apply.
- <https://madrivertpath.org/news/hiring-part-time-executive-director-position>

- **Warren School Brooks Field Playground Community Survey**

- The Warren School/PTO is beginning to plan an overdue update and seeking community feedback about the town's iconic playground. The current structures are incredibly loved but because of the prevalence of decades old wood construction, most of the playground is nearing the end of its lifespan. The Warren School playground complex is the oldest in the district, with needed improvements and structure replacement.
- [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd9fGJuN0xurF\\_Qe6yK1yC0mBVRqh5JgC\\_nDEjJLe0okUMNDw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd9fGJuN0xurF_Qe6yK1yC0mBVRqh5JgC_nDEjJLe0okUMNDw/viewform)

- **Marshfield Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Workshop | 1/28**

- Joshua led a presentation on 1/28 highlighting the MRV's recreation planning efforts to the Town of Marshfield's RERC Steering Committee. Marshfield was one of 25 communities selected as a partner for the US EPA's Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) planning assistance in 2022. As the Town of Marshfield looks to market the town's recreational opportunities to visitors, expand local business opportunities in the village, and foster outdoor recreation activities in all seasons, staff shared the MRV's efforts and recent best practices in support of Marshfield's intent to do the same with its outdoor recreation opportunities. The presentation was well received.

- **MRV Trails Collaborative Meeting | 2/16 | Zoom**

- The next MRVTC meeting will take place on 2/16 at noon.

- The agenda includes an extensive VOREC grant update, as well as updates and discussion on stewardMRV 2023, MRV Dog Park, Trail Mapping, and Trail Signage.

## Housing

### ● **MRV Short-Term Rental Data Project Application**

- Staff are awaiting a decision on the MRV consortium application to ACCD's FY23 Municipal Planning Grant (PMG) Program to provide 90% funding for the MRV Short-Term Rental Data Project.
- Award decisions were anticipated in January 2023. Staff reached out to DHCA and learned that announcements are delayed due to a legislative error with the MPG appropriation, with the correction currently included in the Budget Adjustment Act (BAA). As soon as DHCA has clarity on the BAA, and its MPG program funding is restored, they will be making the MPG announcements.

### ● **MRV Housing Coalition**

- Staff forwarded the MRVHC's 2022/2023 Biennial/Annual report notice from the VT Secretary of State's Corporations Division to MRVHC representatives.
- Staff fielded an inquiry from a Moretown resident inquiring about affordable housing activities and expressed interest in financially supporting such efforts. Staff connected the individual with the MRVHC Chair, Karl Klein.

### ● **Inquiry**

- On 1/27 staff corresponded with Planner from the Mt. Ascutney Regional Commission who is undertaking a housing survey for the Town of Ludlow. Staff provided examples of similar surveys created by MRVPCD.

### ● **Healthy Homes Initiative Awards**

- \$12.6 million in Healthy Homes Initiative awards were announced on 2/9 to help 36 manufactured housing communities (also known as mobile home parks) repair, replace, and upgrade water infrastructure. Most of the awards will address significant problems with outdated and failing wastewater and drinking water systems.
- \$40,000 was awarded to Vermont Mobile Home Park for engineering services to undertake a comprehensive water infrastructure needs assessment.
- <https://anr.vermont.gov/special-topics/arpa-vermont/manufactured-housing-community-solutions>

### ● **Exploring Vermont's Identity: The Paradox of Development | 2/13 | Joslin Memorial Library**

- Paul Searls, historian, professor and author shared how Vermont's development unfolded beginning in the late 1890's with the competing efforts of state officials to promote and conserve the state's natural beauty while also attracting business and industry.
- Staff attended this free event sponsored by the MRV Libraries.
- This event was rescheduled from an event originally planned for 1/23.

## Transportation

### ● **Sugarbush Access Road Pedestrian Path**

- Staff met with Margo (Sugarbush) and Ross (MRPA) on 1/30 and discussed/strategized about next steps on this project (which was denied funding in 2022).
- Staff have followed up in an effort to obtain additional information about potential funding options.

### ● **VT 100/17 Intersection**

- On 2/7 Waitsfield staff received an update from VTrans on the status of this potential project.
  - "VTrans received and selected many quality regionally proposed projects, and has been soliciting Consultant proposals for projects in stages. While WAITSFIELD STP 013-4(55) was not in the first batch for solicitation, it is currently posted and VTrans expects proposals back this month. At that point we will select the Consultant in coordination with the CVRPC and move directly to project refinement [meeting with CVRPC and the Town]. This work will be completed in July of 2023. The fiscal year 2024 Governor's Recommended Budget proposes preliminary engineering funding for this project in FY24 which would allow us to transition directly into the design phase. I will note

that construction funding and schedule are not defined yet as that is reliant on the information gathered during the project refinement stage and the early stages of design.”

- **2023 VT State Walking College | Deadline 3/10**

- The VT State Walking College is a 6-month, distance-learning fellowship program for walkable/livable community advocates, sponsored by AARP Vermont and America Walks. Fellows will complete a series of modules covering leadership development, coalition-building, walkable community design, local public policy, and strategic planning. The instructional content includes online study materials, video-conference discussion forums with other Fellows, and community assignments. Each Fellow will receive one-on-one coaching from a Personal Mentor to assist them in developing a Walking Action Plan for their community. The overall goal of the Walking College curriculum is to build the capacity of local advocates to advance policy, systems, and environment change to create healthy, walkable communities throughout the state.
- <https://states.aarp.org/vermont/calling-all-walking-enthusiasts>

### Historic Preservation

- **Boyce Hill Education Project**

- Staff checked in with the project consultant on 1/26, who shared that they have undertaken a detailed site visit, undertaking research efforts, and beginning scheduling a spring field walk of the property.

- **Before & After Disasters Historic Preservation Guidance Document**

- The US Dept. of Interior has recently released *Before and After Disasters: Guidance for State and Tribal Historic Preservation Leaders on Working with FEMA, NPS, and Other Federal Agencies*, an online guidance document which lays out the federal aid available to historic preservation leaders in the aftermath of a federally declared disaster. The guidance document covers funding opportunities, agency contacts, documentation, and other information that will help historic preservation leaders through preparedness, response, and recovery.
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/before-and-after-disasters-guidance-for-state-and-tribal-historic-preservation-leaders-on-working-with-fema-nps-and-other-federal-agencies.htm>

- **Grant Funding for Sacred Places | 2/24 Letter of Intent Deadline**

- Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are seeking applications from historic houses of worship to support stewarding such aging and architecturally complex facilities. The National Fund for Sacred Places provides training, planning grants, technical assistance, capacity-building support, and capital grants up to \$250,000 to congregations of all faiths for rehabilitation work on their historic facilities. Projects can include:
  - Urgent repair needs that are integral to life safety.
  - Projects that improve the usability or ADA accessibility of the property.
  - Renovation projects that support important community outreach.
- Staff shared this opportunity with Reverend Mark of the Waitsfield United Church of Christ, as well as the Warren United Church.
- <https://savingplaces.org/national-fund-for-sacred-place>

### Economic Development

- **Project-Based Tax Increment Financing Legislation**

- VLCT held a meeting on 1/31 to share and receive feedback on draft legislative language to enable Project-Based Tax Increment Financing, a tool that could allow small communities to pledge a portion of future municipal and education tax growth to pay off the bonds of a public infrastructure project that catalyzed that growth.
- At its 2/13 meeting the Waitsfield Selectboard is considering providing a letter of support to VLCT on this effort.

- **NBRC 2023 Forest Economy Program | Deadline 3/10**

- The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) has opened its 2023 Forest Economy Program (FEP) competition. The purpose of this program is to support the forest-based economy, and to assist in the industry's evolution to include new technologies and viable business models across the 4- state NBRC region. The Commission will make up to \$7 million in grants available, with a maximum award of \$1 million. Potential applicants must express interest through Letters of Interest (LOI) and will have two opportunities to submit: 3/10 and 9/15. For more information, including program materials and to register to attend FEP information sessions, visit the Northern Border Regional Commission FEP webpage.
- <https://www.nbrc.gov/content/FEP>

#### Natural Communities

- **The Vermont Clean Water Initiative 2022 Performance Report**

- Released 1/13/23, the Report highlights VT water quality progress achieved through public investment. The Report details how \$337 million of state investment in water quality projects over the last seven years has been put to work to reduce and prevent pollution washing into Vermont's rivers, lakes, and wetlands. The Report also summarizes progress implementing Lake Champlain and Lake Memphremagog phosphorus pollution reduction requirements, necessary to restore water quality.
  - <https://dec.vermont.gov/water-investment/cwi/reports>
- In addition to the 2022 Performance Report, the Division has released a companion online Clean Water Interactive Dashboard. The Dashboard summarizes investment data, project output measures, estimated pollutant reduction, and cost effectiveness data from the Report.
  - <https://anrweb.vt.gov/DEC/cleanWaterDashboard/>

- **VT DEC Spring 2023 Webinars**

- The VT Fish & Wildlife Community Wildlife Program has opened registration for their spring 2023 webinar series. The presentations aim to address the needs and interests of local and professional planners involved in natural resources issues.
  - **Becoming an Environmental Leader in your Town | 2/22 & 5/24**
  - **Demystifying Subdivision Regulations : Reducing Sprawl Development and Forest Fragmentation | 3/23 & 5/10**
  - **Better Habitat Blocks for Understanding Forest Integrity | 1/26 & 4/7**
  - **How Towns Can Manage Conflicts with Beavers | 2/8 & 3/30**
- All webinars run for approximately one hour, including time for questions from the audience. Two sessions of each webinar will be offered at different dates and times. Recordings will be posted to VT DEC's YouTube channel.
- <https://anr.vermont.gov/maps-and-mapping/biofinder/training>

- **MRV Preserving Wildlife Corridors Event | 2/16 | Big Picture Theater**

- The Warren, Fayston, & Waitsfield Conservation Commissions are presenting the first event of the MRV Biodiversity Series, Preserving Wildlife Corridors, which will take place on 2/16 at the Big Picture Theater. The event is for anyone who is interested in proper forest and land management that will enhance our wildlife habitat by preserving our Wildlife Corridors. Participants will find out how the three conservation commissions have been working to protect the MRV, see the need for wildlife corridors to preserve wildlife diversity, and learn what programs and resources are available for private landowners. In addition to representatives of the three Conservation Commissions, participants include Jens Hilke (VT Fish & Wildlife Department, Conservation Planner), Lisa Sausville (VT Coverts, Executive Director), & Robert Nelson (ANR Dept of Forests, Parks, & Recreation, Chittenden County Forester).

## Placemaking

- **AARP VT Accepting 2023 Community Challenge Grant Applications | 3/15**
  - 2023 Community Challenge Grants fund quick-action projects that help communities become more livable in the long-term by improving public spaces, transportation, housing, civic engagement, diversity and inclusion. The AARP Community Challenge is accepting applications across three different grant opportunities, two of which are new this year.
    - New this year, capacity-building microgrants paired with resources, such as one-on-one coaching, webinars, cohort learning opportunities to improve walkability and starting or expanding a community garden.
    - Also new this year are demonstration grants, focused on transportation improvements and the other portion of will focus on promoting awareness of the benefits of accessory dwelling units as a housing solution.
    - AARP's flagship opportunity supports projects that improve public places; transportation; housing; diversity, equity and inclusion; digital connections; community health and economic empowerment; new this year community resilience; and civic engagement.
  - [www.AARP.org/CommunityChallenge](http://www.AARP.org/CommunityChallenge)
- **Creating a Healthier Vermont: Advancing Health Equity through Placemaking, Funding, & Support**
  - This webinar series will explore the newest VT Health Equity & Community Design Technical Assistance opportunity from the VT Department of Health (VDH) and the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development (DHCD). This two-part event series is open to community leaders, local and statewide organizations, neighborhood groups, and interested residents across VT.
  - **Part 2: Technical Assistance Roundtable | 2/21**
    - Opportunity to connect with Technical Assistance providers and discuss potential project ideas. This event is an excellent opportunity to learn how the Health Equity & Community Design Technical Assistance Pilot can support community-led development, health equity, and placemaking projects in individual communities. Participants will:
      - Learn and identify one or more topics of interest for technical assistance;
      - Connect directly with potential technical assistance providers;
      - Learn how to apply to the Healthy Equity and Community Design Technical Assistant Pilot; and,
      - Ask questions about the new Health Equity and Community Design TA Pilot program.
  - <https://healthycommunitiesvt.com/about/upcoming-events>

## Mapping

- **2022: The Year in GIS**
  - The Vermont Center for Geographic Information (VCGI) Agency of Digital Services has put together a retrospective of GIS work in VT by State Agencies and Regional Partners during this past year, as well as a view to what is ahead.
  - <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/74c977d137cc4b94998d03adc6e1d6b1>
- **2023 VT GIS Service & Strategic Plan Update Survey | Deadline 3/1**
  - VCGI and the State of Vermont's Enterprise GIS Consortium (EGC) are interested in thoughts on its open and public GIS data products and services as it updates its 5-year strategic plan. All users of VT's public GIS data and resources are welcome to respond. The survey should take ~15 minutes to complete.
  - <https://vcgi.vermont.gov/news/2023-vermont-gis-service-and-strategic-plan-update-survey>
- **Intro to ArcGIS Online Training | 2/20-21**
  - Staff is attending this two-day training (2/20-21) being offered by Vermont Tech Continuing Education & Workforce Development
  - <https://www.enrole.com/vsc/jsp/course.jsp?categoryId=7204F9C0&courseId=CED-0840>

## Energy

- **VECAN 2023 Winter Workshop Series**
  - The Vermont Energy & Climate Action Network is hosting virtual workshops every other Wednesday on timely clean energy, climate action, and community-focused topics. These workshops provide opportunities to dig into policies and creative initiatives, and engage with fellow community energy leaders
  - Topics include: Complete Streets, Community-LED Resilience Hubs, The Potential of Thermal Energy Networks, and more.
  - Recordings and resources are available from all workshops.
  - **Inter-Community Idea Share: Cross-Pollinating Community Energy Progress, Challenges, & Successes | 2/15 | Zoom**
    - The next VECAN webinar will engage participants in a productive discussion with other energy leaders across Vermont, hear a case study from the Arlington Energy Committee, spark collaboration with other committees, and identify ways communities can advance aspiring projects.
  - <https://vecan.net/winter-webinar-series-2023/>

### Municipal

- **Waitsfield Bylaw Modernization Grant**
  - Staff have been in communication with SE Group and the Waitsfield ZA in support of Waitsfield’s bylaw modernization efforts.
  - Staff anticipate participating in the 2/21 Waitsfield PC meeting which will focus on this topic.
- **Waitsfield Wastewater Project**
  - Joshua has been working with Waitsfield staff to develop an initial proposed project framework for the coordination of the next phase of the Waitsfield wastewater project. The framework was developed initially by Annie (Town Administrator) and JB (Planning & Zoning Administrator) who aimed to outline what the next year of wastewater planning should look like, with a goal of a March 2024 bond vote for at least one phase of wastewater solution. Annie and JB then met with Joshua to review the proposed project plan and identified what MRVPD staff’s role as the proposed project coordination lead could look like. The initial proposed framework is being reviewed and considered by the Waitsfield Selectboard at its meeting of 2/13. The MRVPD SC will review the same framework at its 2/16 meeting and specifically provide feedback on how the identified effort fits into MRVPD staff’s 2023 work plan. If the Waitsfield Selectboard supports this workplan and the MRVPD Steering Committee supports staff’s time to complete the work as proposed, Annie, JB, and Josh will draft a final MOU for review and final approval. This framework would inform the MOU and be included as an attachment.
  - The framework is organized around four project teams with a proposed breakdown of tasks outlined in a project timeline. It is important to note that this plan is built around a one-year timeline, culminating in a bond vote at Town Meeting 2024, however it is possible based on design and funding opportunities that a timeline of 18 months or even two years is possible. The project timeline as proposed includes a check in meeting in June 2023 to revisit the timeline and anticipated milestones.
- **Floodplain Management Drop-In Sessions**
  - VT DEC River Corridor & Floodplain Management Program is hosting informal online (MS Teams) gatherings on the third Thursday of each month, 9 am. The discussions are intended to support the work of municipal officials who are responsible for floodplain and river corridor regulations, and/or are involved in the broader work of floodplain management.
  - The 2/16 session will focus on National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) compliance.
  - Upcoming sessions are posted as News on [www.floodready.vt.gov](http://www.floodready.vt.gov).
- **Town Meeting 2023 Resources**
  - The VT League of Cities & Towns has a Town Meeting Resources webpage providing a “one stop shop” for model warnings, model articles, FAQs, and important deadlines.
  - <https://www.vlct.org/municipal-assistance/municipal-topics/town-meeting>

## Other

- **MRVPD Executive Committee**
  - The MRVPD EC met on 2/9. Agendas and minutes are available in the “Executive Committee” section of MRVPD’s Agendas & Minutes page.
    - <https://mrvpd.org/agendas-minutes/>
- **MRVPD Community Planner**
  - The MRVPD Community Planner job description was finalized on 2/10.
  - Advertisement activities to date:
    - MRVPD Website News & Notices (2/10)
      - <https://mrvpd.org/2021/10/05/community-planner-job-posting-2/>
      - Direct link to PDF
        - <https://cdn.townweb.com/mrvpd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/MRVPD-Community-Planner-Job-Description-2.10.23.pdf>
    - MRVPD Facebook Page Job Posting (2/10)
      - <https://www.facebook.com/mrvpd/>
    - VLCT (2/10)
      - <https://www.vlct.org/classified/community-planner-3>
    - Vermont Planning Association (VPA) listerv (2/10)
    - Northern New England Chapter of the American Planning Association (NNECAPA)
      - Listserv (2/13)
      - Website (2/10)
        - <https://nne.planning.org/jobs/ad/9264924/>
    - Colleges with planning programs and alumni lists (#13) via Handshake (2/10)
      - <https://app.joinhandshake.com/emp/jobs/7524191>
- **Dara Torre Mtg**
  - Staff met with State Legislator Dara Torre on 1/31 and discussed MRVPD related projects and legislative activities.
- **Britton Rodgers Mtg**
  - Staff met with Britton Rodgers of Yestermorrow on 2/3 and discussed YM and MRVPD activities.
- **Jim Elkind Mtg**
  - Staff met with Jim Elkind, President of the Stark Mountain Foundation and discussed their initiatives.
- **“The Fragmenting Countryside and the Challenge of Retaining Agricultural Land: The Vermont Case” | Article**
  - *Society & Natural Resources, An International Journal* (Vol. 36, 2023), ran an article exploring Vermont’s efforts to try to slow the loss and fragmentation of farmland. Agricultural census and land parcel data are analyzed to identify what are the supply and demand factors of fragmentation, what are the pros and cons of fragmentation, and have VT’s efforts to regulate development and sustain farming slowed the conversion and fragmentation of farmland.
    - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08941920.2022.2132438>
- **Spark Connecting Community Grant Program | Deadline 3/7**
  - Funding is now available for organizations and projects across VT through the Spark Connecting Community competitive grant program at the VT Community Foundation. Spark supports projects that nurture community and build social capital—the connective tissue of our communities. Spark prioritizes community resilience and strength, increased civic engagement, and collaboration among organizations. The program will accept applications from hyperlocal, place-based projects (applications from a single community or a few towns working in partnership in the same region) or statewide/regional projects that support a community of individuals with a shared identity or interest.
  - Spark awards grants of \$500-\$5,000. First-time grant writers are encouraged to apply.
  - <https://www.vermontcf.org/our-impact/programs-and-funds/spark-connecting-community/>

- **Ben & Jerry's Community Action Teams | Deadline: Monthly**
  - VT Community Action Teams (CATs) are groups of employees at each of Ben & Jerry's three VT manufacturing and office facilities. They offer general or project support within the broad guidelines and funding provided by the Ben & Jerry's Foundation. Every month, the CATs make small grants, generally under \$2,000, to various local, community-based Vermont non-profit programs. In addition to making small grants, the CATs plan community service projects for all employees at their sites.
  - <https://benandjerrysfoundation.org/vermont-grants/community-action-team/>
- **Cultural Facilities Grants | Deadline 5/1**
  - The VT Arts Council is now accepting applications for its Cultural Facilities Grants, which award up to \$30,000 to VT nonprofit organizations and municipalities to enhance, create, or expand the capacity of an existing building to provide cultural activities for the public. Projects such as wiring, heating, adding ADA accessibility features (e.g. elevators, lifts, assistive listening systems, ramps, and bathrooms), lighting, and stage improvements are eligible.
    - <https://www.vermontartscouncil.org/grants/organizations/cultural-facilities>
- **Cultural Facilities Grantseeker Workshop | 3/2 | Zoom**
  - The workshop will provide an overview of the grant program, the application process, tips for a strong application, and a brief Q&A period. The workshop will be recorded and posted on the Council's website after the event.
  - <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcqcOCpqDwvGdbWiTU4-AucqGwCLVCxAf7t>