

MRBA Meeting Minutes Thursday February 2nd, 2023: MRBA Office (!)

Attendees: Craig Cimmons, John Little, Paul Stanley, Wendy Scott, Brian Jerose, Lindsey Wight. Via Zoom: Sarah Lunn and Ellen Fox. Guests: Kate Donlon (prospective Board member), Carissa Stein, Bridget Higdon (via Zoom).

1) Greetings and introductions

2) Review of January meeting minutes: PS motioned to accept, JL seconded. All in favor; minutes accepted as written.

3) Bridget Higdon gave a presentation about the Civilian Conservation Corps of Northwestern Vermont (CCCNVT): Thomas Hark, who founded VYCC, started a new organization last summer; now there is a leadership team of 6 (includes Bridget, Carissa, Marlena Valenta, and Katy from the FCNRCD, as well as others). Their mission is to build a conservation corps that will get youth involved in projects in NW VT to address climate change. Small teams will work with leaders on projects: there are over 6500 youths in our region, and they are looking for locally-impactful projects to do. The idea is that the project would be self-sustaining, rather than reliant on government funds: funded by a thrift store in the old Staples space in the Highgate complex. Group has their 501C3 status and the project will be overseen by an executive director.

CCCNVT wants to know what projects we need help with and is asking help to get the word out - connect on FB, share in our newsletters, consider becoming a strategic advisor (meet annually, get monthly email, champion efforts). Carissa got involved because she wants to get youth out on the land doing projects, wants local dollars to stay local and local youth to do projects in their own communities, and also because the leadership team is somewhat St A-heavy.

Recruit from tech centers and alternative-pathways courses/programs. Launch of store timeline: July 2023; launch of youth corps: possibly this spring? Ideas from MRBA for possible projects: stewardship for swimming holes, youth-led education/nature tours (for all public, or specifically other youth). Bridget asked for us to write down other possible contacts that could be helpful for CCCNVT.

4) Administrative business

- Quarterly reporting from Oct-Dec 2022: Lindsey had the wrong quarterly report, so this will be shared via email.
- 2023 Budget: Lindsey provided a draft budget for the MRBA. Suggestion: include actuals in a column next to the budget so that we can adjust it quarterly. Also: Lindsey check in with Lauren Weston (FCNRCD) regarding her reporting activities; perhaps provide an example. We will hold the vote to approve this budget. Suggestion: what if the Board took on the responsibility to “raise” the rent amount each year (through donations, donation-solicitations, or Board-led fundraising)? Having the budget and actuals will help tease out this need, especially as the end of the year approaches: we’ll be able to see any shortfalls. Discuss a fundraising plan.
- ECO AmeriCorps member: Host site applications are due Feb 21. Discussion of pros/cons of hosting an ECO member. Bringing on an ed and outreach person would be great, but we haven’t been able to do that much in the past few years (partly pandemic-caused). We need more structure for an ECO member, and perhaps a training plan and a manual. We need a clear path for them, and staff doesn’t have the capacity to really do that before September. WS motions that we take a pause from the program for a year; PS seconds; all in favor: motion passes.
- Staff reviews: Lindsey met with Ellen, John met with Lindsey. Salary suggestions motioned for an approval

by PS; WS seconds; all in favor.

- We do need a treasurer, with Cynthia stepping down. We are working with a bookkeeper, but still need a treasurer (Cynthia is continuing to help temporarily).
- Office needs: discussed running list of office needs; added items. While organizing the space, ask the Board for help if needed. Wall decor: would be cool to get aerial photos of favorite spots on the river; print them big and put them on the wall (mouth of the Trout and office location?) - There are great docs at NRCS; Carissa willing to go look.

4) Planning and Communications: Lindsey will see if Bethany may have a copy of our old strategic plan. In the meantime, Corrina sent along an outline - JL motions to approve it; CC seconds; all in favor. Most of the work can be done with off-line input (watch for emails from Corrina), but the planning process and plan itself should include regular check-ins during Board meetings, so that it doesn't just get shelved. Ellen added that we can make things trackable in QuickBooks. Our "clients" will be grantors, our "jobs" will be the grants, and our "class codes" can be created so that they are directly tied to Strategic Plan items.

Corrina would also like to do regular new releases (and perhaps include info in our events emails): we request the Board to take on a topic and do a write-up about it. Then Corrina can push that out.

5) 2022 Successes and Highlights - a quick list of highlights: planted 4.5 acres at two locations (3 more along Coburn brook - imagine what it will look like when that is all re-forested. Planting with inner-city youth: good story. We hosted our 2nd round of interns: not without its speedbumps, but a cool program with potential. The continuation of our knotweed projects. The 25th celebration. The return of Lake Lessons, and assisting with Winds, Waves, and Variables. The expansion of the MRBA - staff and space! - and the recognition that brings us.

6) 2023 events:

- VT Flower Show Mar 3-5: We've been invited by Lewis Creek Association to help at their booth at the Vt Flower Show March 3-5, 2023. Volunteers will share information about the ways you can garden for clean water, and have materials from several groups available. Wendy and Kate signed up to help.
- Art contest - who wants to judge: Wendy suggested some people outside of MRBA. Wendy will make some contacts and get back to the Board.
- Office open house - Sunday March 19, 2023. plan; how to advertise? - Make sure that all of the social media platforms are notified as well as newspapers. Have big signs in the windows of the office with Date and times.
- Quebec visit - discuss at the next meeting.

7) Other: what does the Board think about our events email? Mailchimp makes it prettier, but simplicity is good for communicating events. It's tough to keep up with calendars, and helpful to have things compiled somewhere. That said: could it be even simpler: click here for events in our region - and have that link go to a calendar of events (a "conservation calendar")?

8) Next meeting - March 2, 2023 at the office.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35pm