

RHS Repurposing Committee Report

The following update is submitted by co-chairs Kathryn Schenkman and Vic Ribaldo for August 2022

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT: Kathryn is the committee point person re the Environmental Assessment. In early August Kathryn was notified by Sarah Wraight at TRORC that they have hired an environmental consultant (EC) to complete the brown fields and hazardous waste assessment piece of the NEPA Phase 1, and that the cost of this work will be covered by state funding. Neither the Town of Rochester nor RSUD are permitted direct contact w/ the TRORC consultant due to conflict of interest issues, but will be copied on all reports.

We gratefully accepted the offer of Rochester resident Mike Teetsel to help us in understanding the Phase I findings and in determining future steps. Mike is a professional environmental engineer with 30+ years of experience in the investigation and remediation of contaminated sites. He and his wife Diane attended the July 13 feasibility study presentation and knew that a Phase I environmental site assessment is being done on the HS property. He assured us that “this is definitely the correct first step in determining if there are any issues that need fixing.”

In their August communication, Sarah Wraight informed Kathryn that the Town is responsible for hiring a separate EC to complete the historical and archeological portion of the NEPA Phase 1. Kathryn reached out to Grace Vinson, the state environmental officer who alerted us to the floodway issue, asking specifically the responsibilities of the EC the Town would appoint for accurate phrasing of the RFP.

Grace responded that maybe we won't have to do this piece, and sent a Preliminary Review Form for the Town, as the prospective buyer, to complete and return to her; this was done. Kathryn is waiting for Grace to notify us re whether or not the project will be considered exempt from the historical and archeological portion of the Phase 1. If the project is not determined to be exempt, Mike Teetsel states that he has colleagues in the business who he can tap for pointers on how we can best manage this process.

AQUISITION VOTE: The completion of Phase 1 of the NEPA will determine the need for Phase 2, testing of the site. It's likely that Phase 1 will determine the need for Phase 2 testing because of the underground fuel tank. The Town HS acquisition vote will be held March 2, by Australian ballot, along with other voted decisions re to the Rochester annual Town meeting. This decision was made in the interest of providing sufficient time for the environmental assessment to be completed and information related to that assessment be made public.

FLOODWAY ISSUE: As the committee's point person re the floodway/floodplain issue, Dick Robson is working with Dubois & King to resolve the floodway issue, with a survey of the property and assistance with the LOMA, paid with remaining funds in our initial VCDP planning grant, approved by Nathan Cleveland of the VCDB. At the 8/22 meeting Select Board member Pat Harvey expressed concern re the potential lengthy timing of the LOMA, stating it could take months for the federal government to process it. She suggested that it might be better to simply eliminate the sliver of land that is in the floodway from the HS site. This was conveyed to Dick Robson, who responded that he would look into the matter.

PROJECT MANAGER: Vic Ribaldo is the committee person man leading the search and sources of funding for a project manager. He and Kathryn received approval from the Rochester Select Board to proceed with the PM search and funding sources. They have jointly interviewed multiple qualified candidates.

SENATOR SANDERS' SUPPORT: Kathryn received notification from Will Stevens at Senator Sanders' office that out of 16 USDA Community Facilities proposals submitted by Sanders' office to the Senate Appropriations Committee, only 2 were approved: 1.) Barre Municipal Auditorium Upgrades: \$3,451,000, and 2.) Tinker Child Enrichment Center: \$1,500,000 in Morrisville.

Kathryn inquired re the selection criteria to better understand the process and identify any weaknesses of our proposed project. He replied that Sanders' office is not privy to the Appropriations Committee's selection criteria, but as part of Sanders' submission process, they had USDA Community Facilities (CF) folks review all of the applications submitted by Sanders' office prior to submission to Congress.

Because of that, Sanders' office received word from USDA that these applications qualify for CF funding through the CDS process, and also through direct USDA CF funding. Will states that the good news for us is that "CF is one of the few, if not the only, account where a follow-on opportunity exists." USDA will now review the 14 applications that did not receive the subcommittee's approval. So our project continues to be viable pending USDA review for direct CF funding.

Will states that applying for CF grants, whether through the CDS process or directly through USDA, follows the same procedures, and that the amount available from a direct grant through USDA CF will "likely be less than the amount available through a CDS request" but may be more readily available than CDS funds because of different appropriation mechanisms. Will stated that our project's next step with USDA CF funding will be an e-introduction from Sanders' office to the USDA CF folks sometime in mid-September.

MEDIA COVERAGE: Vic and Kathryn were interviewed by *Seven Days* reporter Rachel Hellman, who is working on a story exploring how different Vermont communities are pivoting after the closure of their school districts, and wanted to know more about our project.

COMMUNICATIONS: Lolly Lindsey, Robert Meagher, and Midge Scanlan formed the communications committee that will provide monthly updates on the RHS Repurposing project in print and social media.

COMMITTEE EXPANSION: We are grateful to everyone offering their time and skills to move this project forward—and to Vic for staying on as co-chair until a project manager is hired. We recognize the need for additional committee members willing to volunteer their expertise in the various areas of this project's development, and are increasing our recruiting efforts.

HS BLDG HEAT: This decision to hold the acquisition vote raised the question of who is responsible for the cost of heating the building during the upcoming school year. Kathryn will reach out to the RSUD to discuss this matter, and the committee decided to initiate a limited fundraising campaign at the upcoming Harvest Fair to raise funds towards that expense. .Jeanie Levitan and Kathryn will collaborate on that the fundraising piece.

HARVEST FAIR BOOTH: The RHS Repurposing Committee will host a Harvest Fair Booth on Saturday September 10, to distribute informational materials, talk with the community about the project, and initiate a fundraising effort to supplement the cost of heating the HS building this winter.