

## **RHS Repurposing Committee Status Report**

Co-chairs Kathryn Schenkman and Vic Ribaldo submit the following update, 11/14/22

The RHS Repurposing Project moves forward, not unlike the White River, with a lot of twists and turns, highs and lows.

### **VCDB PLANNING Grant FUND BALANCE:**

On 11/11 Sara Wraight of TRORC submitted a requisition on the Town's behalf, covering past expenses to date. The state will deposit the reimbursement into the savings account that the Town set up specifically for the VCDB Planning Grant. Within 10, the Town will need to transfer the money into the Town's general fund, and Sarah will need to submit documentation that the money was transferred on time.

According to the invoices that Sarah has on file, it looks like we have spent \$33,523.55 of the \$50,000 grant funds to date. TRORC's contract for administrative services will charge an extra \$1,691 to the grant, leaving a balance of \$14,785.04 that the committee intends to use toward the cost of a project manager. That number could be made smaller by any future D&K invoices that have not been received.

Once we receive a confirmed project manager proposal, we will apply to ACCD for a \$10,000 extension on our planning grant funds towards the project manager fees.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:**

*Brownfields and Hazardous Materials Review:* The environmental consultants appointed by TRORC were in the RHS building the last week of October to complete both the Brownfields and Hazardous Materials assessment. We have not yet received their final reports.

*Historical and Archeological Review:* ACCD Historical Preservation has yet to approve the Preliminary Review Form that was submitted in late August as they need more info re ground disturbance. Kathryn responded that there is a potential for ground disturbance during the Brownfield assessment process (digging soil and water test pits, and removing an underground storage tank if needed), but testing does not happen until Phase 2 of NEPA which is ongoing and we will respond more definitely once we receive the reports.

Sarah Wraight states that if necessary the development of a work plan for Phase II testing, which will include maps of exactly where test pits will be dug.

### **BRELLA APPLICATION:**

For your review, attached is an initial draft of the BRELLA application and Notice of Application from Sarah Wraight. The application still requires various attachments: deed, feasibility study, etc. Page 5 (Project Schedule) still requires additional information. The Town is required to have a pre-application meeting with Sarah Bartlett at DEC before the application is finalized and submitted. I am asking to work with a designated Town rep to complete this application. Thank you.

**FLOODWAY ISSUE:** Dick Robson reports that Dubois & King completed the elevation survey. Dick requested that Randy Otis, head surveyor of D&K, provide a map showing the subdivision boundaries

superimposed on the FEMA map. Randy responded that he would provide this map, but did not say when we can expect to receive. Dick has requested this map 3 times, and will continue to press Randy.

**PROJECT MANAGER:** Vic and I met with Mariah Noth from the Vermont Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI) re applying for additional grant writing funds. We rec'd email confirmation today that REDI is willing to pay for a consultant to suggest fundraising opportunities for the project. Diane Meyerhoff, a grant writer and principal of Third Sector Associates, reached out to work us paid by REDI funds.

Because we did not receive any committed proposals to our project manager RFP, due to the breath and complexity of our job description, Vic is revising the RFP to break down the responsibilities in phases. On Friday we had a productive meeting with veteran consultant Tom Appel, who is advising us on the rewrite.

Liz Curry, a seasoned project manager with interest in this project, introduced us to the federal New Markets Tax Credits program, based in the US Treasury Dept. It targets community development projects in low-income census tracts. The census tract where the HS is located is eligible. This is a complicated financial and legal program but there is a statewide non-profit real estate development corporation, called Evernorth, which guides applicants through the process and finds investors as limited partners who receive tax credits for their participation. We will learn more about this from Liz in upcoming conversations.

#### **USDA COMMUNITY FACILITIES GRANT SOURCE:**

Eric Law from USDA toured the RHS building with Vic, Dick and I on 10/20. He was very supportive of the project, asking many questions; our responses aligned with USDA Community Facilities funding eligibility. Eric spent considerable time after the tour outlining the next steps, which require a Preliminary Architectural Report and funding commitments.

We discussed at length the potential of USDA obligated grant funds as well as utilizing USDA as a source for borrowing funds, which he said was at 3.5%.

#### **2022-23 HS BLDG HEAT:**

The RSUD RHS Heat Task Force was created to work together toward the goal of heating the HS this winter. The TF is composed of 2 RSUD board members, Amy Wildt and Bill Egerton, 3 members of the Repurposing Committee Vic, Kathryn, and Lesley Straus, and Pat Harvey, as the Town's SB representative. Due to the greatly increased cost of heating fuel, the projected cost of heating the building this year is approximately \$66,000.

The task force met on September 20th. Bill Egerton proposed a 3-legged strategy that would divide responsibility for the funding sources into thirds to the following 3 groups: the RSUD, the Trustees of Public funds for Supervisory Union and for the Town of Rochester, and the Repurposing Committee's fundraising drive re charitable donations across the Quintown Community.

Kathryn was tasked with reaching out to the Rochester Trustee of Public Funds, who responded that due to the condition of their accounts and overall economic uncertainty, they are unable to contribute this year.

The Rebuild Rochester Fd is working with the Task Force to receive tax-exempt donations, and have to date received \$3,140. Kathryn drafted an outreach letter to the RHS Alumni, which is ready to be mailed. Pat Harvey volunteered to cover the cost of the mailing, which will go out tomorrow.

#### **MEDIA COVERAGE:**

The RHS Repurposing Project is included in a ***Seven Days*** article by Rachel Hellman, scheduled to for publication in this week's edition. Rachel is covering the ways towns across the state are pivoting to deal with the effects of Act 46, dealing with closed school districts and empty school buildings. Yesterday, 12 members of our committee met with *Seven Days* photographer Ben DeFlorio for a photo to accompany the article.