

Vernon Volunteers' Collaborative

Meeting Notes - 3/12/18

Our meeting was held at the Vernon Historical Society.

Attending

The 9 attendees represented 9 of our 13 organizations. They were:

- Cheri Arzt - Vernon Education Foundation
- Ginny Gingras - Tolland County Agricultural Center
- Anne Letendre - Friends of Hockanum River Linear Park & Friends of Valley Falls
- Bruce Luddy - Vernon Greenways Volunteers
- Jean Luddy - Vernon Historical Society
- Jean Merz - Vernon Garden Club
- Nancy Strong - Strong Family Farm
- Cindy Trenholm - The Vernon Chorale

Also participating: Jon Roe - The Tankerhoosen Valley website

Organization Updates & News

- **Friends of the Hockanum River Linear Park** has completed the Suspended Bridge and the Boardwalk along the river except for Jeff Hutton's landscaping in the Spring. A video is being made of the project with CVC.
- **Friends of Valley Falls** is financing a bathroom being installed at the Red Barn. It can also be used for the Heritage Center. There is concern that sprinklers may be required in the Stable. Also planning their annual 3 Walks in May.
- **Strong Family Farm** is preparing for their Spring Clean Up on April 7 & Chicken Run on April 8. They will also be at the Vernon Healthfest on the same dates. SFF received a \$29,000 grant to build raised beds.
- **The Vernon Chorale's** Spring concert is April 7 at the Vernon Congregational Church. They are talking with Arts Center East about participating in the Gene Pitney program.
- **Tolland County Ag Center** - The center needs to work on its structure. Perhaps apply for a grant for help in organizational planning as was done for Friends of Valley Falls.
- **Vernon Education Foundation** is seeking \$500 grant applications from teachers. They will talk with Joe Macary about connecting with the school on short videos of job types.
- **Vernon Garden Club** monthly program series will have a program by Jon Roe on March 26. With Sacred Heart property on the market they are exploring having their May plant sale at VCMS. They also will soon be working with Lake Street students, and have selected a winner for their \$500 scholarship.
- **Vernon Greenways Volunteers** Spring kickoff meeting is April 24 and they will show a first cut of the Suspended Bridge CVC film. They are also working on setting up a bike repair station on the Rail-Trail. Don's monitoring of trail usage shows us to be one of CT's top 3 most used trails.

- **Vernon Historical Society** continues to work with the schools on the update of 'Vernon, Our Town'. Also working on a joint project with Arts Center East about Gene Pitney. A grant is being sought to repair a crack in the foundation. For CT Open House Day they will have a tool exhibit at Strong Farm.

Hartford Foundation For Public Giving

- The Hartford Foundation (HF) works with 29 towns in the Greater Hartford area. They have a new president, Jay Williams, with a new initiative to visit the towns on a Listening Tour.
- They came to Vernon on February 26, the second stop on their tour. Several of us from VVC attended the meeting, which included about 50 people representing many of the organizations in town. Many issues were raised including the old Vernon vs Rockville feelings, the multiple alphabet groups including VVC, and the difficulty finding new volunteers and engaging residents. The meeting was recorded and is available to watch on CVC.
- One idea they mentioned was creating a Community Fund for Vernon for funding local projects to be determined locally.
- The turnout, enthusiasm for our town, and the nature of our challenges provides an opportunity for HF to explore new ways of supporting towns, and as the 2nd stop for them an opportunity to experiment. As a result they phoned several of us and are setting up another meeting for a small group in early April to see where we might go. As the representative of one of the alphabet groups (VCN, RCA and RDA are others) I had two lengthy telephone conversations with HF staff members. I'm optimistic something good for Vernon will result.
- We also discussed this with Joe Macary and Mike Purcaro at our March 19 meeting and we are in agreement on many of the town's needs.
- Of interest HF's 3 Year Strategic Plan makes frequent use of the word 'collaborative.' Perhaps this is why they took an interest in our VVC. Too bad we aren't a 501c3 and could request grants.

Working With Vernon Schools

- At our VVC meeting in November we met for an hour at the school before participating in for their Volunteer Fair. See Notes for the November meeting for details. I gathered feedback from participants and passed it on Cynthia Zingler. Most would do it again with some modifications, although there was little follow up from students.
- In February the school system brought in Steve Constantino, an expert from Virginia on Engaging Families, for a series of talks and programs with teachers and staff. In the afternoon I attended one he conducted for the community and local organizations.

- Several VVC organizations have collaborative projects with the schools: VHS is supporting the 'Vernon, Our Town' update for third graders, VGC is offering a scholarship and works with Lake Street, VEA is offering grants to teachers and supporting the summer bookmobile, and The Vernon Chorale is seeking a closer relationship with the high school.
- Of interest Vernon was one of the very few school systems to make significant improvements in a recent statewide report card and ranking, with none of our schools any longer falling in problem categories.
- Cynthia Zingler also reported to the Board of Education on the projects and progress instituted with the establishment of her family, school and community partnership office.
- The schools and Board of Ed are beginning a new project which will involve the community. Vision 2020 and Beyond's goal is to determine the long-term goals for our school system. It will define what a graduate needs to know as they move into the world beyond high school. The group begins April 2 and will include representatives from the business community with input on what they are looking for in an employee.

Town News

- The new **Senior Center** opens on April 9. We would like to have one of our meetings with Director Maureen Gabriele at the center, but as they will still be getting settled in early May we'll have to put that off until Fall. Meanwhile I encourage everyone to join, as being members will help should we want to hold our meetings there.
- Mayor Champagne is running for State Senator this November, but said he would serve out his term as Mayor which runs until 2019.
- The Rockville Community Alliance is coordinating a new community event for Rockville - the **Hockanum Brewfest** on Saturday, April 21. They asked if any of you would be able to volunteers to help during the day. Let me know if interested.

Promotional Opportunities

- The 9th **Greater Vernon Holistic Healthfest** will be held at VCMS the weekend of **April 7 & 8**. It usually draws about 1700 people from Vernon and well beyond. For the past several fairs Vernon Green organizations have had six free tables and will once again. The Tankerhoosen is a sponsor and, in addition to my table, I've also taken a table for VVC. I'll have a trifold exhibit with photos and distribute literature. If you want your organization included get brochures or flyers to me or bring them to Healthfest. Volunteers to staff the table are welcome.

- In our discussion with Mike Purcaro we mentioned the difficulty of reaching the public. He invited us to participate in the annual **Town Community Day event on Saturday, May 19**. I had a misconception about the event and apparently it is well attended by families. I'll have a tent for VVC so again we can use the trifold and distribute your literature. I had hoped to have our Publicity Envelope for Healthfest but it didn't happen; should be ready for this one.
- The annual **CT Open House Day** is scheduled for **Saturday, June 9**. It's a good opportunity for low cost, minimal work publicity and meeting the public. Let me know if you are participating and what you are planning. Promotion will be done for you. If you don't have your own venue you can probably use one of those with a physical location. The deadline for sign up is April 15.
- I noticed at the Vernon Diner that The Vernon Chorale and Driggs Farm had ads on the place mats. Cindy said they bought these years ago and they are still using them. Consider this for your organization as advertising. It would be interesting for VVC to take a full place mat.
- As always let me know of upcoming events and please check the online Calendar. I use the calendar to send MeetUps (now with 250 members) and Facebook reminders.

Vernon Events Magazine

- Essex Printing has stopped publishing *Vernon Events*. I believe the problem related to not finding enough advertisers locally. There was also dissatisfaction with recent errors and omissions, including two of our articles not included in the Winter issue. The administration is looking for a new publisher. Meanwhile we don't know if or when the Spring issue will be published.
- Since some of our articles are date sensitive promoting upcoming events I published a Tankerhoosen newsletter covering planned April Events. April and May are extremely busy as we get back outdoors. I'll likely publish another newsletter just to cover May and early June (17 events so far). The full list of activities are on our VVC website and the newsletter can be accessed from The Tankerhoosen Home Page.
- The four articles we submitted for the Spring issue of *Vernon Events* are posted on our website: Promoting Vernon To Our Neighbors, the Vernon Center History Walk, VGV Spring Kickoff Meeting, and upcoming Spring Events.
- I'll let you know when the Summer issue articles are due assuming we find a new publisher. If you would like to claim a spot do so. Only VGV took a Spring article so there won't be enough openings for everyone this year.

Ideas From Elsewhere

I keep my eyes open for things other towns are doing we might want to try in Vernon. There were a handful of interesting ones recently. Some were also discussed with Macary and Purcaro.

- Bolton holds an annual **Community Resource Fair** each March. I attended their recent fair to check it out. Held in a school gym it was primarily by their Park & Rec Department signing kids up for summer camps. A few other town departments or area kids' activities took place including their Senior Center. Activities included a Karate demonstration and play stations. They could have easily added groups like ours. The draw was kids summer activities.
- Bolton sends out a periodic **Town Newsletter** that includes town notices, meetings and upcoming talks, as well as programs similar to those we do. Nicely done and compact with links for more information. Good job for a Communication Director.
- Hebron is developing a '**We Are Hebron Academy.**' It is a **Citizens Leadership Academy** to educate and recruit new town leaders and volunteers for civic involvement. It's apparently a model that they are adapting for Hebron. Could help our town find and train commission members and help us find new leaders.
- Ellington Farmers' Market held a '**Meet Your Community Organizations**' day. Its purpose was to allow residents to meet with local nonprofits about volunteer opportunities as well as membership. The draw is the market.
- Pomfret has a very nice **Trails Map** that Jean Luddy & Nancy Strong are considering for a DEEP grant. Vernon does have the large multi page maps, but this one is more compact.
- Middletown has a **Heritage Trail Brochure** that focuses on historical sites rather than trails. Would be a nice addition for Rockville.
- Windsor has a series of **Spring School Field Trips** to galleries, historic homes and neighborhoods. The Windsor Historical Society recruits and trains volunteers for the event. Many choices in Vernon from Rockville mills to Arts Center East to Talcottville to the Vernon Depot outdoor train museum.
- The Windsor Historical Society in partnership with WIN-TV is starting a **Stories Gathering** program to record stories of their town. These will be shared on their community TV station. Sounds like the vocations recordings the Vernon Education Foundation is interested in doing with the schools.
- I've noticed that some organizations show **member appreciation** by doing an event for Members Only. Examples for us might be: Farm to Table at SFF, a private tour at FOVF, a VGC Tea, or a First Night at the VHS Book Sale. If its something special it should encourage others to become members.

Macary/Purcaro Meeting

- A week after our regular meeting we met with School Superintendent Joseph Macary and Town Administrator Michael Purcaro at the Vernon Historical Society. Macary has met with us several times, but this was Purcaro's first visit and some of our groups were new to him.
- Attending from VVC were: Karl Hasel, Nancy Strong, Ginny Gingras, Cindy Trenholm, Cheryl Arzt, Jean Merz, Don Bellingham, Jean Luddy and Jon Roe.
- As mentioned above we talked about the upcoming meeting with Hartford Foundation and who else might be invited to the first meeting.
- In his budget presentation to the Board of Education Macary requested a **Full Time Communications Director** to be shared by the school system and the town. I've long felt Vernon could do a lot more to project a positive image both externally and internally. The Communications Director could not only do public relations, but work to facilitate internal communications; an area of interest to Hartford Foundation too. Better communication would benefit the schools, the town and our VVC organizations.
- A reminder that Purcaro has **Open Office Hours** on the **third Thursday** of each month from 4-7 p.m. I encourage your organization to stop by to introduce yourselves, describe your projects and bring up any issues he could help with.

Next

- We have an exhibit at the **Vernon Healthfest** on **Saturday & Sunday, April 7 & 8**. Please get your brochures and flyers to me for distribution.
- Our next meeting is on **Monday, May 14**. We'll let you know the location. Mike Purcaro has invited us to use the Council Chambers so that is a possibility.

Jon Roe
3/26/18