

Vernon Volunteers' Collaborative

Meeting Notes - 5/14/18

Our meeting was held at Town Hall in the Town Council Chambers.

Attending

The 8 attendees representing 9 of our 13 organizations were:

- Don Bellingham - Vernon Greenways Volunteers
- Ginny Gingras - Vernon Garden Club & Tolland County Agricultural Center
- Karin James - Friends of Valley Falls
- Anne Letendre - Friends of Hockanum River Linear Park
- Jean Luddy - Vernon Historical Society
- Cathy Rebai - Vernon Education Foundation
- Nancy Strong - Strong Family Farm
- Cindy Trenholm - The Vernon Chorale

Also participating: Jon Roe - The Tankerhoosen Valley

Organization Updates & News

- **Arts Center East's** Executive Director Joan Sonnanberg is retiring Thursday.
- **Friends of HRLP** completed the Suspended Bridge video with a June 3 ribbon cutting planned. The Pleasantview Dr. Boardwalk official opening will wait until the road bridge is complete.
- **Friends of Valley Falls** held their 3 Walks in May. The bathroom in the Red Barn is coming along. One of the Norwegian Spruces was hit by lightening and destroyed. The farm will be open for tours 4 weekends this summer.
- **Strong Family Farm** received a \$29,000 grant to build raised beds. The farm stand opens on June 20 and will include craft pop-ups. Nancy is retiring as the Executive Director on July 1.
- **The Vernon Chorale's** next concert is June 2 at St. John's Episcopal Church in Vernon. They are working with Rockville High School for something in 2020 for the high school's 150th Anniversary.
- **Tolland County Ag Center** - The center needs to work on its structure.
- **Vernon Education Foundation** has 12 applications for its \$500 teacher grants. It's also preparing for its annual book distribution to first graders at the end of the term. Superintendent Macary has been attending some of their meetings.
- **Vernon Garden Club** held its annual plant sale at VCMS. The new site worked out well.
- **Vernon Greenways Volunteers** held its Spring kickoff meeting and screened the Suspended Bridge film. The 2018 maintenance season is underway as beds are being cleaned up and mulched. VGV is setting up a bike repair station on the Rail-Trail. On June 2 Trails Day they will take part with Bolton in the Rolling Bike Tour on the Rail Trail.
- **Vernon Historical Society** continues to work with the schools on the update of 'Vernon, Our Town' with a goal of being ready by September. A crack in the foundation will be repaired this summer. 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, and 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 our town organizations. Many issues were raised including the old Vernon vs Rockville feelings and the multiple alphabet groups including VVC.

- HF returned for a smaller meeting on April 5 to further define our challenges in Vernon/Rockville. I represented VVC. Most of those attending focused on Rockville's problems.

- HF summarized the meeting and Communications seemed to be the area that affected us the most and that something could be done about. They were looking to us to take initiative so on May 2 I met with representatives of RCA (DiDio), VCN (Rogers & Flint) and RDA (Crandall) to discuss the communication issues and options for the following:

- A Town Wide Calendar, Directory of Organizations & Services, Communication with Residents, Positive Promotion of Vernon/Rockville, Employment Listings & Specialists

- If communications improve it can help promote your organization and events as we have to replace *Vernon Events*.

- On May 16 we met with Mike Purcaro to review our ideas and begin to develop a public-private response. A new town website is likely with enhanced resident communication tools. We agreed that communication has to take many forms and the public must be included in the planning. For a good idea of possibilities see Tolland's website at tolland.org.

- On May 24 we will meet again with HF to discuss our ideas and show how we are actively working together. We will likely apply for a grant. As I'll be on vacation Nancy will represent VVC.

- HF wants your input on Vernon's barriers and community aspirations so we discussed:

- What holds your org back? Where would your org like to be in 5 years?
- It was felt that attracting new people was one of our biggest challenges; we mentioned that to HF at earlier meetings. We also feel people no longer have a sense of community. Can we educate parents who will pass on to children?

Town & School News

- The new **Senior Center** opened on April 9. It's a beautiful spacious facility. We hope to have our September meeting there with Director Maureen Gabriele.
- Nothing new on a *Vernon Events* magazine replacement. Our area was not profitable for Essex Printing so they stopped working with Vernon, Ellington, Tolland and Willington.
- The Vernon Farmers' Market will be held at the American Legion Field this year. It opened last week.
- The Vernon Seniorfest will be held on October 20, same day as the SFF Harvest Festival.
- There are plans for a 2nd Volunteer Day at Rockville High School this fall. Changes will be made to get more student involvement based on last year's experience.
- A reminder that Mike Purcaro has **Open Office Hours** on the **third Thursday** of each month from 5-7 p.m. I encourage your organization to stop by to introduce yourselves, describe your projects and bring up any issues he could help with.

Organization Promotion

- The 9th **Greater Vernon Holistic Healthfest** was held at VCMS the weekend of **April 7 & 8**. It drew about 1200 people from Vernon and well beyond. The Tankerhoosen was a sponsor and, in addition to my table, a VVC trifold exhibit with photos was created. Strong Family Farm and Northern CT Land Trust also had tables.
- The annual **Town Community Day** event was to be held on **Saturday, May 19**, but due to expected rain has been cancelled and postponed until September. VVC was invited to participate and I had planned to bring the trifold used at the Vernon Healthfest and make your literature
- The annual **CT Open House Day** is scheduled for **Saturday, June 9**. Strong Family Farm, Valley Falls Farm and the New England Civil War Museum will be open. In addition Paul Margelony will have bring his tool exhibit for the Vernon Historical Society and the Vernon Garden Club will have information. I'll send out some promotional information.
- As always let me know of upcoming events and please check the online Calendar. I use the calendar to send MeetUps (now with 260 members) and Facebook reminders.

Other

- There will be a Small Nonprofit Info Fair May 16 at Hartford Public Library. Cindy plans to attend.
- The annual VCN Provider Fair will be June 1 at Cornerstone. A representative from Hartford Foundation will be one of the speakers.
- With no *Vernon Events* magazine to promote our activities I have been sending out a monthly Tankerhoosen email newsletter promoting some of our events during this very active time of year. I'll do one more for June and then nothing until fall.
- Bolton's 300th Anniversary is in 2020 and I'm active on their Anniversary Committee representing Eighteenth Century North Bolton. Jean Luddy and I may write a book on Vernon's first 90 years as part of Bolton.

Summer Special Meeting

Last summer we visited CVC for a tour and then had a picnic at Driggs Farm. We talked of visiting Rockville Public Library to explore their resources including grant searches. Then follow this with a picnic. Also considering inviting Michael Winkler, our State Rep to the picnic to informally discuss state level issues that affect us.

Next

- The summer special meeting will be held on **Monday, July 9**. Details to follow.
- Our next quarterly meeting is on **Monday, September 10**. Hopefully this will be held at the new Senior Center with a conversation with Maureen Gabrielle about how our organizations can support seniors and how we might be able to use the facility.

Jon Roe
5/17/18