

Vernon Volunteers' Collaborative Meeting Notes - 9/13/21

Our meeting was held at Arts Center East. Masks were required.

Attending

The 13 member attendees representing 10 of our 14 organizations were:

- Laurie Bajorek - Vernon Education Foundation
- Carol Barcomb - Friends of Rockville Public Library
- Donna Barnas - Friends of Rockville Public Library.
- Don Bellingham - Vernon Greenways Volunteers
- Liz Bologna - Arts Center East
- Ann Letendre - Friends of HRLP
- Maryann Levesque - Friends of Valley Falls
- Jean Luddy - Vernon Historical Society
- Jean Merz - Vernon Garden Club
- Nancy Steffens - Friends of Valley Falls
- Nancy Strong - Strong Family Farm
- Lynn Sweet - The Vernon Chorale
- Phyllis Winkler- Arts Center East

Also participating:

- Jon Roe - The Tankerhoosen
- Cynthia Zingler - Vernon Public Schools
- Dave Owens - Vernon Communication Specialist

Arts Center East

- Our host **Liz Bologna** gave us an overview of how ACE operated and adapted during Covid, and their plans for Fall.

Vernon Communication

- We were joined by **Dave Owens**, Vernon Communication Specialist. We briefly introduced Dave to each organization's mission and activities.
- Most of the meeting was devoted to discussing Vernon communication methods. Dave began with a review of his background and his first year in town, including bringing the new website online with a town wide calendar, adding social media and the new *Vernon Voice* publication.

- Then we reviewed and provided feedback on each method of town communication:
 - **Website:** Still a work in progress it fulfills most of our needs.
 - a- The photos on the home page slider were primarily taken by Dave and he invited us to submit our own.
 - b- There were comments that the new site does not provide contact information for all employees. This was due to concern that it could be misused or used to harass employees. The Department Directory does include a phone number for each department and some individual department web pages do include an email address.
 - c- 'Points of Interest' includes some of our sites but not others and some could use revision. This is a work in progress.
 - d- Older minutes for Commissions will be added.
 - e- A section with the names, a description and a link to our websites will be added. Could be similar to our VVC website listing.
 - f- When planning the website it was suggested that all trail maps be linked from one page. This will be added.
 - **Calendar:** Color code or separate town meetings & school events versus organization events. A Community Calendar Policy for using it has been established. Dave reviews all submissions before posting.
 - **Vernon Voice:** We need the 2022 schedule, preferably quarterly by season.
 - **Facebook & Twitter:** Dave often forwards our posts. There are at least 7 other town oriented Facebook or social media sites. Some have as many as 6,000 users.
 - **YouTube Channel:** Looking for more content. Might include CVC videos.
 - **Issues:** We discussed Pushing information vs having to Pull it; owners interest vs renters; who we are actually reaching, and town residents vs neighbor towns.
 - **What's Missing:**
 - a- Email updates such as the Bolton Bulletin, which is a periodic notice and link to an online pdf. It pushes notification to those who sign up for the emails.
 - b- Promotion to visitors or neighboring towns. Brochures such as the one Jean Luddy is working on.

- **Survey:** Those attending filled out a survey to learn what form of communications they used to find town information. There were 11 responses.
 - Nearly everyone used the Vernon website, *Vernon Voice*, *Vernon Patch*, *Journal Inquirer* and *Community Courant*.
 - About half used Vernon's online Calendar and Facebook page.
 - Other social media such as Twitter and YouTube were used by very few as were the 7 other social media sites relating to Vernon.

Other Issues

- Some orgs (Strong Farm, ACE) have been having a problem navigating town regulations, particularly for fund raisers. Shaun Gately provides 'one stop' help to businesses. Can someone on staff, maybe Gately, provide guidance for our nonprofits?
- For many living outside of town our trails are our best known feature, best public relations and positive selling point. The Rail Trail is 20 years old and showing wear. This summer's rain has continuously washed out sections of trail that the Vernon Greenways Volunteers, with support from Park & Rec, have filled in with stone dust. This is no longer adequate and a more permanent solution is needed.
- We received good publicity on our trails and for our Covid efforts this year, but we have no planned and funded effort for promoting Vernon to our neighbors and for tourism. What little is done is self-funded by residents or nonprofit organizations. Vernon should have a line item in its budget for promoting the town, and the staff could provide help writing and supporting grants. The brochures I did promoting the Tankerhoosen Valley and the one Jean Luddy is working on to promote the town are examples.

Town News

- **2022 POCD** - A meeting for feedback was held at Rockville High School on September 14. Several VVC members spoke to the Planning & Zoning Commission about undesirable changes from the 2012 POCD. Developers also attended to make their case.
- DON BELLINGHAM and GINNY GINGRAS were added to the Volunteer Wall of Honor at the Sept. 21 Town Council meeting for their decades of service to town. They join ANN LETENDRE on the wall, which is located on the 3rd floor of Town Hall next to the elevator.

● **Project Progress:**

- Golfland has stalled waiting for materials.
- The Talcottville Bridge is on schedule to finish this fall.
- The Dart Hill Bridge was postponed until next year.
- Artificial turf was installed on the RHS field.
- The Hartford Foundation funded **Vernon Grants Program** is behind other towns in distributing money. They accepted applications during August and September.

Promotional Opportunities

- **Vernon Voice** - The fall issue was replaced by a second Summer issue limited to promoting town sponsored events of July 4, the Summer Carnival and National Night Out. We will have four articles in the Winter issue scheduled to arrive in homes mid November.
- There are many Fall events planned by our organizations. We will promote them on our MeetUp and Facebook pages and in a Tankerhoosen newsletter.

Organization Updates & News

- **Arts Center East** is returning to normal with both virtual and in person classes. They will hold their Holiday Artisan craft Fair from November 11 to 21.
- **Friends of HRLP** - DON BELLINGHAM is now their president. They are making progress connecting the Hockanum River Trail from Pleasantview to the Manchester Trail at Golfland.
- **Friends of the Rockville Public Library** - They have become a member of VVC and continue to provide services to the library including Museum Passes.
- **Friends of Valley Falls** will hold their Annual Meeting on September 26 and the rescheduled Artists Day on October 10.
- **New England Civil War Museum** reorganized their exhibit space and are planning a Grand Reopening for October 9.
- **Northern CT Land Trust** will hold their annual Valley Falls hike on October 17. There has been limited access to the Talcott Ravine due to the Main Street bridge replacement.
- **Strong Family Farm's** Farm Stand did well this summer. The Chicken program for kids is underway, the Chicken Run was held in early September, and this fall will see the Scarecrow Contest and a scaled back Harvest Festival on October 16.

- **The Vernon Chorale** has done a number of Zoom songs through the year which are online. They plan a live concert for Christmas on December 4 at St. Bernard's with traditional Christmas music.
- **Vernon Education Foundation** provided ten grants to teachers totaling \$4,700.
- **Vernon Garden Club** monthly programs were discontinued this year and they weren't able to hold their annual plant sale.
- **Vernon Greenways Volunteers** replaced half the Rail Trail mural. The heavy rain this summer has eroded sections of the trail requiring extra maintenance. After 20 years it needs so significant repair.
- **Vernon Historical Society** will hold a fall program on WWII and its annual Holiday Craft Fair on November 27 and 28.
- **The Tankerhoosen** - Working on a book about our first 90 years as North Bolton. Also supporting Strong Family Farm and Friends of Valley Falls with talks this fall.

Next Quarterly Meeting

- Our last quarterly meeting of 2021 is scheduled for **Monday, November 8**. Location TBD.

Jon Roe
10/20/21