

Mad River Path ASSOCIATION

Strategic Plan

2014 - 2018

Adopted January, 9 2014



Supporting Community, Ecology and Health through Public Pathways.

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BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

The current organization was originally formed as a rivers and trails committee of the Mad River Valley Planning District (MRVPD) as part of the development of the Rural Resource Protection Plan in 1988. Regular meetings of this committee brought together volunteers committed to creating a safe alternative to pedestrian travel along or around routes 100 and 17.

The original scope of this group was to create an off-road pedestrian path extending from Warren through Waitsfield toward Moretown across state and town owned lands, private property and farms, villages and commercial districts, and school property. Committee members agreed to locate the Path so that all ages and abilities would be able to utilize and enjoy the route. Most sections of the Path were intended to be accessible only to non-motorized forms of recreation such as hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing. Only where the Path intersected with other recreational trails would other activities, such as snowmobiling be permitted. The goal was to create an enjoyable recreational experience safe from traffic and fast-moving vehicles.

The Mad River Path Recreation Association (later renamed Mad River Path Association) was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1990. During the early years, the work of the organization was carried out by volunteer board members. As time went on, the organization's first Executive Director, Kevin Russell, was hired in the last 1990s. Gradually, the Executive Director's job has grown and today, the Executive Director is a full-time employee. The board has remained active over the years, helping with all manner of tasks.

The MRPA is a volunteer and membership-based organization that relies on financial assistance and volunteer effort from its members. The organization also receives financial support from business sponsors; grants from federal, state and local agencies and private foundations; town funds via the Mad River Valley Recreation District (MRVRD); and additional funds through periodic fundraising events. Membership is not a requirement to use Paths maintained by the MRPA – they are free and open to the public.

CURRENT STATUS

The MRPA has grown tremendously during its 23 years. Today, it has approximately 400 paid members, an operating budget of approximately \$84,000, and employs one full time staff person (the Executive Director) and a 10 hour-per-week summer trail worker. The Mad River Path System encompasses approximately 13 miles of path, sidewalk, road and trail on public and private properties - approximately half of which is managed by the MRPA. A small portion of the Path System is protected by permanent trail access easements while a majority of the Path System exists by virtue of license agreements, handshake agreements or other agreements with public and private landowners.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

This plan is the result of almost two years of work by the MRPA board, its committees, volunteers and staff. The process began with the identification of potential routes the Mad River

Path might follow from Warren to Moretown. Next, all landowners along those potential routes were contacted to assess their interest and inclinations about hosting the Mad River Path. Several dozen landowners were contacted through email, telephone conversations and in-person meetings (many others could not be reached or declined to return email or telephone messages). These confidential conversations provided a clearer picture to the MRPA board about the possibility of completing “the Path” from Warren to Moretown. This information helped illustrate that completion of a path from Warren to Moretown will take many more years and new strategies to complete.

With this information as a backdrop, the MRPA board of directors held two strategic planning retreats in June 2013 and September 2013. With the help of professional facilitator, Debby Bergh, it reviewed the previous Strategic Plan and created this plan for the next five years.

Between the two retreats, board members and staff met with representatives of as many partner organizations as possible. These included the Mad River Riders, Fayston Natural Resources Committee, Waitsfield Conservation Commission, Mad River Ridge Runners, Sugarbush Resort, Mad River Valley Planning District, and Friends of the Mad River. These meetings were designed to ascertain what services the MRPA could provide partner organizations and determine what role the MRPA should have in the future.

VISION

There will be a network of public paths in the Mad River Valley with the ultimate goal to connect the towns from Warren to Moretown.

MISSION:

To build, maintain, and conserve a system of continuous public pathways from Warren to Moretown to foster a healthy community by connecting the people, businesses and special places of the Mad River Valley.

GOALS, STRATEGIES AND MEASURES

GOAL 1: Identify and implement a signature project.

Current Status

A signature project has not yet been identified but several possibilities exist and are being pursued

Strategies

- a. Employ the strategies of Goal 2 to achieve Goal 1

Five Year Measurements

Completion of a signature project.

GOAL 2: Pursue opportunities to expand the Path System.

Current Status

Donations of trail easements are accepted when offered; the organization has embarked upon its first capital campaign to purchase land, keep an easement, then dispose of the land.

Strategies

- a. Develop project selection criteria (see Appendix A)
- b. Acquisition Strategies:
 1. Acquire land, keep easement then dispose of land
 2. Land swaps
 3. Buy easements only
 4. Acquire options on pieces of a segment and execute when all parcels or easements are optioned
 5. Utilize Class 4 town roads
- c. Financing Strategies:
 1. Conduct capital campaign
 2. Involve businesses
 3. Accept donated easements
 4. Bonding and taxes
- d. Valuation Strategies:
 1. Purchase easements for appraised value
 2. Purchase easements for more than appraised value (through sister organization)
 3. Expand awareness of the value of paths in the community
- e. Accept management responsibilities for new or existing paths developed by other organizations
- f. Utilize public access rights created as part of a conservation easement or development approval

Five Year Measurements

Complete at least two additional projects per year.

Goal 3: Build and manage an attractive, well maintained, safe, useful and fun system of paths.

Strategies:

- a. Develop long term path management plan:
 1. Inventory (photograph, GPS locate and describe, and assess condition) all path infrastructure (signs, PAM stations, bridges, walkways, fencing, etc)
 2. Identify the needs, timelines and estimated costs of potential upgrades, repairs and replacements of path infrastructure
 3. Identify any needed localized reroutes and timelines for completion

4. Identify and create plan for annual maintenance
- b. Maintain and upgrade the Path System in conformance with written design standards to be adopted based upon accepted trail building and management practices, in order to accommodate all modes (bicycles, walkers, & skiers) and foster alternative transportation.

5 Year Measures

Have developed a path management plan and adopted written design and management standards

GOAL 4: Strengthen the organization's financial resources.

Current Status

2013 operating budget is approximately \$84,000 with operating reserves, as of January 1, 2013, of approximately \$27,000.

Strategies

- a. Develop major donor program
- b. Recruit board member(s) with backgrounds, interests or abilities that will be necessary to carry out the goals of this plan
 1. Seek to have a board of 12-13 members
 2. Seek the following backgrounds, interests, or abilities in board members:
 - i. Younger members/families
 - ii. Representation from all 4 valley towns
 - iii. Marketing
 - iv. Events
 - v. Trail management
 - vi. Fundraising
 - vii. Finance
 3. Giving capacity is a desirable board member attribute but it is not required
 4. Revise board member guidelines to reflect actual and new expectations (see Appendix B)
- c. Strengthen the committee structure to maximize Board and staff resources and bring in new volunteers (see organizational chart in Appendix C)
 1. Create the following 3 standing board committees to carry out governance of the organization:
 - i. Finance Committee
 1. Committee charge: To oversee the MRPA budget and ongoing finances and insure the board is carrying out its fiduciary duty.
 - ii. Governance and Strategy Committee
 1. Committee charge: To develop and sustain the MRPA board and committees, conduct evaluations of the Executive Director, develop policy, oversee implementation of the organization's Strategic Plan and at least annually review implementation of the Strategic Plan.
 - iii. Funding Committee

1. Committee Charge: To develop and sustain philanthropic giving to the MRPA.
2. Create the following 4 standing organization committees to assist the Executive Director in carrying out tasks of the organization:
 - i. Path Expansion Committee
 1. Committee charge: Identify path sections to be acquired and negotiate and close deals to acquire those sections.
 - ii. Fun, Friends and Education Committee
 1. Committee charge: Organize fun events and programs to educate and engage the community, build support for the organization and, in some cases, raise money.
 - iii. Path Management Committee
 1. Committee charge: Manage and maintain the Path System and foster strong friendships with hosting landowners
 - iv. Mad Dash Committee
 1. Committee charge: Organize the Mad Dash.
3. Review the effectiveness of the committee structure from time to time and make changes as necessary
4. Board members are expected to serve on at least one Board Committee and may serve on Organizational Committees
5. A majority of the members of Board Committees should be board members
- d. Include overhead and staff time in all grant proposals and capital campaigns
- e. Explore new funding sources, mechanisms, and opportunities
 1. Explore potential changes in municipal funding for the organization

Measurements

At least a \$100,000 operating budget & at least \$40,000 in unrestricted operating reserves by 2018

Appendix A

Project Selection Criteria

The potential project must directly or indirectly fulfill at least one of the following criteria:

- Expands the core Mad River Path corridor from Warren to Moretown;
- Permanently protects an existing trail corridor within the Mad River Valley;
- Creates or enhances all or part of a trail connection between existing trails, community facilities, recreational resources, special places, or public lands;
- Creates a self-contained trail network (preferably a loop) of at least 1 mile in length;
- Fulfills a goal or follows a route identified in a local or regional plan (for example, the Mad River Valley Rural Resource Protection Plan) or in a plan developed by a partner organization;
- Emphasize easily traveled routes, although not necessarily strictly ADA compliant routes;
- Purchase easements in accordance with the cost guidelines set by the MRPA board;
- Acquire any easement that is deemed “so cheap we can’t refuse it”.

Appendix B

Board Member Guidelines

Revised October 24, 2013

The Mad River Path Association (MRPA) Board is a dedicated group of up to 15 volunteers working to implement the mission of the MRPA. Board members serve for three-year terms. They can be re-elected by the MRPA membership for additional terms.

General MRPA Board Guidelines

The MRPA Board of Directors:

1. Guides the organization's mission and strategic direction.
2. Is responsible for safe-guarding the fiscal health of the MRPA organization and approval of the annual budget.
3. Hires, evaluates, monitors, aids and encourages the Executive Director.
4. Serves as an advocate for the organization.
5. Assures a strong and healthy Board. A Board who understands their responsibilities and carries them out as well as ensures a pipeline of new volunteers/ potential Board members.

What is expected of a MRPA Board Member:

1. Be a member of the MRPA.
2. Attend and actively participate in monthly Board meetings and board activities. Board members must attend a minimum of 75% of Board Meetings on an annual basis.
3. Serve as a community ambassador for the MRPA.
4. Actively participate on at least one MRPA standing board committee.
5. Help out with the annual fundraising/community events sponsored by the MRPA.
6. Financially support all fund-raising efforts in a manner that is generous for your circumstances.
7. Be a resource for the ED when called upon by him or her.

Appendix C

New Committee Structure

