

**Healthy Roots Collaborative Advisory Committee Meeting**

**April 4, 2024 - 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm**

**NORTHWEST REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION- 75 Fairfield St., St. Albans, VT 05478**

**Zoom link:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87640341868?pwd=VCtZOHdrMmFySUUpDVVkc08yUWdhUT09>

Meeting ID: 876 4034 1868

Passcode: 932011

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**Attendance:** Emily Alger, Marietta Scholten, Lauren Weston, Peter Jenkins, Katie Darr, Cassie Fraser, Jess Graff, Bethany Remmers, Tim Smith.

**Goals:**

- 1. Outline values and program priorities for HRC.**
- 2. Define HRC Advisory Committee role.**
- 3. Have Advisory Committee vote on HRC/CVOEO merger with any existing contingencies.**

Times	Agenda Item	Action
1:00 to 1:15	<b>CVOEO Discussion Update</b>	
<p>The main topic of the meeting was about the transition of the Healthy Routes program to the CVOEO (Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity). C. Porcaro provided an update on the discussions with CVOEO leadership and the progress of the transition planning. Key issues discussed included salary, benefits, and volunteer management. A point of discussion was the timing of the transition, with P. Jenkins suggesting that the end of June might be a better time than October 1st due to considerations for onboarding volunteers and the potential for a transition of volunteers prior to the change. J. Graff shared that their volunteers just need to sign a form so the process to get them signed up is quick and easy.</p> <p>C. Porcaro shared that she did a grant report back in March. She was able to present to them about the potential transition to CVOEO and received really positive feedback and they shared commitment to ongoing support for Healthy Roots.</p>		
1:15 to 2:15	<b>Values/Programming Discussion &amp; HRC Advisory Role</b>	-Christine and Emily will form a subcommittee to develop a transition plan for Healthy Roots' programs and assets, ensuring no disruption to

		<p>operations and maintaining staff compensation and benefits.</p> <p>-Christine and Emily will set up meeting with CVOEO to have next round of discussion for this transition.</p>
<p>E. Alger brought the groups attention to the HRC Mission &amp; Vision document which was then shared on the screen. T. Smith expressed concerns about the potential narrowing of Healthy Routes' mission, in particular as it relates to Farm and Food Business. All advisory members supported additional discussion to clarify the alignment between the two organizations. L. Weston asked if CVOEO was interested in the Farm and Food Business programming staying as a part of Healthy Roots in the transition. C. Porcaro shared that CVOEO has said they are interested in having all program areas be a part of HRC's transition. CVOEO has mentioned their micro-business and weatherization programs as potential compliments to the HRC Farm and Food Business program. J. Graff asked if there were any discussion about job titles. C. Porcaro shared that she had sent both a preliminary budget and job description for both Healthy Roots staff. There had not yet been a discussion about job titles at CVOEO but CVOEO has confirmed they would match the salary HRC currently has.</p> <p>E. Alger asked Advisory Members to share what brings each organization to Healthy Roots and perhaps what each organization touchpoints are to Healthy Roots. She shared that there was a lot of overlap between Healthy Roots and South Hero Land Trust, particularly around supporting strong farm businesses and making sure that local food is being produces and eaten by people in the region.</p> <p>T. Smith shared FCIDC's touchpoints as growing the economy and helping the producers grow and also education for consumers</p> <p>B. Remmers shared NRPC's touchpoints as land use and support of developing economically viable/sustainable farms.</p> <p>C. Fraser shared the Abbey Group's touchpoints as Farm to School and Food Access.</p> <p>K. Darr shared the touchpoints as it related the Lake Champlain Basin program as they focus on clean water, healthy ecosystem, thriving communities and an informed and involved public. K. Darr shared the touchpoint for the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Network which is achieving sustainable development which includes eliminating hunger in the region.</p> <p>L. Weston shared the FC NRCD touchpoint as Farm &amp; Food Business Support and also shared that it was important for her organization to know that HRC is doing food access in the region.</p> <p>J. Graff shared that there is a lot of overlap connecting with FGI Community Action and CVOEO. One of their food programs is NorthWest Family Foods and that connection is food access. J. Graff</p>		

emphasized that Northwest Family Foods is not just a place where people come to food pantry., it is a connection to food that is local, that is reflective of the food that they want to eat.

M. Scholten shared NPRC's touchpoint as a commissioner representative which includes supporting farmers and consumers and ensuring that they have access to fresh local food. The overall goal being a more robust economy that is better for everyone.

P. Jenkins mentioned HRC's role in Farm to School over the past couple of years and was wondering if there would be the opportunity and interest to grow that role as a part of CVOEO.

J. Graff affirmed that anything that fits into their mission of ending hunger would most likely be supported by Feeding Champlain Valley J. Graff shared about the work FCV is doing in other counties and also shared that they have a really outstanding fundraising team.

B. Remmers added that if this transition were to happen, then she would view it similar to the move from Northwestern Medical Center. She does not think that the collaborative model would change.

J. Graff explained that it is important for Feeding Champlain Valley to honor the existing culture and existing organizations of a region and they have been very conscious of that as they have expanded work in other counties.

L. Weston asked for some more clarity on why CVOEO is interested in HRC.

C. Porcaro shared about the past work HRC had done in partnership with CVOEO, including the Sheldon warehouse renovation. CVOEO is looking to expand service in the region and think that HRC can be a good first step in making sure those efforts are in partnership with other community organizations.

J. Graff added that FCV knows that feeding people starts with the growing of food for people to eat and that the answer to end poverty is not just food shelves. They know that you need to build economic stability and ability in the region in order to create a strong food system. They have done some of this work and that is another reason they are interested in the work and skills that Healthy Roots has.

B. Remmers explained that right now looking at the HRC budget, we can get funding for farm and food business support and it is important for that work to continue. Currently, it is more difficult to get funding for gleaning/food access work. It is important that the collaborative come forward to share potential funding opportunities because HRC does not have that funding to support that work if this transition to CVOEO does not happen.

J. Graff added that previous mergers with other orgs have also come at a time of financial instability. J. Graff also shared that it is important to remember that CVOEO is a community action program and that they can bring financial stability to programs.

T. Smith explained some of the historical perspective on HRC with its transition from NMC to NRPC and that he can see the value of the financial stability that CVOEO could bring.

C. Fraser shared that her first thought about this transition is that it would make financial sense for HRC and that it would create more sustainability for HRC programming.

B. Remmers agreed with C. Fraser and said NRPC took HRC in when they needed a home after NMC and that this valued partnership has improved NRPC programming. NRPC staff see all the positives of the transition and will also miss having Christine and Peter as staff. B. Remmers reiterated that what is important for this transition is to do what is best for staff and for programming.

K. Darr echoed the point of HRC being tied to the underlying strategies of the program but allowing them to grow as needed. She also added that HRC should clarify what day to day oversight will look like and making sure it aligns with how the program likes to function.

E. Alger encouraged all members to continue to think about this discussion and add any additional thoughts.

E. Alger started to develop a motion to move forward with the HRC to CVOEO transition with a set of contingencies.

M. Scholten asked about any legal implications of the transition. B. Remmers shared that there are no employee contracts, so there are no issues there. B. Remmers would follow-up with Catherine as she has already started talking with the Executive Committee about this transition.

C. Porcaro mentioned that they had started created a rough list of equipment that would need to have a plan for a transition as well as current grants that would also need a plan for transition.

B. Remmers also wanted to clarify that what is happening is not “a merger”. This transition is similar to what happened when HRC transitioned from the NMC to NRPC. B. Remmers encouraged the committee to think back to that transition to remember what worked and what didn’t work. C. Porcaro added that HRC still has the MOU that was created during that transition that we can refer to during this transition.

C. Porcaro asked about what roles the HRC Advisory Committee would want to have moving forward including approving annual workplan and budget. M. Scholten shared that it would be important for them to continue to be a part of the mission and vision statement process so that they can stay current and involved in the programming process.

P. Jenkins asked about personnel organization and wonder if Nora would become a part of Healthy Roots.

J. Graff said that she thinks that would still need to be discussed and should include a larger group of people, including CVOEO.

L. Weston asked HRC staff if there were any hard lines about this transition that would make them leave. P. Jenkins said his hard line is not working full-time. C. Porcaro said her hard line would be HRC not coming as a full package with all of its programming.

J. Graff shared that no pay cuts and equal benefits packages are important. C. Fraser agreed with that as well. M. Scholten asked if there was any way for staff to be “grandfathered” in for the number of years they have already worked at HRC for things like vacation time.

J. Graff asked if any of the positions would be union positions. C. Porcaro said that neither position would be a union position.

P. Jenkins mentioned that at the CVOEO HR meeting they mentioned there being a month waiting period for benefits to go into effect and that both staff would need COBRA. M. Scholten said that CVOEO should pay for that and that it should be a part of the transition negotiation.

E. Alger shared the motion the advisory committee would be voting on.

T. Smith made a motion to move forward with transitioning the Healthy Roots Collaborative from the umbrella of NRPC to CVOEO and create a subcommittee to develop a transition plan that includes, but is not limited to the following, and will be approved by the advisory committee:

An MOU between CVOEO, NRPC, and Advisory Committee is developed that:

Outlines the transition and specifically clarifies the ways that our staff and programs will be cared for.

Includes a clear description of HRC mission, strategies, and activities and make sure all can stay.

Includes clarity on roles and responsibilities of the advisory committee moving forward.

Advisory committee should continue to hold responsibility to assess HRC mission and programs, and shape them based on the needs of this region specifically.

There are no pay cuts for staff, their benefits with CVOEO are equal to or better than at NRPC. Seniority remains intact. There is no unpaid gap in benefits.

A plan is developed for equipment ownership and use of equipment by HRC moving forward, and who is responsible for maintaining any equipment.

The MOU between NRPC and the Abbey Group that establishes the relationship between HRC and the Sheldon storage facility should be updated.

M. Scholten seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

The group discussed next steps including a smaller subcommittee, including Emily, Christine, and Bethany meeting with CVOEO, including, Rob, Julia, Anna and Paul with the understanding that more questions will be brought up and answered.

2:15-3:00	<b>Discuss next steps, outline/timeline &amp; vote</b>	-Advisory members are going to look at the Northwest Vermont Grown website and share farm and food producers that should be included.
<p>C. Porcaro shared her initiative to update the Northwest Vermont Grow website, which has been positively received by farmers and aims to include more underrepresented regions. C. Porcaro encouraged advisory members to look at the website and share any farms that were not currently on the website that they think would be interested in being included on the website and in the new print Franklin County map.</p> <p>J. Graff shared information on a wine company in Fletcher that C. Porcaro is going to reach out to.</p> <p>Meeting ends at 2:48pm.</p>		

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