Common School Working Group Meeting 2026-10-07 5:00pm

Meeting Notes (Zoom AI Generated)

Attendance: Sorel Chaput, Mary Shreindorfer, Greta Brunswick, Julie Wolcott, Cathy Ainsworth, Bridget Howrigan-Rivet

Key Outcomes

The working group is shifting toward a **"living museum" and welcome center** concept for the first floor to justify the high cost of restoration . The second floor will remain a **flexible, open space** for after-school programs, fitness, or event rentals, provided the building is sprinkled to ensure safety and occupancy flexibility .

Proposed Building Use

- **First Floor:** A **Fairfield Working Lands Museum** and welcome center featuring local agriculture (maple, dairy, vegetables), rotating exhibits, and potential pop-up sales or a small coffee/baked goods component .
- **Second Floor:** Unpartitioned **flexible space** for fitness classes, after-school programming, or future conversion to apartments .
- **Basement:** Minimum improvements (stabilization, cleaning, paint, drainage) to continue supporting the **RUC program** .

Financials & Funding Strategy

- **Estimated Cost:** Restoration is estimated at approximately **$2 million** .
- **Funding Stack:** Proposed mix includes **$500k in grants** (e.g., MBRC), **$500k in fundraising**, and a **$1 million bond** .
- **Revenue Generation:** Discussion focused on a **co-op model** where producers rent display space or a percentage of sales is taken to cover operational costs .

Energy Efficiency & Immediate Improvements

- **Immediate Needs:** The building requires urgent stabilization, specifically regarding **window heat loss** .
- **Proposed Upgrades:**
    - **Foundation/Rim Joist:** Insulation of the basement foundation and rim joists for an estimated **$15,500** (approx. 10% savings) .
    - **Heating:** Installation of a **cold climate heat pump** (~$20,000) .
    - **Windows:** Potential use of **"Window Dressers"** (low-cost interior plastic inserts) to increase R-value from 2 to 4 .

Risks & Blockers

- **Management Capacity:** The town lacks a **facilities manager**, leaving the burden of building maintenance on staff who are already overextended .
- **Community Support:** The project needs a dedicated **"cheerleader"** to create momentum and lead fundraising efforts .
- **Regulatory Constraints:** Without sprinklers, the second floor is highly restrictive for educational use (limited to 27 children under second grade) .

Action Items

- **Julie:** Research other small Vermont municipalities with similar welcome centers or co-op models .
- **Greta:** Develop a formulated concept paragraph and a funding stack/pro forma based on different financing scenarios .
- **Working Group:** Create a **one-page project pitch** to update marketing materials before convening a producer focus group .
- **Greta:** Contact **VCRD** to identify other successful rural co-op or museum models .
- **Town:** Clear brush and overgrowth around the building to make it visible to the community .