

Recreation Facilities Plan for Johnson

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and
Johnson Planning Commission

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INTRODUCTION

Johnson is a town of 3,274 people nestled in the heart of Lamoille County. The spine of the Green Mountains winds through the town north to south. Butternut Mountain is the highest peak that falls entirely within the town. The peak of the 3,715-foot Sterling Mountain (also known as White Face Mountain) is located just south of the Johnson town line.

Mountains and forest dominate Johnson's landscape and provide habitat for game and non-game animals, forest products from timber to maple syrup and protection of valuable water resources. Logging, hiking, backcountry skiing and biking trails crisscross the countryside. Johnson's stretch of the 270-mile Long Trail includes three overnight shelters and outstanding natural features such as Prospect Rock or Dry Ridge.

The Gihon and Lamoille Rivers are a major recreational and scenic resource enjoyed by fishermen, kayakers and canoers. Many residents and visiting artists of the Vermont Studio Center recreate at riverfronts and admire river landmarks, which include Ithiel Falls and Dog's Head Falls. Throughout the village small and large sites exist in the form of small green relaxation areas and river access points that could be connected by a river trail network.

Within an easy walking distance to most village residents, numerous outdoor and indoor recreation facilities exist. Older recreation fields are located within the village in the vicinity of the elementary school. On the hill above the elementary school, Johnson State College's campus offers a variety of recreation opportunities. Outside of the immediate village center, new expansive fields for baseball and soccer were created at the former Talc Mill site. Similarly, new recreation lands have been made available at the former Cubb trailer park and partially developed into a skateboard park. Additional opportunities exist at the remaining 180 acres of the Talc Mill property that has been recently purchased by the town and village. The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, when built, will intersect with Johnson at the Talc Mill property.

Overall, this wealth of natural and man-made recreation assets gives Johnson the potential to integrate these assets into a unique and dynamic recreation system spreading throughout the entire village and connecting to outlying regional trails, streams and woods. This recreation system could be of great benefit to residents, the College and visitors alike, and complement Johnson's educational and cultural resources. The system could also help to establish Johnson as a regional destination.

This Plan honors the importance of recreation to the quality of life in Johnson. It gives an account of Johnson's recreation resources as well as a desired vision for future recreation development.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The development of the *Recreation Facilities Plan* represents the third stage of an overall master planning process initiated by the Johnson Planning Commission in 2001.

The first stage of this process produced a comprehensive conceptual design for roadway, pedestrian, bicycle and streetscape improvements along a mile-long stretch of VT Route 15 also known as Main Street. The first stage's three-year community effort marked an historic milestone in December 2004, when the *Johnson Main Street Project* was awarded \$2,278,000 to finalize engineering designs and implement improvements. The completion of the Main Street revitalization is expected in 2008 - 2009.

During the second stage of the master planning process, the *Johnson Pathways Plan* was created. This 2003 plan examined pedestrian infrastructure extending outward from Main Street. Subsequently, the plan identified needed sidewalk improvements, and proposed a network of pathway loops that would improve pedestrian mobility in the village and its immediate surroundings. The plan also briefly assessed recreation assets located along the proposed pathways and observed that "the development of recreation facilities around the village and town has been in a widely dispersed and somewhat unplanned manner." The plan recommended that it would be beneficial to examine the recreation facilities more closely and produce a plan for "present and potential future recreation facilities to ensure good connectivity between facilities and citizens, determine the priority of various improvements, and identify any problems that may exist with various facilities and locations such as parking issues, natural resource issues, access issues, neighborhood impacts, and so forth."

The implementation of the *Johnson Pathways Plan's* recommendations launched the third phase of the master planning process that led to the development of the *Recreation Facilities Plan*. A further reason for engaging in recreation planning emerged in 2003 with the municipal acquisition of 180 acres of the former Talc Mill property potentially usable for recreation. Finally, the projected conversion of the former Lamoille Valley Railroad Corridor into a four-season recreational path energized local leaders to think about ways of integrating this path into recreation and economic development strategies.

The *Recreation Facilities Plan* was enabled by a \$10,000 grant from the Vermont Department of Housing and Community Affairs' Municipal Planning Grant program and focused on the following objectives:

- To inventory recreation facilities, programs and activities in Johnson;
- To update recreation maps highlighting public lands, trails, significant landmarks, rivers, playgrounds and recreation buildings of importance;
- To examine the most pertinent recreation issues; and
- To create a collective vision for future recreation asset management and programming.

PLANNING PROCESS AND CONTENTS OF THE PLAN

Process

The project was initiated in fall 2004 and completed in spring 2005. The Johnson Planning Commission provided overall direction to the planning effort and Johnson's Community & Economic Development Coordinator coordinated the process. The Coordinator's responsibilities included creating public awareness of the planning process, facilitation of public meetings and meetings of the project steering committee, write-up of the plan, and administration of the grant.

The project kick-off meeting was attended by 32 residents and focused on identifying recreation assets and issues connected to their use. At the end of the meeting, an eleven member *Recreation Facilities Plan* Steering Committee was formed with the purpose to provide a more in-depth look at the assets and issues, and to identify goals, policies and priority implementation tasks. A list of the Steering Committee members is included in Appendix 1.

The Steering Committee met four times. Through the Committee's work a draft of the plan was created and submitted to the Johnson Planning Commission and to the wider community for their review. The core of the *Recreation Facilities Plan* is anticipated to be inserted in the *Town of Johnson Municipal Development Plan for 2005-2010* scheduled for completion in October 2005.

Contents of this plan

The plan begins with a summary of past recreation surveys and studies conducted in Johnson. It then continues by providing a context for recreation planning statewide and presenting excerpts from the 2005-2009 *Vermont Outdoor Recreation Plan*. A detailed description of Johnson's recreation assets and issues follows.

The strategic part of the plan opens with a description of a vision and goals for the desired condition of recreation in Johnson. The desired conditions are then elaborated into policies geared towards achieving those conditions. Each policy statement clearly identifies which recreation issue it intends to address. Finally, the policies are further detailed in specific implementation tasks to be undertaken in the next five years. To the extent possible, entities suggested for the implementation of those tasks and potential funding sources are identified.

PAST SURVEYS, STUDIES AND PLANS

1995 – 2001

The *Johnson Pathways Plan* provides a good summary of recent recreation-related studies and surveys:

- 1) 1995 *Johnson People's Path* study to examine a proposed ten-foot wide paved path weaving through Johnson Village along the Gihon River. The study recommended against further development of the path citing the lack of local support. More information about the study is available in Appendix 3.
- 2) 1998 *Georgia Balch Footbridge Proposal* to design and construct a footbridge that would cross the Gihon River and connect Vermont Electric Coop's building on School Street to the Stearns property behind the gas station on Main Street. The project had strong local support but due to the lack of funding has not moved forward.
- 3) 2001 *River Park Pathways Survey* to gather public opinion about potential recreational uses of the lower portion of the Trailer Park area in the Route 15 West area. The most preferred uses were a bike-trail, skateboard area, and walking paths, followed by a picnic area and site for outdoor music.
- 4) 2001 *Old Mill Recreation Field Bridge Study* to investigate potential designs for a bridge spanning Lamoille River from the Old Mill Recreation fields to the River Park area. A copy of this study and drawings are on file at Lamoille County Planning Commission.

2003

The 2003 Johnson Pathways Plan identifies six pedestrian loops radiating from Main Street. These are: 1) Pearl Street, School Street, VT 100C, Main Street Loop; 2) Clay Hill Road, Gould Hill Road, Colony Hill Road Loop; 3) College Loop; 4) Conger's Woods Loop; 5) Old Mill Park Loop; and 6) Riverwalk Greenway. The plan also briefly describes the following recreation facilities located along these loops: Johnson State College's facilities; Elementary School Gymnasium, Playground and Legion Field; Nelson Duba Field, Powerhouse bridge area, Public Library and Old Mill Park; Lamoille and Gihon Rivers and Skate Park Area. Finally, the plan proposes various improvements and prioritizes a public wish to pursue the improvements in the following order: 1) Village sidewalk needs; 2) Recreational paths; and 3) Loops consisting of a combination of sidewalks and & recreational paths.

The Johnson Pathways Plan's recommendations are instrumental to the improvement of Johnson's "walkability", broadly recognized as a unique feature resulting from the compact layout of the village and presence of Johnson State College and the Vermont Studio Center. The fact that Johnson is a walking community is also supported by the 2000 Census data which show that in all of Lamoille County, Johnson has the highest proportion of people walking to work. Over 15% of Johnson's employed workforce walk to work and an additional 6.5% work out of their homes.

Town and Village of Johnson Municipal Development Plans

The Town of Johnson Municipal Development Plan for 2000 – 2005 recognizes rivers, streams and ponds as important parts of the natural scenery and local economy (page 16). The plan defines the need to maintain and improve access to public waters (page 21). It also recommends that routes for multipurpose recreational corridors are sought and developed (page 28). Recreation is defined as one of the core components of Johnson’s diverse and resilient economy (page 28).

The Village of Johnson Municipal Development Plan for 2003- 2008 establishes the promotion of the community’s tourism and recreation opportunities as one of its specific planning goals. The plan recognizes the recreational importance of the Gihon and Lamoille Rivers (page 23) and identifies the lack of efficient and effective connections to the riverfront (page 28). The plan recommends to identify and enhance important pedestrian links between municipal and recreation facilities, the waterfront, elementary school, Johnson State College, Vermont Studio Center and the village commercial center, and provide a safe, efficient and attractive network that links these facilities (page 39).



T-Ball Team Practice at the Old Mill Park

STATEWIDE RECREATION PLANNING

The Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation updates its strategic plans on a five-year basis. A comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation in each state is a requirement for receiving support from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Since 1965, the LWCF has provided Vermont communities and state agencies with more than 27 million dollars toward acquisition, conservation, and development of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. More than 500 separate recreation projects, such as bike paths, parks, and playgrounds, have taken place in more than 100 Vermont communities. Last year just over \$404,000 was awarded to 11 Vermont communities.

Understanding the statewide priorities for outdoor recreation is important if Johnson decides to approach the LWCF for funding. At the time of writing of this plan, the new *Vermont Outdoor Recreation Plan* for 2005-2009 has undergone its final revisions and its draft is available at <http://www.state.vt.us/anr/fpr/recreation/scorp/index.htm>. What follows is an excerpt from the plan describing the vision and desired conditions for Vermont's outdoor recreation.

Vision

Vermont offers outstanding outdoor recreation opportunities which support the state's economy and the well-being of its visitors, people, and communities and which keep Vermont well-connected to nature through thoughtful, careful use and enjoyment of its natural and cultural resources.

Desired Conditions

- A. Everyone who wishes to participate in outdoor recreation activities in Vermont has an opportunity to do so.
- B. Vermont's natural resources base, which provides the foundation for outdoor recreational pursuits, is protected and enhanced.
- C. The quality of existing outdoor recreation facilities, programming, and operations is high.
- D. Vermont meets increasing needs for outdoor recreation by making more resources and diverse programming available.
- E. Vermont finds creative solutions to situations where outdoor recreation conflicts occur.
- F. The majority of private landowners in Vermont continue to allow free access to their land for outdoor public recreation.
- G. Recreation participants of all ages appreciate the natural resource base, act as good stewards of natural resources and the recreation infrastructure, and treat private and public resources and other users with respect.
- H. Outdoor recreationists in Vermont experience health benefits, and those communities which emphasize outdoor recreation in their development become healthier.
- I. Information about Vermont's outdoor recreational opportunities is provided in user-friendly ways and directs people to appropriate places.
- J. There is adequate administrative support for Vermont's outdoor recreation industry.

Regional input in the Vermont Outdoor Recreation Plan

The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation contracted with the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) to update the Lamoille County portion of the State's Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Regional issues

Through the input provided by municipal surveys and public meetings, the LCPC Recreation and Tourism Committee identified the following most important regional issues related to recreational facilities and program planning. Not included among these issues but assumed is the ever-present need for increased financial assistance.

- There is a need for greater public involvement in recreation planning.
- There is a need to have more lands available and / or accessible to the public.
- There needs to be better regional and inter-municipal coordination regarding the development of recreation facilities and programs.
- Some recreational activities have the potential for causing negative impacts to the natural environment.
- There is a threat that the publicly owned railroad corridor could revert to private ownership if the railroad is abandoned.
- Sometimes Class 4 roads are thrown up and converted to private ownership.
- Local recreation resources are often inappropriately promoted and overused by the general public, while other recreation resources more geared for the general public often have inadequate access and capacity, or are not promoted enough.

As a result of LCPC staff's research of municipal plans, ordinances and town reports, LCPC staff discovered that, with the exception of the Town of Stowe, none of the region's towns are really planning or appropriating funds for recreation facilities or programs.

Regional recreation priorities

Based on these issues above, the LCPC Recreation and Tourism Committee reviewed the regional recreation priorities that were identified in the 1993 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and found that the same priorities that were identified in 1993 still apply in 2003. The region's recreation priorities are as follows:

1. Bicycle / pedestrian paths in the communities and linking communities - There continues to be a need for designated shoulders along the roadways, separated multi-use pathways in the communities and bike racks and other amenities in the village centers.
2. Additional parks, ball fields, courts, ice rink, and playgrounds - There continues to be a need for these community facilities.
3. Additional winter and summer recreation programs for children - There continues to be a need for these community programs. With regards to both the community center and the swimming pool, the Committee decided these types of facilities are less needed now since the 1993 State Plan, as a number of these types of facilities have either been developed or are in the process of being developed.

The Committee also identified the following new priorities that were not identified in the 1993 State Plan: Education regarding landowner liability; location of and access to the region's state public lands; benefits of conserving open spaces; and health benefits of recreation.

INVENTORY OF JOHNSON'S RECREATION ASSETS AND ISSUES

Community Visit

An initial discussion aimed at the identification of recreation assets and issues occurred in March 2004, when Johnson hosted a town-wide Community Visit forum led by the Vermont Council on Rural Development (VCRD). About 150 Johnson residents and state-level professionals examined community strengths and challenges in ten different issue areas. Recreation and Recreation Facilities was one of the issue areas. The list of ideas brainstormed during the Community Visit provided a basis for the inventory of Johnson's recreation assets and issues.

Definition of recreation assets

The Johnson Planning Commission determined the scope of the inventory by defining recreation assets as "facilities, natural resources, organized programs and unstructured activities contributing to physical and mental health of everyone from babies to seniors." This broad-based approach enabled the Planning Commission and the Steering Committee to produce a rich list of recreation resources, and, by that same token, a rather broad range of challenges to tackle.

The next chapter provides the detailed list of recreation resources. The resources are divided into three categories: Human Resources; Activities; and Physical Facilities and Natural Resources. Each of the categories is further subdivided as follows:

Human Resources:

- Volunteer committees appointed by the Select Board or Board of Trustees
- Other committees, community groups and non-profit organizations
- Private businesses

Activities:

- Organized activities and programs
- Unstructured activities

Physical Facilities and Natural Resources:

- Indoor facilities serving recreational purposes
- Johnson State College resources
- Playing fields and other town-owned developed land
- Undeveloped, or partially developed town-owned land
- Private land with unofficial public use
- Private land of potential recreation interest
- Trails and walking loops
- Rivers, streams, ponds, swimming holes
- State forests and lands

COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF ASSETS

HUMAN RESOURCES

Volunteer committees appointed by the Select Board or Board of Trustees

- The Johnson Recreation Committee coordinates a variety of programs for youth. The Committee works with many other volunteers to organize activities, coach sports teams, maintain recreation fields and raise financial resources. Activities of the Johnson Recreation Committee are described in detail in Appendix 3.
- The Johnson SkatePark Committee oversees the development of the Johnson SkatePark & Bike Track. Activities of the Johnson SkatePark Committee are described in detail in Appendix 3.
- The Johnson Planning Commission sponsors and raises funds for various recreation studies, such as the *Johnson Pathways Plan* and the *Recreation Facilities Plan*.
- The Main Street Committee provides leadership for the *Johnson Main Street Project*, which includes an important recreation component consisting of pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements.
- The Municipal Conservation Commission, appointed by the Select Board in April 2005, will likely become an important facilitator of future recreation actions.

Other committees, community groups and non-profit organizations

- The Johnson Communications Committee (JCC) maintains a web based Community Events Calendar. A JCC member, who is also a chair of the Johnson Recreation Committee, manages the johnsonrecreationcalendar@yahoo.com e-mail list. Along with the PTA and other community groups, JCC organizes various community events and celebrations. JCC has also expressed its interest in helping to enhance the promotion of Johnson's unique recreation resources.
- The emerging Economic Development Committee indicated an interest in improving the connectivity between a planned four-season path along the Lamoille Valley Railroad Corridor and Johnson Village. Development of a marketing/branding strategy, which would include the promotion of Johnson's recreation resources, has been defined as another vital component of Johnson's economic development.
- The Johnson Senior Center has 36 members who usually meet twice a week in the Municipal Building. Meals on Wheels provides them with lunch. Seniors play cards and other games, take art classes, organize field trips and participate in the walking program sponsored by the Johnson Health Clinic.
- The Sterling Snow Riders (SSR) is the local chapter of the statewide Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST). In 2003, the Sterling Snow Riders had 117 members. The SSR president estimated that about 25 members are active in trail improvement and maintenance. There are 36 miles of trails in Johnson.
- The Laraway and Sterling Sections are two local Chapters of the Green Mountain Club that oversee the Johnson stretch of the Long Trail. With a total of 15 miles including three overnight shelters, this stretch of the Long Trail passes outstanding features such as Prospect Rock and Ithiel Falls.
- The Johnson Health Clinic runs a wellness program that encourages people with diabetes

or at risk of diabetes to walk. Last year, 62 people participated in the program and a majority of them were Johnson residents. In 2005, the Clinic is planning to publish a map featuring 20 walking trails.

- The Johnson PTA has about 25 members. The PTA organizes a broad spectrum of programs, which include arts residencies (dance, poetry, song writing, and Circus Smirkus), a healthy food program, fundraising for field trips and ROPES courses, or evening and weekend workshops in yoga, karate and juggling.
- Johnson Scouts includes cub scouts and boy scouts for boys, and four different troops for girls. The Boy Scouts meet in the United Church and Cub Scouts meet in the office building at the Old Mill Park. The Girl Scouts meet in the United Church, JES, or at homes of members.
- Lamoille Riding and Driving Club is a horse-riding club. The Club is a member of the Vermont Horse Council. There are 9 members of the Council from Lamoille County.
- Lamoille River Anglers Association is dedicated to stream bank stabilization on the Lamoille River and brooks in Johnson and other Lamoille County communities. The Association is registered as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.
- The Vermont Studio Center (VSC) brings visual artists and writers for 2-8 weeklong residencies year round. VSC offers exhibitions, public lectures and readings to the community. VSC also provides an art program at Johnson Elementary School and Community Life Drawing for Johnson residents on Monday nights.

Private businesses

- Windy Willows Farm, LCC offers guided trail rides and sleigh rides. They have a total of 16 horses and also do breeding. Most of their clientele comes from Stowe.
- Johnson Yoga Center (JYS), formerly known as the Open Center of the Vermont Studio Center (VSC), is now operated as an independent business. In the fall of 2004, the weekly attendance of the JYS was about 70 people. Out of these, about 40% were VSC artists and 60% were local residents.
- Totem Shuttle and Guide Services is a small canoe and kayak outfitting company. The business rents boats, provides shuttle services and offers guided tours (mostly on the Lamoille River).

ACTIVITIES

Organized activities and programs

- Youth programs sponsored by the Recreation Committee (Skiing and snow boarding, basketball, summer program, swim program at JSC, soccer, baseball/softball, Halloween. A more detailed description is in an Appendix 3.)
- SkatePark and Bike Track (Informal coaching, promoting substance abuse prevention, skills clinics, events)
- Youth sports camps and clinics offered by JSC (Summer hoop camp, fall soccer clinic, fall small fry basketball clinic, swim program.)
- REACH (Extra-curricular program that offers activities after school hours and before the Johnson after school program. Last year there were 70 students enrolled in the program. Some classes include running, hiking, snowshoeing, or other outdoor activities.)

- Johnson After School Program
- Horizon Camp (Six-week summer camp for students from 5th through 8th grades. Students engage in many outdoor activities such as hiking, bicycling and swimming.)
- 4-H Club
- Winter Carnival (Indoor and outdoor activities for Johnson residents that include a parade, events on the ice rink, in the gym, lunch by the United Church, gallery show by seniors at VSC, etc.)
- Tuesday Night Live (Series of summer outdoor concerts held at the Legion Field organized by the Johnson Communications Committee.)
- Art House classes (Clay arts, Massage courses, Photography classes.)
- Vermont Studio Center lecture and reading series (Prominent artists and writers host 60 talks and 24 readings annually.)
- Walking program for seniors (Organized by the Johnson Health Clinic.)
- Women's softball league (Regional league in Lamoille County. There are three softball league teams in Johnson. One team plays at the Legion Field and two teams play at the Long Trail Tavern field. Games are typically played between mid-May and early August.)
- Lamoille County Field Days (Summer country fair with a 44-year tradition.)
- Hunter safety courses (Courses for new hunting license applicants. Local instructors certified by the Agency of Natural Resources teach the courses. The courses are typically held in the fall in the basement of the Masonic Temple.)



SkatePark & Bike Track

Unstructured activities

- Bike riding
- Canoeing, kayaking
- Cross-country skiing
- Fishing
- Horse riding
- Hunting
- Ice-skating
- Rock climbing

- Skateboarding/rollerblading
- Snowmobiling
- Use of ATVs
- Walking/hiking

PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Indoor facilities serving recreational purposes

- Johnson Elementary School gymnasium (A more detailed description can be found on page 26.)
- Johnson Public Library (Over 1,500 registered patrons; Open 24 hours a week; On average, 107 people visit the library in the course of a week; Approximately 6,150 books, 27 videos and 120 audio books; Four computers with high-speed Internet access; Children’s groups meet here for their story-time readings and play.)
- Municipal Building (Houses the Johnson Senior Center.)
- Office building at the former Talc Mill site (Provides meeting space for Cub Scouts.)
- United Church (Provides meeting space for Boy Scouts.)
- Art House (Owned by the Elementary School and leased by the Vermont Studio Center; Space for art classes and workshops for adults and kids.)

Johnson State College resources

- Open to community use (A more detailed description can be found on page 27.)
 - SHAPE facility
 - Tennis Courts
 - Lower and Upper Pond
 - JSC trail network
 - Dibden Center for the Arts
 - Library and Learning Center
 - Frisbeegolf
 - Child Development Center
- Other facilities and resources
 - Minaert Fields (baseball, soccer)
 - Terrain Park
 - Pasture Fields
 - Human resources: students and staff of the Outdoor Education, Physical Education, and Hospitality and Tourism Management programs.

Playing fields and other town-owned developed land

- Old Mill Park (A more detailed description can be found on page 22.)
- Nelson Duba Field (A more detailed description can be found on page 23.)
- River Park and SkatePark & Bike Track (A more detailed description can be found on page 24.)
- Legion Field (A more detailed description can be found on page 25.)
- Johnson Elementary School playground (A more detailed description can be found on page 26.)
- Cold Spring (Walking destination; Source of drinking water; Benches for relaxation.)

Undeveloped, or partially developed town-owned land

- Former Tatro property (195 acres; A more detailed description can be found on page 29.)
- Gomo Farm (120 acres by Coddington Hollow Road; Purchased by the Town in 1948; Sale of the land was rejected by Johnson voters at the 1983 Town Meeting; Open beautiful views; Long Trail runs through the land; Recreation Potential: Day hiking and picnics, camping – already used by local Scouts, Nature study and bird watching, Hunting, Mountain biking, X-country skiing and snowshoeing.)
- Prindle lot (25 acres off Plot Road; The Town acquired title to the Prindle lot in the deed from Gaylord and Gladys Powers dated September, 1935.)
- Land around the Fire Department (4.1 acres; Includes land around the Wastewater treatment plant.)
- Powerhouse Bridge area (1 acre; Pedestrian destination for people visiting the bridge and Gihon River; Popular swimming hole and fishing area are located nearby.)

Private land with unofficial public use (These sites have been traditionally open to users through the generosity of their owners.)

- Smith land (Behind the Nelson Duba Field; Hiking, nature walking and snowshoeing.)
- Conger's woods (Informal walking, skiing and snowshoeing trails that connect Clark Street to Main Street. If sidewalks are extended on Main Street, Conger's woods could become a pathway loop.)
- Parker & Stearns' land (Adjacent to the Old Mill Park; Former ball field.)
- United Church Gihon River horseshoe (Walking path accessing the Gihon River; Fishing and swimming; Posted for no trespassing.)
- Beards' property accessing the Gihon River swimming hole (By the Powerhouse Bridge; Fishing and painting.)
- Spooner land (10 acres at the top of Clay Hill used for relaxation and star viewing.)
- Masonic Temple Yard (Picnicing area and green space.)
- Informal parking, fishing and kayaking accesses along the Gihon River and Hogback Road (e.g. Gihon River access on either side of the Pearl Street Bridge near the Woolen Mills and the Vermont Studio Center; access adjacent to the Scribner Bridge in East Johnson.)

Private land of potential recreation interest (These are lands identified by the Steering Committee as having a potential use, primarily as green space. Agreements would need to be secured with owners in order to provide access.)

- Union Bank (Accesses Gihon River; Could be included in a network of local greenways.)
- Gretchen's Hometown Deli (Accesses Gihon River; Could be included in a network of local greenways.)
- Former Vermont Electric Cooperative building on School Street (Good potential site for a community center; River access on Gihon.)
- Marvin's lot on Main Street (Discussions are underway to use the property as a green space; location for an information kiosk; public art space; and parking lot; The owner is interested in selling the lot to the Village.)
- Grand Union (Potential green space in front of the parking lot for benches, kiosk, bicycle racks, as described in the Main Street Project; Also potential river access on Gihon.)

Trails and walking loops

- Long Trail (Fifteen miles of trail include the side Davis Neighborhood trail; The trail descends the north side of Sterling Mountain, through Bear Hollow, along Dry Ridge, crosses Rte 15 and the Lamoille River, ascends to Prospect Rock, up and over Roundtop Mountain, crosses the Plot Rd, wends into Coddington Hollow, then continues its way north to Laraway, Butternut and Bowen Mountains; Three shelters: Bear Hollow, Roundtop and Corliss Camp).
- Vermont Association of Snow Travelers trails (There are 36 miles of trails in Johnson and the estimated use of these trails is about 1,000 snowmobiles per week.)
- Lamoille Valley Rail Corridor (A 98-mile corridor between Sheldon Junction and St. Johnsbury that passes through Johnson along the banks of the Lamoille River. The State of Vermont currently owns the line, which is not operational at this time. Plans are currently underway to convert the line to a year-round, multi-use recreational trail. The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers will hold a lease on the right-of-way and will be responsible for operating and maintaining the multi-use trail.)
- Entire network of back roads (Commonly used for walking. The network includes walking loops identified in the Pathways Plan: Pearl Street, School Street, VT 100C, Main Street Loop; Clay Hill Road, Gould Hill Road, Colony Hill Road Loop; College Loop; Conger's Woods Loop; Old Mill Park Loop; and Riverwalk Greenway. More information on the Riverwalk Greenway can be found in Appendix 3.)

Rivers, streams, ponds, swimming holes

- Lamoille River, Gihon River, and numerous streams including Waterman, Smith and Foote Brooks (Excellent water quality – most waters proposed for B1 classification; Unique geologic features – Ithiel Falls, Dog's Head Falls, oxbows and potholes; Swimming, fishing, boating and relaxation at riverbanks; More information can be found on page 30.)
- Belding Pond (4-acre pond in the southwest section of Johnson; Classified as not fully supporting fisheries due to increased sedimentation and water clarity problems.)
- Swimming holes (Powerhouse Bridge Hole; Sheep's Hole; Journey's End; United Church Hole.)



Sheep's Hole Swimming Hole

State forests and lands

- Mount Mansfield State Forest (Approximately 2200 acres.)
- Long Trail State Forest (Approximately 1600 acres; Green Mountain Club retains conservation easements on the whole acreage, the only exception is the original Prospect Rock parcel.)
- Fishing and boating access points (The Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife owns two sections of stream bank for public and fishing access on the Lamoille River in Johnson. The first is 11 acres on the southerly bank of the river from the Hyde Park line to the island below Dog's Head Falls. The second section is approximately 0.2 acres on the north bank of the Lamoille on the Johnson/Hyde Park line.)



Long Trail, View from the Prospect Rock

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

Through the work of the *Recreation Facilities Plan* Steering Committee, the recreation issues were organized into five overarching themes. These themes were: 1) Exclusive reliance on volunteers; 2) Absence of community-wide communication and information dissemination; 3) Dispersed location of current facilities; 4) Missing, inadequate or poorly utilized recreation facilities, and missing recreation activities; and 5) Fragility of public access to some recreation assets.

The Committee's discussion also focused on identifying issues specific to individual public recreation facilities. As a result, a detailed description of site-specific issues has been documented for: The Old Mill Park; Nelson Duba Field; River Park and SkatePark & Bike Track; Legion Field; Johnson Elementary School gymnasium and playground; and Johnson State College resources. The Steering Committee also outlined potential recreational uses for the former Tatro property because of its perceived potential for recreation development. Finally, rivers and trails have been at the core of the discussions of the planning process and river and trail access issues have come up regarding nearly all sites. A section titled Rivers and Trails summarizes the main points brought up during the discussions.

ISSUES ORGANIZED BY THEMES

1. Exclusive reliance on volunteers

Johnson has a wealth of recreation facilities and programs managed by a variety of providers. While Johnson State College and private commercial establishments use professionals to manage their resources, all town-sponsored programming, and much of recreation planning and facility maintenance rely on volunteers.

Throughout this planning process it became obvious that the sole reliance on volunteers poses the threat of volunteer burn out and subsequent setbacks in recreation development. Reliance on volunteers can also leave certain groups of users underserved. The availability of professional help to support volunteer efforts and coordinate various aspects of recreation development was recognized as being potentially very helpful.

2. Absence of community-wide communication and information dissemination

Johnson's recreation activities are offered by diverse groups with no central coordination. It is unclear who is responsible for broad oversight, scheduling of the use of recreation fields and planning for all facilities. For example, the Recreation Committee, SkatePark Committee and Select Board are all responsible for different aspects of the use and maintenance of town recreation facilities. As a result, some fields end up being overused, and others under-utilized. A frequently stated example of an overused area has been the cluster of facilities comprised of the Legion Field, Duba Field, Art House and the yoga center. The Old Mill Park fields, on the other hand, are believed to be under-utilized. To solve this issue, the Steering Committee has called for a scheduling approach that will address the use of recreation facilities in a coordinated manner and alleviate neighborhood pressures created by facility overuse.

The lack of coordination is also believed to contribute to various communication and information distribution deficiencies. For example, many citizens feel that the recreation resources are not sufficiently publicized. They do not know whom to turn to in order to find out information regarding the availability of recreation opportunities. They are not adequately aware of which facilities they are welcome to use and under what conditions. This lack of publicity was also defined as a factor contributing to under-utilization of some facilities and could decrease participation in events and programs.

The Community Events Calendar on the town web site has been noted as an important improvement in communication and information dissemination. Additionally, the johnsonrecreationcalendar@yahoo.com e-mail list has been set up by a member of the Johnson Communications Committee to inform about recreation happenings. In March 2005, the list had about 300 recipients. The e-mail list coordinator attested that he has received a lot of positive feedback to this improvement in information dissemination. At the same time, the coordinator stated that the expanding number of recipients required more involved management of the network and pondered the sustainability of this volunteer-coordinated service.

3. Dispersed location of current facilities

One of the premises for undertaking this study was a notion that the development of recreation facilities has been occurring in a widely dispersed and somewhat unplanned manner. Because the town acquired the recreation facilities one at a time, there has never been a chance to evaluate them as a whole. In the last ten years, Johnson has seen a significant increase in the amount of land devoted to structured outdoor recreation. Two major expansions occurred due to the conversion of the former Talc Mill property to a multi-purpose athletic field and the development of a SkatePark on a portion of land formerly occupied by a mobile home park.

The Old Mill Park and SkatePark are located some distance from traditional recreational fields that are clustered in the vicinity of Johnson Elementary School. One perceived disadvantage of the fields being located in three separate and not well interconnected locations is the inability of families to recreate together and enjoy advantages usually provided by multi-purpose recreation campuses. Additionally, the current placement of the recreation facilities creates some site-specific issues that need to be addressed through further planning and actions. In general, these issues can be summarized as negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhood; access and parking issues; and safety and behavioral issues. Issues specific to individual recreation sites are described in more detail in the following section of this plan.

Widely dispersed facilities can also be a great asset if facilities work in harmony with the neighborhood and provide specific opportunities to it.

4. Missing, inadequate or poorly utilized recreation facilities, and missing recreation activities

The inventory of assets highlighted the community's wishes for some additional recreation facilities and activities:

- On numerous occasions residents expressed a need for a recreation center that would serve multiple functions.
- According to many, Johnson also lacks facilities and activities geared towards the needs of pre-teens and teens.
- There is not a youth center in Johnson and no common place to “come together and hang out”, especially in the wintertime.
- Johnson Elementary School has a nice playground. However, this playground is not available to pre-schoolers during school hours. Consequently, a new playground accessible to pre-schoolers all day long has been identified as a necessity.
- Adults would like to see more organized recreation activities for the adult age group. All of our public recreation facilities are designed primarily for athletics or sports.
- The town lacks a dedicated town common. The community would benefit from a public park with a gazebo serving community events and celebrations.
- Snowmobilers lack facilities that would allow snowmobile trail users to visit the Village, and the Sterling Snow Riders lack a storage facility for their trail maintenance gear.
- A specific suggestion was made to build a bridge spanning the Lamoille River to connect Old Mill Park and River Park recreation areas. Norwich University prepared a preliminary engineering study for the project in 2001.
- Seniors would enjoy community gardens.

- All age groups would benefit from a more extensive and safer network of walking and biking trails. Their desire for better walking infrastructure, which would include an established place for safe dog walking, reinforced the recommendation of the *Johnson Pathways Plan* to improve linkages between existing recreation resources by improving sidewalks, pathways and trail-based recreation opportunities.
- Lighting facilities are lacking that would extend the use of the recreation fields to evening hours.
- Among the examples of poorly utilized facilities are the office building at the former Talc Mill industrial site, the Municipal Offices and the Gomo lot. Some argue that, besides sports, the Old Mill Park is under-utilized and Legion Field is over-utilized. The River Park recreation area is undeveloped beyond the SkatePark & Bike Track. Current town facilities do not take advantage of their river front locations.

5. Fragility of public access to some recreation assets

During this planning process it was identified that Johnson currently lacks an organized approach that would enable the community to define and prioritize lands of public recreation interest and to act upon their preservation and/or recreation development. Additionally, the lack of policies expressing the Town’s commitment to the preservation of public access to recreation resources was perceived as a problem.

Addressing this challenge is especially important in light of the fact that access to numerous outdoor recreation resources in Johnson exists thanks to the generosity and willingness of private landowners allowing the public to use them. A concern to keep in mind is that while recreating in these places is possible today, long-term uncertainties exist regarding future use of these favorite sites.

The Steering Committee identified the following recreation resources as those most at risk:

- Swimming holes by the Powerhouse Bridge (access through Beards’ property), Journey’s End and Sheep’s Hole;
- United Church peninsula;
- Hiking trails in Conger’s Woods;
- Canoe and kayak access points at Willow Crossing and the Drowning Pool (at Hogback Road); and
- Scenic viewing and star watching area at the Spooner property (at the top of the Clay Hill).

Working with private landowners is a critical component of long-term preservation of access to recreation resources statewide. The 2005-2009 *Vermont Outdoor Recreation Plan* supports this argument by stating that in 1998 Vermont revised its landowner liability law and enhanced protection to private landowners who allow non-commercial public recreation access: “Now a Vermont landowner can be held liable for an injury to a user of their land only if the landowner was found to have committed willful or wanton misconduct.” It then further explains: “Despite the passing of this landmark legislation, information surveys for this plan revealed that many landowners are not aware of these protections.”

ISSUES ORGANIZED BY SITES

The Old Mill Park

Description:

The Old Mill Park is a 22-acre self-contained park located at the end of Railroad Street. It is owned by Luzenac America and formerly served as a talc-processing site. In 1995, after the company ceased its operations, the premises were converted to recreational use. The Town of Johnson leases the property for an annual rent of one dollar and is bound to use the premises for recreational purposes only. The initial term of the lease is 25 years and the Town has the option to renew the lease for five additional terms, each 25 years in duration.

The athletic park consists of three baseball and softball fields, and three soccer fields. The central part of the park features a small and modestly equipped playground. The original design also envisioned a basketball court. However, that project has not yet been completed. A gravel path circles the outskirts of the entire park.

Use:

Primary users of the ball fields are youth sports teams sponsored by the Johnson Recreation Committee. In 2004, approximately 100 kids were enrolled in the soccer program and 70 kids participated in the baseball and softball programs.

Six soccer teams (pre-K; K; 1st-2nd grade boys and girls; 3rd-4th grade girls; 3rd-4th grade boys; 5th-6th grade girls; and 5th-6th grade boys) usually practice twice a week between May and June, and from late August through October. Additionally, youth soccer tournaments and family soccer games are held here.

The baseball season runs from mid April until the end of June. The T-Ball team (5-6 years of age); the Rookie League team (7-9 years); the Major League team (11-12 and 12-13 years); and several softball teams (girls of the same age as Major and Minor league baseball teams) practice and play at the Old Mill Park. Each team has 2-3 weekly practices and 8 games, out of which 4 are played at home fields.

The gravel path encircling the perimeter of the park is frequently used for walking and jogging.

Issues:

Maintenance: Outside of basic mowing performed by the Town, field maintenance relies on volunteers. While the soccer fields are in good shape, the baseball fields are in need of serious improvements. Needed improvements include measures such as persistent grass re-growth control and a replacement of the field surface from dirt to a desired mix of sand, silt and clay. A comprehensive list of suggested improvements is attached in Appendix 3.

Infrastructure: Both soccer and baseball fields could use new benches. The playground, which is currently minimally equipped, should be expanded and improved. The walking path is falling into disrepair. The basketball court idea has never been implemented. There is no signage on Railroad Street directing traffic to Old Mill Park. The current carry out waste disposal approach

occasionally results in trash being left behind.

Access and parking: Many residents feel that the Old Mill Park is far away, because the entrance is far removed at the end of Railroad Street. Car access to the field is regulated by the availability of a single entry point. On the other hand, pedestrians can access the field from several places informally.

While parking opportunities are generally adequate; there is an overflow of parking during soccer tournaments. Winter-specific access issues, such as parking and snow mobile access, need to be addressed should the park be open in winter (e.g. for cross country skiing).

Future considerations:

To maximize the use of Old Mill Park, a suggestion was made to hire a professional to optimize the layout of the fields. This would include reevaluation of current use and identification of user conflicts.

The proximity of the River Park, Lamoille Valley Railroad Corridor and the 180-acre former Tatro property recently purchased by the Town and Village gives Johnson an opportunity to brainstorm a vision for the development of a comprehensive recreation campus. Potential recreational utilization of the adjacent Parker & Stearns land, used for recreation in the past, could also be included in the brainstorming process.

Nelson Duba (Checkerberry) Field

Description:

The Nelson Duba Field is a beautiful traditional field located in the heart of Johnson Village. The 2.9-acre parcel stretching along the northern bank of the Gihon River was purchased by the Town and School District in 1924 and is home to a baseball field.

Use:

The Babe Ruth team (13-15 years of age) practices and plays at the Nelson Duba Field.

Issues:

Maintenance: The field has maintenance and upgrade challenges similar to those applicable to the Old Mill Park fields. Additionally, there are problems with weeds growing into the fence from behind the field and the warm-up pitching mounds are in inadequate condition. The comprehensive list of needed improvements is attached in Appendix 3.

Access, parking and neighborhood impacts: The right of way to the field goes through David Perkins' property by sharing a narrow driveway. Public access has been enabled through an agreement between Mr. Perkins and the Town. The agreement limits parking in the field to two vehicles. Field users, however, tend not to respect this limit and drive in and out of the field to drop off players. Additionally, in an attempt to access the field from as close as possible, cars are often parked on Clay Hill, which compromises safety and comfort of the neighborhood.

River Park, SkatePark & Bike Track

Description:

River Park is a 7-acre recreation area, a portion of which has been developed into a skateboard park. The land is located on the west end of the Village and is intersected by Wescom Road. The eastern border of the River Park meanders along the Lamoille River. The Old Mill Park recreation fields are located right across the river.

The Town of Johnson purchased this land, previously occupied by the Cubb mobile home park, in 2001. Because the land was subject to frequent floods, an agreement was made with the mobile home park owner to remove the trailers from the flood-prone area and develop new trailer sites on higher ground, in the upper part of the park. The Town purchased the land through a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant. The grant agreement with FEMA designated the use of the land as solely recreational, thus excluding residential and commercial uses of the property.

Use:

The SkatePark & Bike Track (further referred to as the SkatePark) is a very active facility open from April through October. About 150 teens, young adults and families from all over Lamoille County are registered to skate and bike here. The Johnson SkatePark Committee oversees the use, programs and development of the facility. The Town provides insurance and town services. The 2005 proposed budget for the facility is \$13,400 and a large proportion of the budget is expected to be raised from grants. Local in-kind support from local businesses and community partners such as the Lamoille Valley Tobacco Task Force also supports programs and development; the Park's mission includes substance-abuse prevention and youth leadership.

Issues:

Location: The SkatePark was created in response to a pressing need for a safe place for youth to skateboard and bike, and community support for a drug, alcohol and tobacco-free facility for youth and teens. A perceived downside of the quick development of the site is that the SkatePark was built prior to any comprehensive planning of the River Park area. The isolation of the SkatePark from other recreation facilities is also an issue.

Neighborhood impacts and user-safety: The proximity of the facility to the trailer park causes some negative impacts on the residential neighborhood. Some residents who live near the SkatePark have voiced concerns about late night noise and headlights beaming into their homes. They were also concerned about the lack of supervision and attested: "Several times kids have been hurt and have come to us for help."

Future considerations:

There is a notion that the SkatePark would greatly benefit from a multipurpose location, where a broader spectrum of children, youth and parents could engage in activities. Future development of the River Park could address this issue. The proposed bridge across the Lamoille River would also help, as it would connect the Old Mill Park athletic fields with the River Park area. (Note: There used to be a bridge near the foot of Wescom Road but it was washed away in the 1995 flood.) Another proposal was to explore the integration of the SkatePark into a multiple function recreation campus that could be developed on the former Tatro land.

Overall, the River Park area has not been fully developed and future development should be integrated into a comprehensive approach addressing connectivity of the River Park with other town parks.

Legion Field

Description:

The Legion Field is a 1.6-acre parcel owned by the Town of Johnson. It is located on School Street in the proximity of Johnson Elementary School. The *Johnson Pathways Plan* acknowledges the Legion Field as an “extremely important town facility often serving as a town common for special events.” Parking is available along School Street and on a nearby College Hill parking lot.

Use:

The central location of the Legion Field in the heart of the Village lends itself to the field’s frequent use. The field is rich in community events and celebrations. In recent years, the field hosted events such as the Winter Carnival; the Halloween parade and bonfire; the Tuesday Night Live concert series; the Powerhouse Bridge reopening; and the Johnson Millennium Celebration.

The field also serves as a sports and outdoor education facility. Minor League Baseball players (9-11 year olds) and the women’s softball league use the field for their team practices and games. Johnson Elementary and Laraway Schools conduct their physical education classes here. Church Football Days are held here as well. In the winter, the Johnson Fire Department floods the field and converts it into an ice rink. The hillside of the field above the Art House functions as a sledding slope.

When not otherwise in use, the field serves as a general park space for local residents. A member of the *Recreation Facilities Plan* Steering Committee observed that the Legion Field “is the only field in town where you can see people gather for pick up games.”

Issues:

Infrastructure: Though this facility sees wide and diverse use, the only infrastructure in place is a baseball field. There is little in the way of trees, benches or amenities. Tuesday Night Live concerts must set up and take down staging for each concert. The ice rink must utilize snow banks in order to be flooded each winter.

Maintenance: The list of improvements suggested for the enhancement of the baseball function of the field is attached in Appendix 3. A portion of the hillside is still owned by Johnson State College and is no longer maintained. Consequently, it is reverting to a wild state.

Neighborhood impacts:

- **Parking:** The surrounding neighborhood is impacted by increased car traffic and parking during the use of the field. Occasionally, behavioral issues are present as well.
- **Behavioral issues:** The women’s softball league has created several negative impacts on the neighborhood. These impacts result from behaviors such as drinking, use of foul language and trespassing on private property by the players’ children. Language issues

are also present when the field is used by Laraway school students.

- Field layout: The orientation of the field and location of bleachers interfere with the privacy of neighboring properties by bringing the focus of game activity into close proximity of neighboring backyards.

Future considerations:

Discussion about the use of the Legion Field brought up a broad need to clarify and better coordinate policies guiding the use of Johnson's recreation facilities. To alleviate the over-use of the Legion Field, the Steering Committee called for a scheduling approach that would address the use of recreation facilities in a coordinated manner.



Playground and Gymnasium at Johnson Elementary School

Elementary School Facilities - Gymnasium and Playground

Description:

The gymnasium and playground are owned by the School District and are integrated into a greater Johnson Elementary School campus located on School Street. The gymnasium was built in 1998 as a part of a larger building addition project. The playground features diverse equipment, a basketball court and a grass-covered play area.

Use:

The gymnasium is considered a wonderful addition to Johnson's indoor recreation facilities. Several examples of uses by athletic and social groups from the community and school include: Youth basketball teams sponsored by the Johnson Recreation Committee; AAU Basketball; Scouts; Community fundraising dinners; Local alumni group; Johnson After School Program; Town meeting; and community celebrations such as Winter Carnival.

The playground is a quality facility primarily used by the school children. Outside of school hours, it is open to the greater community. The basketball court is the only place where outdoor basketball can be played and is heavily used for that purpose.

Issues:

Insufficient availability of the gymnasium for the community: To address concerns of some residents regarding what they believe is an insufficient availability of the gym to the community,

as well as to respond to the high demand for the use of the gym, the School Board drafted a policy document providing guidance for the use of the gym. The document defines priority user groups and is available at the school office. Some residents, however, still express that the user policy does not adequately address the issue of unavailability and needs to be revised. The residents feel that the community access to the gym needs to be simplified, better facilitated and publicized. An excerpt from the user policy is attached in Appendix 3.

Site design: The gymnasium has two different compartments divided by a removable curtain. During events when only one compartment is intended for public use, the removable curtain cannot prevent trespassing to the other compartment, which directly connects to the rest of the school premises. Occasionally, this trespassing has resulted in vandalism of the facilities.

Neighborhood impacts: Late night use of the playground causes occasional noise and light disturbances.

Johnson State College

Description:

Johnson State College has a broad range of recreation facilities serving its approximately 1,700 students and 200 employees. Some of these facilities are available to the wider community.

Among the facilities open to community use is the SHAPE facility, which includes a swimming pool, exercise rooms and an indoor climbing wall. Four outdoor tennis courts; a network of hiking, biking and running trails; and a newly built disc golf course are also available. The Lower Pond is a favorite walking destination as is a pathway loop circling the College via School Street, College and Clay Hills.

Johnson State College (JSC) human resources that could support Johnson's recreation development are concentrated within the Outdoor Education, Physical Education, and Hospitality and Tourism Management programs. The Outdoor Education program has two useful curriculum requirements. Students are required to complete a 25-day leadership requirement as well as a semester-long internship requirement (240-280 hours) in adventure education, wilderness leadership, or environmental education. Regionally, the Outdoor Education Program has been working with UMIK, Smuggler's Notch Resort, Craftsbury Nordic Center, and Lamoille County Nature Center. Local beneficiaries include the Laraway School and P.T.A. The Physical Education students could act as youth sports team coaches and supervisors. The Hospitality and Tourism Management program could help research and design solutions to recreation issues related to tourism and economic development.

Use:

Following are some statistics providing insight as to how Johnson residents use JSC facilities. In 2003, 60 residents purchased membership cards at the SHAPE facility. Eighteen children participated in the SWIM program sponsored by the Johnson Recreation Committee. A total of 20 children participated in 2003 camps and clinics (Summer Hoop Camp - 4 kids; Fall Soccer Clinic - 10 kids; and Fall Small Fry Basketball Clinic - 6 kids). The Dibden Center for the Arts, which in 2003 organized 52 cultural events, has 300 Johnson residents on the mailing list. The

College Library registers 637 guest borrowers with the 05656 zip code.

Issues:

Visibility of JSC recreation resources: Johnson State College disseminates the information about its facilities and programs through a number of different channels. These include their web site, a periodic newsletter to subscribed residents, and occasional publications, such as the 1999 *Community Contributions* brochure. Recently, a link to JSC events has been added to the community calendar available on the town web site. Despite these efforts, many Johnson residents have been continuously concerned about the lack of publicity for the College's recreational offerings. One resident expressed her viewpoint in the following way: "We don't know what recreation facilities and programs we are welcome to use. It took some of us three years to find out that the College had a swimming pool we could use."

Understanding of JSC facility user policies by the community: JSC welcomes and encourages the use of its facilities by the community. That said, there are some important issues that JSC needs to address prior to making the facilities available to the community. These include liability issues and resolving staffing challenges to accommodate extension of hours of availability of their facilities for community use (e.g. swimming pool hours). JSC is currently in the process of reviewing many of its policies, one of them being a policy of opening up outdoor recreation fields to the community.

Future considerations:

Town recreation leaders believe that the strengthening of mutual linkages would be beneficial for both the College and Town. For example, JSC has a solid skill, knowledge and research base. Better utilization of this intellectual hub for the benefit of the entire community could significantly advance the implementation of this recreation plan. The Town, on the other hand, offers a vast array of amenities that enhance the quality of life of both students and employees.

During this planning process the following suggestions have been made to improve coordination and communication:

- 1) The Town should create a focal point (e.g. informational kiosk in the Village) with a space designated for the promotion of College facilities and events;
- 2) The Town should designate a counterpart to interface with the College;
- 3) The College and the Town could explore possibilities for broader student involvement in Town matters. These could take the form of student internships, sports coaching, or recreation studies and research;
- 4) The College should consider nominating its representatives to the Town Committees charged with recreation development;
- 5) The College could provide an annual update of their facilities and programs open to the community. This update could be advertised on the town web site, annual town meeting report, and the informational kiosk in the Village;
- 6) The College and the Town should discuss opportunities for establishing a system of 'easy links' between JSC and the town. (Note: In this example, 'easy links' are understood as physical pathways; signage improving the visibility of recreation resources; or a greenway through the College campus enabling walkers to avoid the main asphalt road)
- 7) The College is currently undergoing a master planning process for the campus. The planning process offers a useful opportunity to initiate a dialogue with the community.



Lower Pond and Sterling Mountain View from JSC

Tatro Property

Description:

The former Tatro property consists of approximately 195 acres of land and several buildings. Until 1995, a part of the property served as an industrial site for the Luzenac Corporation's talc-processing operations. The northern border of the property is defined by the Lamoille River (from the end of Railroad Street and along Lendway Lane). From there the property extends south towards Upper French Hill Road. The Town and Village of Johnson jointly purchased the property in two phases. The first purchase of about 15 acres, two large industrial buildings and an office building occurred in 1995. The remaining 180 acres and related physical infrastructure were acquired in 2003.

Current use:

At present, the two-story office building houses the office of the Public Works Superintendent, Boy Scouts meeting room, storage space for youth sports equipment, and a Food Shelf. One of the large buildings is used by the Fire Department, which relocated there after a structural fire destroyed its premises in February 2004. Another large building is home to the Village Electric and Village Water and Light Departments. A storage place for salt and sand is located here as well. The property also features a cement pad, which is often viewed as a good foundation for a potential recreation facility.

Potential use:

To get a better understanding of the most desirable and feasible future uses of the property, the Johnson Planning Commission was charged with a task to commission an evaluation study outlining different use options.

During this planning process, the Steering Committee and residents participating in public meetings brainstormed their suggestions for the potential recreational utilization of the property. According to the Committee, one obvious advantage of developing the property for recreation is its location. Primarily, the property is adjacent to the Old Mill Park athletic fields. Secondly, it is intersected by the Lamoille Valley Railroad Corridor, which, after financial resources have been secured, will be converted to a 98-mile, four-season multipurpose recreation path going

from Swanton to St. Johnsbury. And lastly, the property is adjacent to a section of Vermont State Forest land that will eventually site the Long Trail when the trail is fully relocated. This relocation could create an easy link between the trail and the village.

According to the Steering Committee, the Tatro property could capitalize on its location as well as its current infrastructure and be developed as part of a multiple function recreation campus. The cement pad could have a variety of recreational uses. For example, a basketball court or new skate park could be placed here. After the Fire Department moves into its new premises on Main Street in 2005, the vacated building could house various services supporting the economic development of the area (e.g. bicycle rental for Rail Trail users, canoe and kayak rental, storage for snowmobilers' maintenance equipment, etc.). A youth and teen center as well as an all-age recreation center is another option. Other mentioned uses are an outdoor ice-skating rink (the flooding of the current rink at the Legion Field seems to be a challenging task), a parking area for snowmobilers or bicyclists, an access to the Long Trail, flat x-country ski trails, camp ground, and a Lamoille River bridge connecting the area to the River Park.

Rivers and Trails

Description:

Rivers and trails have been at the center of the discussions throughout this process. The Village Plan recognizes "the importance of the Gihon and Lamoille Rivers in the Village's history and their continued contribution to the scenic, economic, and recreational opportunities in the community". Most of our current recreation facilities possess river frontage, yet rivers also create an obstacle in some instances by separating facilities, requiring a span over the river to connect the facilities.

Current use:

The Gihon and Lamoille Rivers help create the essential character of Johnson. There are many commonly used access points on public or private land along the rivers within the town center. Many sites are accessed by paths well worn from decades of use. There is a state fishing access along the Lamoille to Dog's Head Falls. There are countless other fishing sites along the streams and brooks that form the watershed. Fishermen and swimmers are among the most frequent river users. Kayakers flock to Johnson in the spring. A portion of the Lamoille between the mouth of the Gihon to intersection with Route 15 has restrictions on live bait fishing.

Two major state trail systems pass through Johnson. The Long Trail passes within two miles of the village center and a future relocation will bring the trail closer. When completed, The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail will intersect the Old Mill Park and pass through the former Tatro land. This 98-mile trail system will wind throughout the Lamoille Valley bringing a variety of users in different seasons. The Rail Trail will have the added benefit of creating a direct connection between the Long Trail and the village, bypassing VT 15.

Issues:

Due to the natural flooding of the rivers, the adjacent floodplain areas are largely unsuited for development other than low impact trails and green spaces. The nature of this floodplain makes many areas available for greenway use. To create a truly connected trail system within the

village it would be necessary to acquire easements to cross private property in certain locations within the floodplain. It may also be necessary to span the river in some locations to create a unified trail.

Potential use and future considerations:

The many river frontage points in Johnson Village are a valuable if overlooked resource. The rivers have been at the core of the historic development of Johnson. Many communities have sought to redevelop themselves using water frontage as a focal point. The Village Plan recommends that the “prominence of the waterways in the village should be better utilized to promote the village as a waterfront community...”.

Trails and rivers can be linked in many locations throughout the valley. Many of our parks have river frontage that is not well utilized. The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail will offer an aesthetic tie to the scenery of the Lamoille River as it leads outward from Johnson. To the east, the trail will traverse a state fishing access area to Dog’s Head Falls. To the west, the trail will follow the Lamoille and intersect the newly reconfigured Long Trail and pedestrian bridge.

Though perhaps overly ambitious and ahead of its time, the notion of a trail system along the rivers goes back to the People’s Path project of 1995. There has also been strong sentiment throughout the planning process that every effort should be made to enhance the ability to appreciate the rivers. The *Pathways Plan* makes several recommendations regarding trails and pathway loops. The first step is to create low impact Riverwalk Greenways on public property or where easements can be secured to demonstrate the value of this project. More information about the Riverwalk Greenway is included in Appendix 3.

Johnson should take advantage of the easy accessibility to rural and natural environments that are unique to its setting. The implementation of the Main Street Project and the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail will help bring focus to some of the trail projects and also help to create possibilities for implementation. Several easily built, low impact spurs or paths from Main Street and at our town facilities can be easily developed. Connecting Main Street to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail for both bicycles and snowmobiles will be an economic necessity.

The health of our waterways is vital to their continued use for recreational purposes. To support the water quality in the region and the continued utilization of our rivers for recreation, the town should take actions to ensure that our rivers and streams are classified as B1 waters in accordance with the Select Board’s resolution from August 16, 2004. This resolution accepts the Planning Commission’s recommendation that all waters be classified as B1 waters; with the exception of the Lamoille River by Paul McLure, Gihon River that runs through the Village, Smith Brook by Route 15 and the Osgood Brook that runs down from the College pond, which should be classified as B2 waters. (Note: Typing and classification of B class waters is explained in the footnote)¹.

¹ Class B waters are divided in three categories – B1, B2 and B3. A simplification of the B1, B2 and B3 designations would be to say that the spectrum from B3 to B2 to B1 is described as representing “good,” “better” and “best” aquatic conditions. Class B1 waters may also be described as nearly pristine and pertinent for recreation. All Class B waters must support the designated uses described in the Vermont Water Quality Standards for Class B waters, which include, among other uses, suitability for aquatic life, boating, fishing, swimming, and drinking with treatment.

VISION

The strategic part of the *Recreation Facilities Plan* opens with a description of a vision and goals for recreation in Johnson. These goals are then elaborated into policies geared towards achieving those conditions. Finally, the policies are further detailed in specific implementation tasks to be undertaken in the next five years.

Vision

Johnson has a unique opportunity to create a dynamic system of recreation that is well integrated throughout the town center and extends outward into the natural environment. The recreation system will enhance the quality of life and complement Johnson's already strong educational and cultural resources. The recreation system will promote economic development and tourism opportunities, and will help to establish Johnson as a destination point.

This plan envisions Johnson Village as the hub of recreation that spreads outward along the river valley and upward into the more natural settings of the mountains, connecting to two important and diverse state trail systems. Given Johnson's unique location, riverfront assets and the availability of certain lands, the town should use the opportunity of the recent acquisitions of the former Tatro land and River Park, along with the development of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail to envision a Multiple Function Recreation Campus developed in conjunction with the Old Mill Park. This plan envisions this campus as an important anchor in a multifaceted recreation system. The multifunction campus will serve as an important gateway between Johnson Village and the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, the Long Trail and the Lamoille River. The recreation campus will further be connected by riverfront trails to facilities throughout the village and at Johnson State College and beyond. The new recreation system will integrate new greenways and historic recreation sites throughout the village.

As an aid to achieving this vision and to properly meet the recreational needs of Johnson's citizens now and into the future, Johnson should explore the possibility of a new organizational structure to oversee recreation, including the hiring of a Director for Recreation. This organizational structure should support Johnson's numerous volunteers, and improve communication and coordination between various recreation groups and citizens.

Future recreation development in Johnson should be guided by goals and policies described in the next chapters of this plan.

GOALS

- Johnson is a community in which natural and man-made recreation assets are integrated throughout the entire village and connected outward to regional trails, streams and woods. Recreational assets are interconnected by safe trails and bikeways to afford greater access and use. The assets exist in harmony with their adjacent residential and enhance the quality of life for all.
- Benefits of recreation as a contributor to a healthy lifestyle and community cohesiveness are broadly understood. Safe and diverse recreation opportunities are provided for all ages and opportunities exist for families to recreate together.
- Strategic decision-making processes guide future development of recreation facilities, programs and open spaces. Understanding of recreation's significance to Johnson's future is reflected in fund-raising strategies that support policy implementation.
- Policies guiding the use of public recreation facilities are straightforward and easily accessible to the community. The use of facilities is coordinated and well balanced.
- Dynamic and well-designed athletic facilities are well suited to serve their intended users. Facilities are designed with the thoughtful use of the unique natural resources of Johnson.
- Information about recreation resources is publicized and disseminated in ways that encourage their appropriate use.
- Professional staff is available to manage all components of recreation.
- Availability of high quality natural resources and recreation facilities is recognized as an asset that strengthens the local economy.
- Visitor infrastructure encourages users of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and Long Trail to explore the historic Johnson Village and use the services of its business district.

POLICIES

This plan outlines two kinds of policies that will facilitate progress towards the goals and begin resolving the identified recreation issues. Policies A - C are human resource policies. Policies D - H are facility policies. Each policy identifies which thematic issue it intends to address. The thematic issues are described in detail on pages 19-21 of this plan.

Human resource policies:

- A. Coordinate all aspects of town-sponsored recreation by one person. (Addresses issues 1 and 2)
- B. Facilitate access to and improve the publicity for recreation programs, facilities and policies governing the use of the facilities. (Addresses issue 2)
- C. Encourage stronger communication to promote recreation resources. Assure that representatives of all major recreation providers have an opportunity to participate in committees contributing to recreation development in Johnson. (Addresses issue 2)

Facility policies:

- D. Brainstorm a vision for the future desirable layout and uses of recreation facilities. Create this vision with attention to the thematic and site-specific issues identified in this plan, and with attention to the recreation potential of the former Tatro land and the prospective Rail Trail recreational path. (Addresses issues 3 and 4)
- E. Until a plan for the future desirable layout of the recreation facilities exists, focus major investments on improvements to existing facilities that will improve the safety of facility users, decrease negative neighborhood impacts and optimize the use of the existing recreation resources to their best potential. (Addresses issues 3 and 4)
- F. Improve trail-based infrastructure that will link prospective recreation facilities with the heart of the Village and explore opportunities to link local trails with statewide trails. (Addresses issues 3 and 4)
- G. Prepare and actively pursue strategies assuring long-term public access to recreation resources. (Addresses issue 5)
- H. Minimize barriers to allowing public access on private lands. (Addresses issue 5)

IMPLEMENTATION TASKS

The implementation tasks list specific actions to be undertaken in the next five years. To the extent possible, entities suggested for the implementation of the tasks are identified.

POLICY A: Coordinate all aspects of town-sponsored recreation by one person.

TASKS:

1. Create a sub-committee to explore the feasibility of hiring a professional recreation coordinator - look at examples and efforts of other towns; investigate potential funding sources; and draft job description (*Select Board*).
2. Explore a new committee structure, which would merge, or coordinate current SkatePark and Recreation Committees (*Johnson Recreation Committee and SkatePark Committee*).
3. To advance the implementation tasks identified in this plan, assist committees that work on recreation related projects in grant writing. (*Community and Economic Development Coordinator*).
4. On an annual basis, review progress that has been made towards achieving the goals, policies and tasks defined in this plan (*Community and Economic Development Coordinator*).

POLICY B: Facilitate access to and improve the publicity for recreation programs, facilities and policies governing the use of the facilities.

TASKS:

1. Create a focal point in the village advertising programs, facilities and policies governing facilities use (*Main Street Committee, Johnson Communications Committee*).
2. Improve signage to recreation facilities, particularly the Old Mill Park.
3. Encourage JSC to annually create a list of recreation opportunities available to Johnson residents (*Johnson Communications Committee*).
4. Organize a public forum to discuss the use of the school gymnasium (*School Board*).

POLICY C: Encourage stronger communication to promote recreation resources. Assure that representatives of all major recreation providers have an opportunity to participate in committees contributing to recreation development in Johnson.

TASK: Invite representatives from JSC, VAST, Green Mountain Club and other organizations to different committees (*committee chairs*).

POLICY D: Brainstorm a vision for the future desirable layout and uses of recreation facilities. Create this vision with attention to the thematic and site-specific issues identified in this plan, and with attention to the recreation potential of the former Tatro land, and the prospective Rail Trail recreational path.

TASKS:

1. Commission a study to determine potential and most desirable uses for the former Talc Mill Property also known as the Tatro land (*Johnson Planning*

Commission).

2. Create a master plan detailing the future layout and use of Johnson's recreation facilities (*Johnson Planning Commission*).

3. Conduct a study to explore utilization and integration of the Gomo Farm property for recreation purposes (*Johnson Planning Commission*).

POLICY E: Until a plan for the future desirable layout of the recreation facilities exists, focus major investments on improvements to existing facilities that will improve the safety of facility users, decrease negative neighborhood impacts and optimize the use of the existing recreation resources to their best potential.

TASKS: 1. Expand playground equipment at Old Mill Park.
2. Schedule the use of the fields in a way that has the least negative impact on neighborhoods (*Recreation Committee, Select Board*).

POLICY F: Improve trail-based infrastructure that will link prospective recreation facilities with the heart of the Village and explore opportunities to link local trails with statewide trails.

TASKS: 1. Think of how to connect the Rail Trail with the heart of the Village and beyond (*Economic Development Committee*).
2. Implement the Riverwalk Greenway project described in the Pathways Plan.

POLICY G: Prepare and actively pursue strategies assuring long-term public access to recreation resources.

TASKS: 1. Create a priority list of lands desirable for conservation and recreation development (*Conservation Commission*).
2. Explore creative ways to raise financial resources for land conservation (*Conservation Commission*).

POLICY H: Minimize barriers to allowing public access on private lands.

TASKS: 1. Provide information to private landowners about laws protecting them from liabilities for injuries to recreationists on their property when the landowner did not purposefully cause the injuries (*Conservation Commission*).
2. Provide information on various options available to landowners for allowing recreational use of their lands (*Conservation Commission*).

FUNDING SOURCES

The following list of funding sources may help implement some of the tasks identified in the previous section of the plan.

Vermont's Recreation Trails Program

<http://www.vtfpr.org/recgrant/trgrant.cfm>

Grants are available to help fund trail projects in Vermont. Examples of trail projects include development of trail-side and trail-head facilities; construction of new trails; trail maintenance; and pre-implementation planning including inventories, route analysis, exploration of permitting and clearances, and landowner contact. Grant applications are typically due in January. Grant funds may reimburse up to 80% of the total project cost with a minimum sponsor match of 20%. Mini-grants up to \$500 are available for small scale projects and can include trail signs, recreational lands guidebooks or trail maps.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

<http://www.vtfpr.org/reclwcf/index.cfm>

LWCF provides grants towards acquisition of land for outdoor recreation and open space purposes, and development or rehabilitation of outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Applications are typically due in February. Each approved project can receive up to 50% reimbursement on allowable costs associated with that project.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Grant Program

<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/progdev/Sections/LTF/LTF.htm>

The program funds design, acquisition of right-of-way and construction of approved bike and pedestrian projects. Applications with the following emphasis are considered favorably: Connectivity to other bicycle and pedestrian facilities; Proximity and access to village centers; Multi-town projects; and Projects that demonstrate a strong relationship to economic development. Applications may include spot improvements such as information kiosks and signs. To be eligible, projects must have completed a preliminary planning stage and have a completed feasibility study or equivalent type study. The program pays for 90% of eligible project costs and requires a minimum 10% local match.

Transportation Enhancements Grant Program

<http://www.aot.state.vt.us/progdev/Sections/LTF/LTF.htm>

The grant program funds the following types of transportation related projects: Provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles; Educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists; Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites; scenic or historic highway programs; Landscaping and other beautification; Rehabilitation of historic transportation buildings; Preservation of abandoned railway corridors, etc. Funds cover up to 80% of the total project cost. For each of the eligible categories, funds can be used for planning, feasibility studies, preliminary engineering, property acquisition, staff time, and construction. Applications are required to be reviewed by the regional planning commissions. The grant awards are a minimum of \$10,000. Awards greater than \$300,000 are rare.

Vermont Watershed Grants

http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/waterq/lakes/htm/lp_watershedgrants.htm

Funds are available for water-related projects. Enhancement of recreational use and enjoyment of rivers are one eligible type of project. Mini-grants range from \$200 to \$1,000. Larger grants exceed \$1,000. Applications are usually due in October.

Municipal Planning Grant Program

<http://www.dhca.state.vt.us/Planning/MPG.htm>

The program supports Vermont towns in their municipal planning efforts. Applications are typically due in September and grants usually do not exceed \$15,000.

USDA, Rural Development Community Facility Program

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/vt/vtnhcf.htm>

The program provides funds for capital acquisition, construction or improvements to buildings and/or equipment of essential community facilities. These facilities include community centers and youth centers. Applications are accepted throughout the year. The level of funding varies from 15% to 75% of the project cost and is based on the population and income of the primary service area of the facility to be financed. Johnson Village qualifies for 75% of the total project cost. Maximum grant amount is \$50,000.

Community Assistance Grant Program

Department of Buildings and General Services; Deb.ferrel@state.vt.us; 802-828-3519.

The program assists local programs on a municipal or regional basis, through small appropriations to initiate or complete specific activities. Examples include minor renovations to parks and recreation fields and assistance with improvements to publicly owned facilities. The maximum available grant is \$50,000.

Green Mountain Fund

<http://www.vermontcf.org/grants-green.html>

The Green Mountain Fund has been established by the Vermont Community Foundation. The Fund is interested in opportunities where a modest grant will have an impact by leveraging a new idea or other dollars, or by making possible something that will benefit the children and families of Lamoille County. Grants generally fall in the range of \$500 to \$5,000. The Green Mountain Fund also makes modest grants to schools or organizations which provide educational and enriching activities for children and families.