

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROUNDTABLE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
MONDAY, MAY 24, 2023

Present: Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Shayne Spence, Mark Woodward
Others: Jenna Koloski (Vermont Council on Rural Development), Alyssa Johnson (VCRD), Candace Truso (Vermont Studio Center), Allison Tafuri (business owner), Brett Long (VT Dept. of Economic Development), Gary Holloway (VT Dept. of Housing and Community Development), Will Stevens (Sen. Sanders' office), Tim Tierney (VT Dept. of Economic Development), Jayshree Bhat (VT State University), Katie Buckley (VT League of Cities and Towns), Ted Brady (VLCT), Fauna Hurley (Sen. Welch's office), Seth Jensen (Lamoille County Planning Commission), Tasha Wallis (LCPC), Bill Hoag (business owner), Greg Tatro (business owner, co-founder Jenna's Promise), Pat Ripley (Lamoille Economic Development Corp./Lamoille Chamber of Commerce), Sen. Rich Westman, Lois Frey (Conservation Commission, Historical Society), Paul Warden (Johnson Planning Commission), Scott Meyer (community member), Kim Dunkley (community member)

1. *Introductions*

Facilitator Jenna Koloski said the goal of the meeting is to address 3 areas identified by the selectboard where they know they want to take some action. The goal is not to make decisions today but to come up with potential action ideas in each of the three areas. Introductions were made. Jenna explained the process for the meeting. Beth Foy noted that the town is looking for a town administrator and an economic developer.

2. *Light Industrial/Commercial Park Development*

Beth Foy said the town bought a property just outside the village with the intent of creating something like a light industrial/commercial park that could bring jobs and increase the tax base. The town owns the property fully now and is looking to build out infrastructure. The goal for this meeting is to get ideas about funding sources and understand how this can align with other objectives to put the town in a better position to get funding and support. The town had an engineering study done in 2012. Since then we have gotten financial updates to the plan. We are in the process of applying for a Northern Borders grant. Our letter of interest was accepted and we are working on an application that is due in a couple of weeks.

Tim Tierney asked what the letter of intent for the Northern Borders grant included. Beth Foy said roads, utilities, etc. Duncan Hastings said all that is necessary to develop a lot.

Kim Dunkley asked if there is any thought of incorporating housing. Beth said the selectboard doesn't know yet.

Greg Tatro asked if the grant match will come from ARPA funds. Beth said yes; that is why the town is able to seek the grant, because ARPA money is available. Greg asked how much the town is requesting in grant funds. Duncan said he thinks around \$1.3 to 1.4 million. He thinks there would be close to an \$800K balance to be paid by the town, but ARPA funds can only be used for 80% of the grant match so the selectboard is very interested in hearing about any other grant opportunities that can help close the gap.

Katie Buckley asked if the idea is to sell all the lots to businesses or for the town to own them. Beth said the town is open to different ideas about what is most feasible. The idea is not that the town

would own the property long-term but the board is open to any idea. Katie asked if the town has an appetite to get the lots all ready to go, including permitting. Beth said there is an appetite, but feasibility is the question.

Pat Ripley asked who will write the application. Northern Borders Regional Commission grants are not easy to get. It will need to be done really professionally. Beth said the town is contracting with LCPC to do it.

Fauna Hurley asked how big the property is. Selectboard members said it is 17 acres. Tim Tierney asked if there is wastewater infrastructure. Beth said it is across the road.

Brett Long said his department runs the Community Recovery and Revitalization Program. It provides funding to municipalities for water or wastewater to support affordable housing or economic development. But that program is expected to wind up in a couple of months. If there was someone interested in a lot and the town could say water or wastewater infrastructure would support sale or development it might be a good fit. A recent bill in the legislature supports a \$5 million appropriation for development of industrial parks. He is not sure what it will be like when it is finalized but it is for exactly this kind of project. Five million dollars is the total amount that will be available so Johnson should be thinking of a fraction of that as a potential award.

Beth said the town doesn't have businesses lined up at the moment. If there are areas that should be focused on in recruiting businesses, that is part of the ask. Brett said Tim Tierney is a good resource.

Pat Ripley said no matter how much money the town puts into the industrial park there is never a guarantee that a business will be there within a specific amount of time. Sometimes the expectation is "If you build it, they will come," but that is not guaranteed.

Brett said it is hard to get businesses interested if it will be years before they can occupy a building. One of the intentions of the additional funding in the new bill is to help people get to the point where they have a building.

Gary Holloway said if housing is in the mix the design will be different, so the town will want to be sure whether there is going to be housing or maybe just decide to bring the work to a point where it could still be either.

Katie Buckley asked what zoning can support. Duncan Hastings said Johnson doesn't have zoning.

Katie said if there is an issue with using ARPA funds as a match, there is a workaround for that, so that should not be an impediment. She asked if there is any EDA funding that could support the Northern Borders grant.

Seth Jensen said prior to ARPA, LCPC had been assisting the town with pursuing EDA grants. A lot want to see businesses lined up but for the phase of pad development and permitting when the town has tenants EDA may be a good source to keep in mind.

Duncan said Pat Ripley is right that it is not a "Build it and they will come" scenario. He worked for the Town of Georgia before working for Johnson. Georgia has an industrial park. It was years before it was fully built out. But if we don't have a park and don't have infrastructure, it will never happen.

Pat's predecessor John Mandeville was a strong supporter of this industrial park. He thinks this is one of the best opportunities for an industrial park in all of Lamoille County. We looked at the possibility of including a housing component. That is still probably open for discussion, but housing can be built in a lot of places. This is one of the few sites that has highway access and municipal utilities. It is well screened. There are probably multiple opportunities to build housing in other locations, but to him this location is a unique opportunity for light industrial/commercial development that doesn't exist elsewhere in town.

Katie Buckley asked if anyone has reached out to Agency of Natural Resources wastewater program staff. Brett Long said if the town applies for a CRRP grant one thing they will be looking for is progress on permitting, so talking to wastewater staff is a good idea. They have a permit navigator program. That would be a good place to start. Tim Tierney suggested asking them if all permitting is done first or if a permit will be needed every time a lot is sold.

Tasha Wallis asked if there was any prior use that could mean brownfield issues. Selectboard members said no, it was farmland and woodland.

Tasha said she and Gary have talked about the possibility of exploring a neighborhood designation, which includes incentives for housing. Gary said he thinks the issue of the town having no zoning is the first thing to explore with regard to that.

Brett Long suggested some people in other towns with industrial parks that the selectboard might want to talk to.

Tim Tierney said there are companies that want to be in northern Vermont near Canada. Pat said they often want 25,000 sq. ft. Tasha Wallis said they also often want interstate access. Beth said Johnson is well situated. We are in the center of northern Vermont, an hour away from every northern Vermont city.

Greg Tatro said he thinks the town is a long way from getting any kind of permit. To apply for the extra money, would permits need to be in place? Gary Holloway said he thinks the permit navigator can help determine what is necessary. Brett Long said the town will need to decide if it is permitting the whole park or a particular site.

Duncan Hastings said the town has hired a firm to do engineering and submit an Act 250 application.

Katie Buckley asked about the scope of the engineering study. Duncan said it is to get to the point of submitting an Act 250 permit application. He would love to be able to apply for a blanket permit but his feeling is that we are not likely to be able to do that. Brett Long said he understands that to be a possibility.

Gary Holloway said the town could apply for a Municipal Planning Grant to look at questions like whether to use the space for industry or housing.

Scott Meyer said Starksboro has a housing shortage but the state owns a house for employees. UVM just did the same. He thinks housing and businesses would be a good mix for the site. Johnson is strapped for housing like other towns.

Pat Ripley said LEDC is for this effort, but he wants expectations to be realistic. Housing, industrial space or a mix are all economic development. If the town puts in housing and people come and live, that is economic development.

Greg Tatro said he is working on a project in Jericho that will provide housing for seniors. People are aging and want to move out of their big old houses but stay in their own community. He thinks this is a perfect opportunity to do something like that. It could give older people a place to live so they can sell their big old houses to families and still stay in our town where they want to be. He is thinking of a 50-50 split between housing and business. Housing is a critical issue right now.

Sen. Westman said everyone talks about housing. We hear about housing shortages statewide, but no one talks about what specifically is needed. Greg brought up one form of housing. We have to identify demographically what is needed. He would say statewide a lot of one and two bedroom units for young and older people are vital, but we need to identify what type of housing we are talking about.

Tasha Wallis said LCPC is working with the Lamoille Housing Partnership to update the housing needs assessment done in 2018. It should be complete in August or September. It will look at every community in Lamoille County in detail.

Paul Warden said the Johnson Planning Commission did a town survey recently and around 86% of respondents identified a need for housing, specifically single family houses. That is perception, not necessarily true need.

Ted Brady said there is a model of a municipally driven mixed use housing and industrial park in Bristol. He doesn't believe they have an anchor industrial tenant yet but they have a vision of mixing housing, industrial and town uses. There is a master permitting process for industrial parks. It does exist and should be usable. If it is not, VLCT wants to know and he thinks ACCD would want to know. An action item for LCPC is to get a better understanding of that process. Johnson is an unzoned community that needs housing. The legislature is trying to fix housing shortages by fixing zoning, but Johnson's situation shows that there are other things besides zoning that are obstacles. There is probably an opportunity to do something more quickly if zoning is not an issue.

Beth said we have landowners who own large amounts of land that has been in their family. It costs money they don't have to subdivide and there are Act 250 restrictions. A lot of them get forest land tax breaks. There is no incentive for them to sell if they don't need money fast.

Duncan said the original version of the industrial park had one lot laid out with an option to develop it for housing. At the time the town and village had a housing needs assessment being done and the vast majority of residents were against adding single family housing in Johnson. The study pointed out a strong need for affordable housing. People equate that with low income housing and nobody wanted it. So the idea of housing along with industrial use got dropped.

Beth said the college is having trouble hiring people because they don't have housing for them. Affordable housing could mean housing for college employees. It doesn't need to mean low income. To address Sen. Westman's point about what kind of housing we are looking for, we need housing for the workforce we will be bringing into the industrial park.

Jenna Koloski asked if it feels like there is good community support for this project. Beth said she thinks attitudes are changing because there has been a perceived lack of action. ARPA changed our ability to act. We are hearing two sentiments – that the town should quickly move ahead or that the town should sell the property.

Seth Jensen said, regarding the statute Ted Brady mentioned that enables permitting for industrial parks, he believes there is something in that about municipal borrowing. That might be worth exploring. Ted said he thinks the borrowing has to be by regional planning commissions. There is a VEDA program that provides deferred financing for development. Pat Ripley said he thinks the regional planning commission has to own the property for it to work.

Kim Dunkley said there is a feeling in the community that there are other lots already set up near us so there may not be a need. We are hearing that there are lots not selling in Morrisville. Tim said he wonders if that is true. Pat Ripley said it is, but they are mostly undeveloped lots.

Pat Ripley said there are ways of managing ARPA funds to remove some limitations. Beth said the town is exploring those ways.

Seth Jensen said there is a question about competition with industrial spaces in other communities. There are some needs this park might address that aren't addressed in Morristown. In this region few spaces have access to municipal sewer and water systems with capacity and direct access to a state highway. Stormwater infrastructure is another thing to consider. There is a decision to be made soon about whether stormwater will be managed on site by individual lot owners or parkwide. In the Hyde Park and Cambridge industrial parks and in some older parks in Morristown, on site management has been a challenge for some lot transfers. He suggests including that in any assessment that is eligible for NBRC and ANR funding sources.

Greg Tatro asked, isn't Hirchak working on a big industrial park across from the airport? Pat said it is a private development. He doesn't know if it will be all industrial. It is partially a lease. Greg said the town shouldn't be in the real estate business. He suggested thinking about selling to a private investor after getting it ready with water and sewer.

Gary Holloway said every funding source has different eligibility. We will want to look at whether it is better to be municipally owned or privately owned. Will Stevens said money often flows better to nonprofits. Katie Buckley said an investor would be more interested if it were fully permitted.

Brett Long suggested talking to VEDA about what the town is trying to do. They have financing options that might be applicable. Duncan asked if they are available to municipal entities. Brett said he is not the right person to answer that.

Duncan said he agrees with Greg about ownership. Is there any opportunity for partnership with some organization that could manage it on behalf of the town? He thinks at one time the Georgia industrial park was owned by the town and managed by the Franklin County Industrial Development Corporation. Greg said LEDC would be willing to talk about possibly managing it. Pat Ripley said they could talk about it but there are risks.

3. *Small and Local Business Needs*

Beth said Johnson has seen a number of small businesses close their doors in recent years. We have also seen business growth in a number of ways. We have very few well established long-running

businesses. How do we keep our community viable? How do we keep our businesses supported? What are the challenges for businesses? When we had a part-time economic developer she brought a lot of money into our community. She was instrumental in getting money to bring our grocery store to town. That was about getting the right people in the room to make it happen. It was funded partially, maybe primarily, by a loan and we now have a revolving loan fund for the town that she thinks has restrictions that make it harder for businesses.

Shayne Spence said he has been hearing that smaller businesses have a hard time accessing grant programs that larger businesses can access. Making that easier would help.

Tim Tierney asked if there is a business association in Johnson. Beth said we don't have a chamber of commerce. We have Johnson Works, which supports and promotes local businesses. It does not provide the same level of support as a chamber of commerce. They do marketing and exposure events. They are primarily about bringing people together. Shayne said they have a website with local attractions, recreation opportunities, and listings of short term rentals. They do events, like a "buy local" campaign a few years back. They have been relatively inactive in the last few years but are now coming back. Beth said they are a volunteer organization and they struggle with getting a good volunteer force. Shayne said with a constantly rotating cast of business owners it is difficult.

Scott Meyer asked if anyone from the village trustee board or the selectboard talks to business owners about why they are leaving. That would generate good data. It could be helpful for the selectboard or trustees to meet with owners of businesses that are opening to learn about their needs and hurdles. The village also has a revolving loan fund available for businesses.

Bill Hoag said he is not sure what the town could do to support businesses. He thinks it is a state issue. He thinks housing is the most important issue. We need places for workers. He thinks small businesses need more support from the state. How can he attract employees when he can't pay what businesses in Stowe pay? Allison Tafuri said her restaurant had the same issue. It was very hard to maintain staffing when other businesses in the area pay more.

Pat Ripley said the big issue he hears about from businesses is staffing – getting people to come to work and show up every day. Housing is a big issue. Some municipalities are helping with the housing issue. There was a story in VT Digger the other day about a municipality paying a portion of the cost of workforce housing for businesses. The employee doesn't even have to live in the community. The Town of Cambridge is granting ARPA funds directly to businesses and organizations.

Kim said businesses are affected by what happens at the college. Does the college have dorms that might have potential for housing workers? Gary Holloway asked, are they not doing that already? The fact that Smugglers' Notch is bringing employees there tells him there may be space.

Bill Hoag asked if there is cooperation between the town and the college. It seems like it should be a symbiotic relationship.

Beth said the selectboard has invited college representatives to come and speak at selectboard meetings a couple of times. She invited Jayshree Bhat from Vermont State University to this meeting. Jayshree's role is about connecting the college to people in our community to support the growth of students and the community. Jayshree said she is relatively new to the college. This meeting is an eye

opener for her. She has heard that student numbers are 50% of what they were around 2018. The challenge is how to bring more students in. Part of her role is to build connections to the community so students have more hands-on opportunities.

Sen. Westman said the Smugglers' Notch employees living at the college are not locals; they are internationals here for short stays. The Vermont Housing Finance Agency is writing off part of the interest rate for building new rental housing units and Winooski is taking care of the rest by giving zero percent loans for a third of the cost of rental units.

Duncan said he is not speaking for the whole selectboard but he thinks there is a real challenge for us as elected officials in terms of roles and responsibilities. The traditional function of a selectboard is dealing with dog bites, roads, etc. – direct municipal functions, not necessarily housing or workforce development. Selectboard members are volunteers who meet a couple of times a month. They don't have time to deal with workforce development and that is not necessarily a function of the board. The town has implemented a program for tax incentives. The town has a revolving loan fund and is looking to hire a community and economic development specialist. Perhaps one of the biggest things we can do is apply for grants. We are not an economic or business development agency.

Tim Tierney said Johnson is one of the rare towns that is fully in a Qualified Census Tract. Brett said Community Recovery and Revitalization Program funds are available for many businesses in Qualified Census Tracts.

Jenna Koloski asked who helps make connections to resources available for businesses. Brett Long said that is something the Vermont Department of Economic Development does. Pat Ripley said LEDC does its best to get the word out. There have been at least 4 or 5 applications for CRRP grants from Johnson businesses. If anyone has questions, they can be referred to LEDC. Tim Tierney said there are a lot of programs some businesses might not be aware of.

Brett Long said the selectboard might want to think about what community members could come together to solve issues. Beth said she loves grassroots efforts. But we have lots of committees and community volunteers. They tend to be the same people. Their reach only goes so far and their burnout mostly happens fairly quickly. She likes the idea of grassroots effort but she thinks they need support behind them.

Paul Warden asked about the town's revolving loan fund and what makes it hard to use. Duncan said there was a \$500K grant to the town to redevelop the grocery store. The town loaned the money to the grocery store and after it was paid back the town got \$250K of it to set up a revolving loan fund. It has some real challenges. The easiest way that money can be accessed is for purchase of equipment for a business, not necessarily for hiring people. The loan fund is limited in terms of what people can use it for. Businesses commonly have used it to purchase equipment and used other funds for other business expenses.

Paul asked how many loans have been made in the past 5 or 10 years. Duncan said he thinks two. The village has a revolving loan fund from a different era. They have total control over the funds and can decide what to lend for. Most of the limitations are due to Agency of Commerce and Community Development restrictions. ACCD tells us the restrictions come from the original federal loan requirements.

Katie Buckley suggested talking to the people at the Vermont Community Development Program and seeing if the town can renegotiate some of the terms. The town should ask about the possibility of reduction in restrictions as the money revolves back multiple times. Duncan said the original answer to that was no, but it is worth revisiting.

Pat Ripley said cannabis businesses can't get loans if the original source of the money is the federal government. If the town had the ability to loan to cannabis businesses it could probably get that money moving out.

Seth Jensen said there are some open questions it would be good to get clarity from the state on: Does the form based code the town adopted meet the requirements of having zoning for a neighborhood area designation? A neighborhood area designation opens up tax credits for rehab of buildings. It would be helpful to get clarity on whether Johnson is a 1 acre or 10 acre town for Act 250, on exemptions to the 10 year rule for rehab and on whether form based code satisfies requirements for state floodplain rules. There are a lot of resources available. Some are complex because of passed down federal rules. How does a business owner find out what those resources are and who to talk to for more information?

Gary Holloway said Community Capital of Vermont is a funding resource for businesses that might not qualify for traditional loans. They take on a higher risk portfolio. Their focus is small businesses. Another funding resource is Mainvest, a crowd investing platform. When Piecemeal Pies expanded to Stowe they used Mainvest to raise capital. It is revenue sharing, not a loan. An investor gets a percentage of the revenue.

Gary Holloway mentioned some towns that had business competitions and gave \$10K grants to businesses.

Greg Tatro talked about marketing our town. We are in an opportunity zone. We have water and sewer. The problem is that no one knows we have that to offer. We need more parking downtown. For businesses to succeed they need parking close. There is a new medical facility in town. So far it is treating 100 people in addiction medicine and 200 as a local primary provider. Medical care in rural communities is dying out. We should support medical facilities as much as we can, especially in our town with such a high rate of impoverished people. This is a facility people can walk to.

Tasha Wallis said Lamoille County is the second fastest growing county in Vermont. Pressure from Montpelier and Chittenden County will combine in Lamoille County. The Communications Union District is talking about bringing broadband. That will change Johnson. Houses will be worth more and opportunities for downtown will be more significant.

Kim Dunkley suggested recreation opportunities or events to bring people in, like a maple run or a triathlon.

4. Rail Trail and Recreation Development

Beth said the opening of the rail trail brings great opportunity. Johnson is in the middle of it. There is a lot of social media chatter about Johnson. There are postings every day from people all over the country talking about coming to use the rail trail. The Long Trail also runs through Johnson. We have other opportunities like Prospect Rock, swimming holes, rivers, parks (including an arboretum), snowshoeing in winter, trails behind the college and disc golf. We have a newly formed rail trail committee. We need to exploit the recreational opportunities out there. We need to find ways to bring

people using those resources into the village more. We need marketing and promoting. We would love to cooperate at the state and regional levels on marketing. We would like to explore opportunities to link different recreational opportunities together, for instance the rail trail and swimming holes. How can we grow the recreation areas so they are pedestrian and biker friendly and get people off the trails into town? Shayne Spence noted that we have proximity to 3 major ski resorts as well.

Scott said what gets people into the village or town is a cheap place to sleep and cheap available food that is healthy.

Beth said one objective is bringing people from trails into town. Another is bringing people from the town to the trails.

Greg Tatro said we need parking in town.

Beth said she thinks collectively people involved with Vermont often have recreation objectives. Are there things we are missing in those objectives that would allow us to be more successful?

Shayne Spence mentioned that there is a skatepark but there is no sidewalk to get there.

Gary Holloway said from a state perspective it is important for the state and VTrans to have a relationship with towns so objectives are met. There is a Lamoille Valley Rail Trail management plan. It is phased. Trailheads and parking come first. It calls for branding and way finding signs and coordination between the state and towns.

Jenna Koloski asked if that coordination is already happening with the town committee. Beth said LCPC is our connecting point. Tasha Wallis said LCPC got funding from the state to create a regional rail trail committee. Their intent is for that committee to communicate with local committees. That is starting this year.

Kim Dunkley said canoe put-ins and parking are other recreation needs.

Tim Tierney said VTrans has a Better Connections program. Danville has really taken advantage of tying the trail to the town. A lot has also been done in Lyndonville. He suggested talking to people in those towns.

Gary Holloway said Better Connections Grants and Municipal Planning Grants both come from the same source and a town can't get both in one year. The town should work with LCPC to know which to apply for each year.

Tim Tierney said Vermont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative will have a pot of money coming soon. There are federal funds available from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Recreational Trails Program is another federal program.

Katie Buckley suggested the possibility of coordinating with the Agency of Transportation on streetscape improvements in Johnson if they have a major capital project in Johnson. Tasha Wallis said we should look into when they are doing corridor planning for Route 15.

Duncan said an issue we have with the rail trail is that it is about a mile from the village. Access is via Railroad Street, a fairly narrow road through a residential area. Are there any funds available for a direct path or widening the road?

Tim Tierney said a Better Connections Grant could be used for that. Jenna said in West Windsor they are using a VOREC grant for something similar.

Pat Ripley said his understanding is that the town and village co-own property by the rail trail. There may be an opportunity to do something there. There may be brownfields issues but there is brownfields funding available. That property could be used to entice people into the village. The river is right there, too.

Beth said that is the old talc mill property. We have a trailhead with ample parking and soccer fields. The river runs right beside the soccer fields. Up the road just a little, Lamoille Valley Bike Tours has bought land. They are setting up shuttles to go to either end of the rail trail and they rent e-bikes. That is all just enough removed from the village that sometimes it is hard to get people off the trail and into the village.

Kim Dunkley said there was a plan for a bridge going from that property across the river.

Tim Tierney asked if there are any businesses in that area. Beth said only Lamoille Valley Bike Tours and JP's Promising Goods. Greg said Jenna's Coffee Roasting is right on the rail trail. They have talked about possibly putting in a deck. Beth said JPS's Promising Goods could possibly carry bike supplies. Scott said Johnson Farm and Garden is right on the trail and they have people coming in from the trail.

Jenna said she is hearing that maybe there could be a more concerted effort to work with businesses and offer support and resources.

Paul Warden said if people's needs are met along the trail it makes it harder to get people into town. Another issue is that there are no public restrooms in Johnson. Katie Buckley said people want to know where they can find a bathroom, a creemee and a cold drink.

Duncan said it is one thing to create a pathway to the village and it is another to have a reason to go into the village. That ties into trying to get businesses in the village that might have a connection with the rail trail.

Kim Dunkley suggested it would be helpful to have information at the trailhead about events happening in Johnson with a map showing locations of things like Tuesday Night Live, the portable toilet, and restaurants. Beth said there could be a bulletin board with information about businesses and what they offer, like a bathroom.

Tim Tierney said Buildings and General Services has small grants that can be used for things like a composting toilet. Katie Buckley said there are also Regional Economic Development Grants through BGS. There is a real opportunity in Johnson with the waterway. There is not one canoe, kayak or paddleboard event in Vermont. There could be one in Johnson. That would get retailers showing up. There are a lot of different national organizations that could help with that.

Sen. Westman said the rail trail was open in this area before others so the trailheads here are mostly ahead of those in other areas. A great start would be something at the trailhead to tell people what is in the village. There are 3 companies putting canoes in the river every day all summer. The reason they don't come up as far as Johnson is lack of parking. Kim Dunkley said also a lack of put-ins. Sen. Westman said if we had parking and put-ins the 3 companies working in Jeffersonville could also come to Johnson.

Gary Holloway said there is a marketing app for the Mississquoi Valley Rail Trail. Maybe that is something to look at.

Tasha Wallis suggested talking to VTrans about what is possible at the state level and what can be done at the local level

Kim Dunkley said the Lamoille River Paddlers' Association has wonderful maps. Maybe they could be a resource for events.

Seth Jensen suggested an action would be for people to walk the stretch of road between the rail trail and the village and imagine a family doing it with kids and bikes to see what would be challenging. VTrans has small bike-ped grants that can be used for small segments. In kind contributions can be used for the match. USDA Rural Development has concluded that streetscaping projects can be considered community facilities.

Ted Brady said the Northern Forest Center may be a resource.

Greg Tatro said if anyone wants to put a sign on his building by the trail he will allow it. He suggested painting a bike lane on Railroad Street.

Katie said for any of these programs the town should mention being a Qualified Census Tract (disadvantaged community.) That changes the rules for many programs.

Duncan said we have talked a lot about how to get people off the trail but not about getting people to Johnson to access the trail. We need bed and breakfasts, Airbnbs, hostels or campgrounds – some means of attracting people here for all our recreation opportunities. Are there any public-private partnership opportunities?

Tim Tierney said the more demand there is the more he thinks entrepreneurs will develop places to places to stay. Shayne said there are rumors that someone is thinking of setting up a campground near the rail trail.

Jenna said Kingdom Trails is a good example. They provide information about lodging near the trails.

Brett said events are good for attracting people to town.

5. *Wrap Up and Next Steps*

Beth thanked everyone for coming and asked people to reach out if anything new comes up that could be helpful to Johnson.