

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MASONIC TEMPLE, JOHNSON PUBLIC LIBRARY
22 PEARL STREET, JOHNSON, VT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2024

Present:

Committee Members: BJ Putvain, Adrienne Stevson, Kyle Nuse, Kim Dunkley, Mary Lou Kopas, Jan Gearhart, Doug Molde (remote), Peggy Williams (remote)

Others: Jim MacDowell, Randall Szott (remote)

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

BJ called the meeting to order at 5:33.

2. Elect Committee Chair

BJ said Doug is willing to serve as chair. **BJ moved that Doug Molde serve as chair of the committee, Jan seconded and the motion was passed.**

3. Meeting Schedule

BJ said the library is available every third Wednesday at 5:30. Committee members agreed that day and time would work. BJ said Microsoft Teams will be an option for those who cannot attend in person but it is preferable for people to come in person.

4. Grant Updates

Kyle said she believes we are still waiting to hear on our VOREC grant application for a bike lane study. There is another grant she thinks is a good match for our group – the AARP Community Challenge Grant, with a deadline in March. It historically has supported things like bike racks, benches and connectivity. We would have to show we were focusing on making things more accessible for those 50 and older. Randall said the VOREC grant has a long decision window. He believes they have until the end of February to make a decision. For the AARP grant they are also interested in the year-round nature of opportunities. If the project provided year-round access that would make it more compelling to them.

Randall said there had been discussion about a public art project related to the bike trail. One idea mentioned was painting old bikes and placing them around. In the process of discussing a different project for a Better Places grant he mentioned this bike project and they said that would be a good fit for that grant. There is a rolling deadline so we could apply as soon as the committee decides we should. It is crowdfunding model. They help you set up a crowdfunding site. You set a goal and if you raise that amount he believes you get a 2 to 1 payout. He doesn't know what the upper cap is.

He will attend an informational webinar January 31 on the AARP grant. If we decide to move forward with that grant we should set up a call with local AARP representatives.

He applied to the Vermont Council on Rural Development for facilitation services through their Climate Economy Resilient Communities program. The program sounds very specific but it can actually be quite broad. He mentioned to them that there is a lot of enthusiasm and energy around the rail trail. The rail trail may be part or all of the conversation with them. They could help, for instance, with planning for several rail trail projects. This program does not provide funding, just facilitation services. They bring in players such as members of the selectboard or village trustees,

committee members or business leaders and they have a session to hash out what we want to achieve. It is about getting a road map to projects.

Kyle said she and Adrienne have done some work to identify where we have benches, bike racks, trash cans and bathroom facilities and where they are needed. For the AARP Community Challenge grant she suggested we should identify all the businesses that could use bike racks or benches and ask if they are interested in them. Maybe the committee could divide up and different people could talk to different businesses. We need permission from the state to put anything in the green strips along Route 15, because that is the state right of way. Doug said he has a contact from the state who we should talk to and perhaps invite to walk Main Street and hear our idea. Kyle said Yva Rose of Lamoille Valley Bike Tours has a lot of information about how e-bikes, for example, make biking more accessible for older people. She was going to help us put that piece together. Randall said there are different levels of grants available from AARP. Flagship grants are \$500 to \$50K, Capacity-Building Microgrants are \$2500 and Demonstration grants are generally \$10-20K but will not exceed \$50K. There is no required match but having a match helps.

Adrienne suggested we could focus on the e-bike hub for the AARP grant and for the public art grant we could make artistic bike racks, maybe with a theme of the history of bikes, with different historic bikes on the end of each rack. Kyle said if we have bike racks all over we want them to be memorable. Kim said they should also be functional. The existing bike racks are not very functional. Jan said we could ask local artists, blacksmiths, or welders to do the work. Perhaps we could ask them to donate some services.

Kyle said the new art piece along the rail trail in Hyde Park was funded by a Better Places grant. That is the one that includes crowdfunding. It is a good grant for something very expensive – something big that the community wants to rally behind. There are good examples on their website such as public murals and sculptures.

Doug said if committee members visit local businesses he thinks we should we should talk to them about combined benches and charging stations and ask them what they could use. This is a way to spread the word about the rail trail and hopefully grow other services.

Adrienne asked if would we ask for multiple charging stations. She was picturing one charging area. Kyle said it makes sense to have Johnson eventually become an e-bike hub where people can charge their bikes while they visit a café, the library or a store. It makes sense to have charging stations on public and private property. There is already power at the village green and it is a central location. It makes sense to put one there. We would have to work out with the village trustees who would pay the electric bill. BJ said he assumes they have low power use. Kyle said another good location would be at the trail head by the Ted Alexander Welcome Center. People could lock their bikes there and walk into town. Jan asked how many charging stations we are thinking of having. Kyle said right now Yva Rose doesn't think the need is very great but it will be greater in the future. Kim said it might be strategic not to have a charging station at the trailhead so people would come into town. Kyle said logistically it is a good place to put one because there is electricity there and it is owned by the town. Maybe Jenna's Café would also be a good place.

BJ asked if we would pay for the electricity. Kyle said she thinks it would be up to businesses to pay for it if they had charging stations.

Adrienne suggested that we be able to charge electric snowmobiles as well. Jan agreed that we should include snowmobiles. VAST is a huge resource and we should get them on our side.

Doug said Gene Richards is willing to put bike racks at the Woolen Mills. Jackie Cassino, the Vermont rail trails program manager, suggested starting with Seth Jensen of LCPC to get information about legality and how to approach the state for permission. Jackie thought we would probably not have much difficulty with placement on Route 15. Peggy asked if Doug is saying the AOT has jurisdiction over whether Gene Richards can put a bike rack at the Woolen Mills. Doug said the state right of way is 5 rods wide. Most people's front porches on Main St. are within the right of way.

Randall said he is happy to join in on some business visits and he can start a conversation with Seth Jensen. The deadline for the AARP grant application is March 6.

Kyle said she thinks our goal would be to get grant funding to pay for all the benches, bike racks or charging stations. We would ask businesses to host them and to pay for the electricity for charging stations. There are different designs for these items and some are dual-purpose, such as a combination bench and bike rack. She thinks asking business owners what needs they see would be good.

Kyle moved that she be appointed as point person to work with Randall on the AARP grant application, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

Kyle moved to appoint Adrienne, Jan, Mary Lou and Kyle to the subcommittee for the AARP grant application, BJ seconded and the motion was passed.

Adrienne suggested looking into how much electricity the chargers use. She said she wonders if they make solar charging stations. Kyle said she thinks they do but there is a lack of sun in Vermont. BJ said he thinks it would be good to have cost numbers before approaching businesses.

5. *Committee Report for Town Report*

It was agreed that Adrienne and Doug will work on a report on the committee's activities to be included in the town report. The deadline is Friday, January 26. BJ asked them to send it to Rosemary and Sue as soon as it finished and also send copies to the committee.

6. *Develop a Priority List for Secured Parking*

Doug said Yva Rose had suggested secured overnight parking would be a real draw. A lot of towns with rail trails have provided parking for people who start at that location. We have good parking at Old Mill Park. We should work on lighting and security and have Randall advise us on where to get grants for electricity.

Peggy asked if there are restrictions now on overnight parking in front of the food shelf building or in Old Mill Park. Kim said there used to be a sign in the park saying there was no use after sundown. She doesn't know if that is still true. Peggy asked if there is any lighting in either place. Kyle said no. Peggy said we should get clarification from the town on whether there are any restrictions now, and if there are we should get that changed in addition to adding lighting.

Doug said there is power as far as the welcome center.

Kim said she has concerns about overnight parking in that area. Having facilities such as bathrooms and water could lead to problem usage by local people. She wonders how many people need overnight parking and where this idea is coming from.

Jan said she has driven to many rail trails in other states. After driving there she wants to park her car in a centrally located place where she can leave it safely. Peggy said people may want to park here, ride to one end or the other, and stay overnight there before coming back.

Kyle said this topic is coming from Yva and Jim Rose. Their customers have requested secure overnight parking. They have done research on rail trails and which towns get the most benefit from users.

BJ said with the fires and vandalism we have had in that area he sees what Kim is talking about. We would have to put a lot of thought into providing overnight parking. We may have to increase police patrols and use theft deterrence measures like cameras.

Jim said it may not be critical to have secure parking at the trailhead. Maybe parking could be at Johnson Farm and Garden or downtown.

Donna mentioned that light pollution is an issue to consider if we are talking about adding lights to an area that is dark now.

7. *Snow Machine Access from Rail Trail to Parking & Fuel / VOREC Bridge Study*

BJ said he thinks Lisa Crews mentioned a study. Was she or someone else going to look into it? Jan said she thinks Casey Romero has done a lot of work on it already. Doug said the VAST director was talking about this at a regional rail trail committee meeting. It was brought up as an alternative to a direct connection to the village center. He thinks we need to consider it but he feels it would not be as beneficial to merchants as a direct route to downtown. The town owns Old Mill Park and 10 acres on the other side of the river. A bridge from one town property to the other allowing snowmobiles to access the town highway to Jolley would be a great benefit to snowmobilers but not as much to bikers and pedestrians. It would also provide another way to get to the skate park. He thinks this should be something we consider later, not now. Kyle said she thinks the idea is good to keep in mind as we are strategically thinking but it is beyond our capacity right now. Others agreed.

8. *Safe Parking for Rail Trail Users – Needs, Benefits, Next Steps*

Kyle said she thinks we should find out the current regulations as Peggy suggested. The AARP grant subcommittee will discuss going to talk to the selectboard to make sure no other Johnson committees are going for the same grant and get authorization to apply. They can ask about parking regulations at the same time.

BJ said in the future we could have a group working on the safety aspect.

Kim said she would like to see what the existing signage about parking is like. Adrienne said she did a study of that before the flood and she thought it was really confusing. Kim suggested maybe this committee can request signs and say where we would like them to be. Doug said AOT has guidelines for signs that apply even on town highways. We need to have knowledge of those. He can send out information about signage rules for state and town highways.

9. Other Business / Future Agenda Items

It was agreed that the AARP grant subcommittee will try to get on the agenda for a selectboard meeting to talk about proceeding with the grant application.

Adrienne asked, didn't Tom said he was going to make an email address for the committee? Kyle said she thinks we are supposed to create a Gmail address. Adrienne agreed to set that up and put files into a folder on Google Drive. BJ said if he can he will send out the Teams recording from this meeting and put it on Google Drive. Adrienne said she can put the information on Google Drive about the assessment she and Kyle did of where there should be services. Kyle suggested maybe it would be helpful to have a tutorial at a meeting on how to use Google Drive.

Kyle said she thinks it would be good for us to be in communication with the other town committees. It would be good to know their priorities so we could collaborate more. Adrienne suggested the idea of a yearly meeting of all committees to talk about what each wants to accomplish for the year. Mary Lou asked if other committees post their minutes. Kyle said they are supposed to. Mary Lou asked, isn't there a selectboard liason to this committee? Kyle said yes, Shayne Spence. He doesn't make every meeting. Kim said the town report is another way we can see what other committees are doing. Adrienne suggested that if it is too hard to get all members of all committees together maybe just the chairs could meet.

BJ said he will create a link for the next Teams meeting that Doug can put on the agenda.

Doug asked if we will be meeting twice a month. Others said they think once a month is sufficient for now. The next meeting will be February 21.

10. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths