

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
MASONIC TEMPLE, JOHNSON PUBLIC LIBRARY  
22 PEARL STREET, JOHNSON, VT  
WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2024

**Present:**

Committee Members: Kyle Nuse, Doug Molde, Peggy Williams, Adrienne Stevson, BJ Putvain, Mary Lou Kopas, Kim Dunkley

Others: Yva Rose

**Absent:** Jan Gearhart

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. Call to Order**

Doug called the meeting to order at 5:33.

**2. Changes or Additions to Agenda**

Doug added discussion of potential funds from Eddie Gale, upcoming grant applications, a response to LCPC on handicapped accessible bathrooms in town, and updates from the Lamoille County Planning Commission rail trail committee meeting.

**3. Updates from LCPC Rail Trail Committee Meeting**

Doug said he learned yesterday that the rail trail is closed from the Danville train depot trailhead to West Danville, from Ward Hill Road in Hardwick to Stannard Mountain Road (for active construction, with a detour sign), and from the Hardwick depot trailhead to the Wolcott trailhead.

**4. Changes or Additions to Agenda**

Kyle asked to add discussion of bike racks to the agenda and the committee agreed.

**5. Updates from LCPC Rail Trail Committee Meeting**

Doug said the state is going to make a large map and also trifold pamphlets. Neither will be very useful to us because they don't show detail of what is in Johnson. Tori Hellwig from LCPC would like to do a regional map and list of attractions. She will continue to develop that. Kyle asked what "regional" means. Doug said he pointed out that if people are doing a 3-day trip they typically travel from Jeffersonville to Hardwick on one of the days, but they decided to go with a Lamoille County map because they are the Lamoille County Planning Commission.

Doug said Cambridge is doing some of their pamphlets in French. We might want to consider that. Peggy said there is huge network of cycle paths in Quebec very close to the border. Cycling in Quebec is huge. Kyle said when she was on the rail trail earlier this summer she saw a whole family speaking French (probably from Quebec) having lunch at our welcome center.

**6. Consider Approving Minutes of June 19, 2024**

Doug noted that Mary Lou was shown as both present and absent and the minutes should be changed to show her as absent. **Peggy moved to approve the minutes of June 19, 2024 with that change, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**7. Summation of Father's Day Picnic Table Projects**

BJ said he put plaques on the picnic tables. Kyle said BJ sent photos and she sent thank you emails to the businesses that donated and included the photos.

**8. Information from Yva Rose on How to Make Johnson a Rail Trail Destination**

Yva Rose said the trail section from Wolcott to Hardwick that is closed is projected to be repaired in 4 to 6 weeks or even sooner if the weather cooperates. Luckily it does not seem like the trail closures are deterring people. People are still planning to stick with their previous plans.

Yva said there is a lull in other tourism in September but it seems that many people are planning to come and bike the whole trail then. September is a very popular time for other rail trails. Peggy agreed that September and October are good times to bike on a trail. There is less heat and it is less crowded.

Yva said they have a lot of Canadian reservations. Of people using their shuttle, about 45% have e-bikes and 55% have regular bikes. People are typically basing their nightly destinations on mileage and breaking the trip up into thirds, with stops in Cambridge and Hardwick. It only takes about 4 hours to cycle 30 miles so people traveling from Cambridge to Hardwick have a lot of time to kill and are looking for activities. That is where she thinks Johnson will come into play. On their middle day people want to have fun in villages and see attractions. That is where Johnson can shine as a quaint village to visit. Those who are biking the whole trail in two days tend to book at the Sunset Motor Inn in Morrisville because the location is convenient, they can book for just one night, and they can easily reschedule. With some other accommodations it is harder to get their money back or reschedule if they need to change their plans.

Kim asked if Yva has heard that lack of food choices in Johnson has been one reason why people go to Morrisville. Yva said she gets lots of eating questions, but because Jenna's Café has breakfast and lunch, that is working. Not a lot of people are looking for dinner in Johnson. They are usually in Hardwick for dinner. The lack of options does get mentioned a lot.

Doug asked if Yva can attend the July 22 Re-Imagine Johnson meeting. Yva said she will be traveling and cannot make it but she can provide some thoughts. Statistics from Canada show how quickly rail trails can become popular. Peggy asked if there will be an opportunity to present information on the rail trail at that meeting. Doug said he thinks attendees will be able to mention opportunities presented by the rail trail and also opportunities for residents to provide services like B&Bs.

Adrienne asked if we have we heard any talk from VTrans about being more prepared for flooding – buying fill ahead of time, for instance. Yva said when they rebuilt last year they made the trail stronger and when they do repairs now they are planning to do the same. She is hearing that they are trying to figure out how to make the trail even more resilient. She thinks because they reinforced it better last year it didn't get as damaged this time. Peggy said on Facebook they are saying they are going to need to treat the rail trail like bridges and highways as far as fixing it quickly when it washes out. She hopes they don't put down too much gravel like they did last year. Adrienne asked if any trails use porous paving. Peggy said no, most use something like staymat. Kim said the same culvert that failed last time failed this time. She suggested it could be interesting to find out if willing local volunteers could help with rail trail repairs.

Doug said Laird MacDowell from Cambridge said their Greenway (the link from the rail trail to the village) was partially washed out again, but they already had a contract with someone to fix the damage from last year. They walked the trail after the recent flood and found it was better armored due to previous work. Doug's question is how long the political will to fund the rail trail will last.

**9. Preparation for, Attendance and Participation in Re-Imagine Johnson Community Forum**

Doug asked who can go to the Re-Imagine Johnson meeting and raise the advantages of the rail trail. Kim, Mary Lou and Adrienne said they planned to go. Doug said his goal is to attend the breakout sessions that will allow conversation about the rail trail. Peggy said she thinks that can also happen during the first part of the meeting. She thinks it would be helpful if we could go with about 5 talking points and put them in when appropriate. Doug agreed. He suggested that people spend time thinking

about it and come prepared. Mary Lou suggested making sure a committee member is in each breakout group.

Yva said she can provide information on what use has been like so far this year – already many more users than any other year. She can also provide projections for the rest of summer and foliage season. The numbers speak for themselves. She will email that information to the whole group.

Yva said she spoke with Jackie Cassino and work on the rail trail will be considered as high a priority as work on roads and bridges because of the economic loss we will sustain if the trail is closed during summer and fall. They will have rolling closures for improving bumpy sections. They will prioritize detours instead of closing sections this time.

Peggy said at the Re-Imagine Johnson meeting we need to make the point about the need for a tent campground and B&Bs (not Airbnbs.) Doug said hostels also. Yva said people are looking for flexible lodging. That is why the Sunset Motor Inn is getting so much action. BJ said he thinks we need to push that we are at the center of the trail and we need to make our trailhead better than everyone else's. Peggy is right about accommodations. If we had places to stay, why wouldn't people want to stay here? We need to figure out how to advertise that we are the midpoint. Mary Lou said a campground may be more attractive to people who are doing the trail in 2 days. They tend to be younger, hardier riders. We talked before about signage telling people they are halfway. Doug said he thinks we should push the opportunity for brunch here. BJ said we talked about QR codes and pamphlets telling what is available in town, but the first thing is to get them to want to stop at the trailhead. Yva said people coming from the east go by the village first and then hit the trailhead. Sometimes they will just keep going. She can put up pamphlets or QR codes at her shop. The trailhead can be an attraction in itself with historical information. People enjoy trailheads that have amenities and things to read about.

#### **10. Projects – Trail Head and Other Rail Trail Related Projects and Funding Sources**

Kyle said her subcommittee has identified all the needs just discussed. Adrienne is working on a Johnson-specific map for the trailhead with a key showing businesses that could be of interest. Beth Foy has made a rail trail page on the town website that is live. It has information on food, lodging and parking and she will add other attractions soon. There is potential funding from Eddie Gale to deal with the puddling water at the trailhead. It is not attractive and it is eating away at the wood. We could put in a drain on the front side of the building. The beautification committee just put some flowers at the trailhead. The international wayfinding sign will go in on Thursday. When the town redoes its website the rail trail page will have its own tab.

Kim suggested listing Tuesday Night Live as one of the attractions. Kyle said seasonal events will be listed. Kim suggested listing the Minema Gallery and open studio at the Studio Center. She also suggested an event specifically to welcome rail trail users. Kyle said there is regional discussion about rail trail specific events. Doug said Noah Pollock suggested a paddle-pedal event next year on the Lamoille River.

BJ asked if we are restricted in where we can put signs. Kyle said the pink sign is where it is because it has to be on town property, not state property. Peggy suggested we could put up more things on town property.

Doug said VTrans is trying to control all the messaging to ensure there is a uniform design. They have guidelines for signs on town roads. They will put signs on the rail trail and on state highways. We

need to get the selectboard involved and do grant applications or get the state to make the signs. We should try to message according to the VTrans protocols for better recognition by users.

Adrienne asked if we have an approved spot for the wayfinding sign. Kyle said yes.

BJ asked if we are limited as to what we can put at the trailhead. Kyle said that is town owned. The wayfinding sign will be in an open area just beyond the bike repair station.

#### **11. Potential Funding from Eddie Gale / Bike Racks**

Kyle said Eddie Gale, former partner of Lea Kilvadyova, who passed away of cancer, created a Lea fund that paid for the new playground at Old Mill Park. He has around \$4K left in the fund and he reached out to Howard Romero and Kyle to ask what they need. She and Howard both gave some suggestions. She suggested we need the drainage issue fixed and told him we also need bike racks, benches, and charging stations. He loved the idea of repairing the damage at the trailhead. Howard said there is already a dry well and we just need to put in a drain. Eddie said he will turn the money over to the committee to decide what to do with it.

Kyle said we still need funding to fix the bike racks. She asked if BJ is still willing to donate time to do the work. BJ said yes. The committee just needs to get the material. It will probably cost \$100. Adrienne asked if we need to move the bike racks. BJ said no, he can blast them where they are. Then someone needs to paint them. They need to dry for about 20 minutes after being blasted so someone would need to come after him and paint them about half an hour later. Kyle asked what paint would be weather resistant. BJ said he doesn't know. Kyle said we would need to research that. Kyle said she is hoping the town or village crew can help us move bike racks. We may need to purchase new bases.

BJ said we should find out what paint the village uses and get that color if the village is going to have to maintain the bike racks. Doug said he and Kyle talked to Erik Bailey and Ken Tourangeau and that has been determined. We don't want black but we have no choice. BJ said the thought is that it is easier for the village to match the color if they are all black instead of using many colors. Mary Lou and Peggy asked if we could paint them all a single color that isn't black. Doug said the answer is no. They were given arguments about the cost of the village wastewater plant and maintenance and the judgment that black is as good as any other color. Kim suggested maybe the base coat could be black and then volunteers could paint them fun colors. If they needed to be repainted, they could go back to black. Kyle said the question of paint color was not brought to the whole trustee board. One person spoke on behalf of all of them.

Adrienne asked what BJ uses for blasting. BJ said he uses glass bead, which is eco friendly. He can provide an MSDS sheet on it.

**Peggy moved to accept the gift from Eddie Gale in the amount of \$4000 and, if approved by the town, to use it to repair the wet spot by the trailhead building and to use any remaining funds for blasting and repainting bike racks or other projects Kyle determines should be done. Adrienne seconded.**

Adrienne asked if we could blast the metal parts of the wooden benches. BJ said he would have no problem doing it but it would be hard to do just the metal without hitting the wood. Blasting will make the wood look newer but we would want to sand it down afterwards. Adrienne said she thinks that would be good.

Yva said she will send out information that will be helpful for the Re-Imagine Johnson meeting. She left at 6:37.

**The motion was passed.**

Kyle will ask to put this on a selectboard agenda and let the committee know which meeting it will be discussed at. It would be great if other people from the committee could come to that meeting.

BJ said he will need to know where the bike racks are and how many there are. Kyle said she will get him that information

Peggy asked if we are still talking about moving one from where Sterling Market used to be. Kyle said yes.

***12. Review of Proposals Submitted for Johnson Downtown and LVRT Connection Study***

Doug said we got 3 responses to the RFP for the study of a connection from downtown to the rail trail. The respondents were Mumley, DuBois & King, and VHB. We are able to make a recommendation of which to choose but it is the selectboard's decision. They have a purchasing policy that says that unless there is a really good reason they have to take the low bidder. Someone from VHB talked to Jackie Cassino about additional funding and she said there may be money available from a different grant source that would have a local match. VHB included some additional work in their proposal that could potentially be funded by this other source, bringing their total up to \$49,931 but the amount not covered by grants would be \$22,231. The other two companies did not have information about the potential additional funding. Doug emailed Randall and Tom and asked if this bid process is proper. Randall said he doesn't want to make that decision. Doug feels we should ask the selectboard to decide and attend the meeting where they discuss it.

Kim asked, wouldn't it make sense to ask Mumley and DuBois & King if they know about the grant opportunities. Doug said he knows they do not. Kim said the amount of possible grant money is more than either of the other two companies' bids. Doug said Randall reached out to Jackie Cassino about the funds and Randall said he is not sure the grant opportunity is as straightforward as it was presented by VHB. Mary Lou said it seems like Mumley doesn't have relevant experience but the other two companies do. Peggy said she doesn't want the selectboard to approve a proposal that requires us to get an additional \$27K. Mary Lou said they could choose to go with VHB but only have them do the work described in the RFP, not the additional work they proposed. Kim noted that Mumley did not give a timeline. She asked how much money is set aside for this. Kyle said we got a grant for \$27,700. Mary Lou said that is the exact amount VHB has in their proposal for the work described in the RFP.

Kyle said VHB is very experienced. They helped create the rail trail. She thinks they would be the best. Mary Lou said Mumley's proposal lacked details. It does not include a timeline even though that was specifically requested in the RFP. She would not go with them even though they are the low bidder.

**Kyle moved to recommend that the selectboard accept VHB's proposal of \$27,700 that uses only the VOREC funds, Kim seconded and the motion was passed.**

Kyle said she is also not against using DuBois & King.

**13. Handicapped Accessible Bathrooms**

Doug said Jackie Cassino wants to know by July 26 where the handicapped accessible bathrooms in Johnson are. Kyle said she thinks Maplefields and Jolley are the only locations. Others said Jenna's Cafe also.

**14. Other Business**

BJ said he was surprised to hear the percentage of people using e-bikes. We have no charging stations at our trailhead. Is there a way to put charging outlets on the outside of the building? Kyle said they would take very little electricity. She charges her electric bike every night and has seen no bump in her electric bill.

**15. Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be August 21. Kyle asked how other committee members feel about starting meetings later than 5:30. It is difficult for her to get here that early. It was agreed to move the starting time to 6:00 for the next meeting.

**16. Adjourn**

**Kyle moved to adjourn, Kim seconded and the motion was passed at 6:57.**

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*