

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2024

Present:

Committee Members: Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Adrienne Stevson, Kim Dunkley, Mary Lou Kopas (via Teams)

Absent: Peggy Williams, BJ Putvain, Jan Gearhart

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Doug called the meeting to order at 6:24.

2. Changes or Additions to Agenda

Doug added an update on bike racks, discussion of how to use money from grants and donations, and discussion of the state's trail friendly business program

3. Consider Approving Minutes of July 17, 2024

Adrienne moved to approve the minutes of August 21, 2024, Kim seconded and the motion was passed.

4. Thoughts/Actions Arising from September 10 Re-Imagine Johnson Meeting

Kim said a task force was created for recreation. There are possible funding sources. Doug said they started with 15 possible priority areas, cut them down to 10 and then cut them down to 5. Economic development related to recreation is one.

5. Status of Contract with VHB for Project Funded by VOREC Grant

Doug said he emailed Tom Galinat, who contacted VHB. VHB said someone would respond. Randall said if we didn't hear anything by this week we should send another inquiry. Doug contacted Tom again about it today. They may think we should be drafting a contract. Doug thinks drafting a contract should be up to the selectboard. He thinks all we can do is keep following up and pushing it.

Kyle said when our committee reported to the selectboard on Monday we reiterated the importance of the town and the village working out who owns, maintains and is allowed to use the right of way.

6. Review and Discuss Trailhead Map

The committee looked at the trailhead map Adrienne designed and suggested changes.

7. Expert Assistance for Developing Camping in Holmes Meadow

Doug said Phil Yuris used to run state parks in Connecticut. Doug is connecting him with Seth Jensen to talk about what would be needed to develop camping in Holmes Meadow. He can let other committee members know when Phil and Seth are going to meet.

8. Rail Trail Related Information to be Posted on Front Porch Forum

Mary Lou volunteered to write something for Front Porch Forum. Doug said he would like to see us educate people on opportunities to provide camping, food, etc. to rail trail users. Kyle said she thinks that is a good idea. We could give people information about providing camping space through something like Hipcamp, which is like the Airbnb of camping. Doug said we need to provide information about legalities like paying rooms and meals tax. Kyle said she thinks Hipcamp guides people on that. The committee discussed letting people know there is a need for places for rail trail users to stay overnight for one night and suggesting existing platforms like Hipcamp, Warmshowers or Couchsurfing that can be used to offer space. Mary Lou said she will draft something and run it by the committee.

9. Vermont Huts / Report on Selectboard Meetings of September 9 and 16 / VTrans Wayfind Guidance

Doug said he talked to Vermont Huts. They are interested in putting a hostel in Johnson. They are putting one in Hardwick. They couldn't come to this meeting, but they are very interested in Johnson. He told them we have an area-wide brownfields plan and a building – the old mill house – that would be a good location for a hostel. Other committee members brought up the fact that the food shelf currently uses that building.

Doug said he told the selectboard we ought to work seriously on developing camping at Holmes Meadow. He also brought up the wayfinding guidance VTrans is developing for signage for attractions. We need to come up with a list of local attractions we want signed and make sure the selectboard knows about the wayfinding guidance so when it is rolled out we will be ready. Kyle offered to make a preliminary list and bring it to the next meeting. Doug clarified that these signs will be on town highways, not on the rail trail.

Adrienne said she wonders if we could ask the selectboard to put a stop sign where the trail crosses Railroad St. Kyle said she knows Yva Rose has complained about it for her riders. There are stop signs on the trail. Trail users are supposed to stop for traffic. It would be helpful if there were crosswalk stripes. Kim said she will contact a selectboard member about painting sharrow and a crosswalk.

10. Bike Rack Update

Kim said BJ didn't want to do the sand blasting until he knew someone would be coming behind to paint. Kyle said then we learned that only chairs of committees can go to the trustees to make requests. Doug said Erik asked for information on chargers to be placed on the green. Doug told him we didn't get that grant and that we want help moving bike racks. He has not replied.

Kim said the bike racks are bricked in. It would be a lot of work to move them. Kyle said she thinks moving them is too complicated and we aren't getting people power support from the village. She was told by Erik Bailey that they don't have time for that kind of small stuff. And the racks are bolted in. She thinks we should keep them where they are. She researched cheaper options for new bike racks. She suggests ordering a 7-bike rack to go between the café and the Church Studio and a 5-bike rack for the Cold Spring. We need permission to put one at the Cold Spring. The other location is private property. She showed what the racks look like.

Kim suggested researching how they will be anchored. Kyle said she has been in communication with Jim MacDowell and Zach Shaw at the Studio Center. They are willing to help physically with the new bike racks. Kim said she is willing to help as well.

Kyle said the total for both racks would be \$910, plus shipping. Do we want to repair and repaint the existing ones? You don't notice issues with them until you are up close. The MOU the village has with the state says they are supposed to be maintaining them. Kim said she thinks we should ask Erik Bailey to have a village employee paint them after BJ sand blasts them. Kyle said they are out of compliance with their MOU with the state. Doug said he saw that Erik thought the MOU had expired.

Kyle said we have also talked about the benches. One on Pearl St. is completely out of commission. She has told Erik about it three times and he has said they will get to it.

Doug said he can ask to be on the village trustee board agenda to ask for permission to put a bike rack at the Cold Spring and to ask the village to address issues with the other bike racks and the benches.

11. Uses for Grant/Donation Money

Kyle said with shipping the new bike racks may cost around \$1100. We got a proposal for granite stairs to go down the slope from the Welcome Center to the rec field and playground. That cost is \$14K. We have the money. That would leave \$8100.

Kim said that is a lot of money that could go toward other things. Couldn't we find someone to donate a few big rocks? Kyle said we want it to be safe, with a railing. These steps would last forever.

Kyle said we need about \$500 for the map infrastructure. Eddie Gale gave the town \$4100 from the rest of Lea Kilvadyova's playground fund. He is not putting any stipulations on how we spend it, but he would love if there was money to go to a nice sign that says "Lea's Playground." He has a quote of about \$1400 for that. Lattice around the portable toilet would make it look more attractive. She doesn't have a quote for that. It may cost \$500-800. That still leaves \$5400 that could go toward more public art. The beautification committee has talked about public art.

Kim asked, could it go to a business willing to let people charge bikes? Or toward a charger? Kyle said a charger costs about \$20K. Kim said she was thinking we could give a business owner something like \$1000 to let people charge bikes there. Kyle said the trailhead building has outdoor outlets. Part of the plan for finishing it off is getting the outlets outside where people can use them. Adrienne suggested we could use some money for "Charging Outlet" signs.

Kim said there may be some installation costs for the bike racks. She asked if the picnic tables are going to be maintained for the winter. Kyle said in the past the village has stored picnic tables somewhere. We might need to put that on the village agenda too. Some get put under the bandstand. The ones at Beard Park stay out.

Adrienne asked if we need to pour a cement base for the Cold Spring bike rack. Kyle said it would go on a grassy area. We would have to research it. Kyle said the Studio Center people were willing to help us move the old bike racks. We might be able to use them as a Plan B for installation of the new racks.

Doug said if we don't spend the grant money by the end of the year it gets rolled into the town general fund. Kim asked, can't it be earmarked for future expenses like updating the map? Doug said to prevent it being spent on something else we would really need to establish a reserve fund. But we could ask for money to be allocated for something in particular.

Doug will get on the village trustee agenda to ask about repair of benches and existing bike racks, request permission to install a bike rack at the Cold Spring and ask if the village will install it. We need to ask the selectboard to authorize our purchase plan.

Doug said we need to get Act 250 approval for the stone steps. Adrienne asked for more details on the steps. Kyle and Doug said we have a full proposal. Kim asked if it can be sent out to the whole committee. Doug said he can send it out. Kyle said we couldn't add the steps to the grant because we didn't have Act 250 approval.

Kyle moved to bring the slate of expenditures discussed to the selectboard for permission. Adrienne seconded.

Doug said the grant will be available again next year but will probably require a 50% match and we might not get it. His only other thought is what other needs we have in the community. Kim said people need water, bathrooms and charging. We could rent a portalet for the village green.

Kyle showed committee members the proposal for the steps.

Doug said we have a bathroom at the Welcome Center and when we have enough traffic we will have an indoor bathroom.

Doug said the proposed steps are what Phil Yuris suggested. Kim said they are not ADA-compliant. Doug said the ADA-compliant access is on the other side. This lets people go more directly toward the fields. Kyle said people are going into the road now. It is a safety issue. Doug said he thinks this is a necessary expenditure. He thinks the bathroom issue will be solved by businesses that want people to go there.

The motion was passed with Kim abstaining.

Doug asked Kyle to write up the list of proposed expenditures. He suggested he and Kyle both go to the selectboard. Adrienne said she could go instead of Kyle. Kyle will prepare the list.

12. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be October 17 at the municipal building. Adrienne will make edits to the map as discussed and bring it back for the committee to look at one more time.

13. State Trail Friendly Business Program

Doug suggested that Adrienne check with the person in charge of the trail friendly business program to see what he is doing and whether he has anything that would be useful for our map or web page.

14. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:55.