

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2024

**Present:**

Committee Members: Doug Molde, Kyle Nuse, Adrienne Parker, Kim Dunkley, Mary Lou Kopas, BJ Putvain, Jan Gearhart

Others: Catrina McKnight (remote)

**Absent:** Peggy Williams

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

**1. Call to Order**

Doug called the meeting to order at 6:05.

**2. Changes or Additions to Agenda**

It was agreed to add discussion of a witch ride event, an upcoming Lamoille Valley Rail Trail grant program, and the Trail Friendly Business program.

**3. Consider Approving Minutes of September 18, 2024**

**Kyle moved to approve the minutes of September 18, 2024, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.**

**4. October 9 Re-Imagine Johnson Meeting**

Doug asked which task forces committee members are on. Kyle, Jan and Adrienne are on the downtown reconfiguration task force. Mary Lou said she couldn't go to the October 9 meeting. She signed up for a task force but doesn't remember which one. It may be the grocery store one. Doug said he is on the recreation one.

**5. Project List and Expenditures**

Kyle said at the last meeting the committee approved a list of expenditures (bike rack, etc.) The next step is to get on the selectboard agenda. We will have \$5400 left and we thought that could go toward public art. The beautification committee would also like to do public art at the trailhead, so maybe we could join forces with them.

Doug said a consortium of towns are paying for a county-wide map. We don't really have a place to put it but he agreed to participate. He told them we are doing our own map but he thought it would probably be useful to have another map. They are going to apply for a grant to pay for it. The grant has a 20% match. Johnson's share of that match is about \$638. There is a production cost and a preparation cost for the map. If we order more than one we only have to pay the production cost for the additional maps. It will be the same size as our trailhead map.

Kim asked if we can put it in a place where people may see it who are visiting the town for other reasons and may not even know about the rail trail. Kyle said that was her thought. There is not room for it on the trailhead building and there is not a need for it there. Kim suggested we could ask the village about putting up a small kiosk for it on the village green. Adrienne said she thinks that is a good idea. She thinks a map of the village should be on the side people see first, with the trail map on the back. Jan suggested there might be room to put it on some open space in the same area where our local map will be.

Doug said there will be some customization options for the map. We can choose which way it will be oriented and we can supply our own pictures to go across the top. We can also choose which map is the inset and which is the main map.

Kim said she thinks it would be good to find out the cost of hanging the map and if it is possible to put it on the village green before the money disappears. Kyle said she thinks building a kiosk would cost as much as the map, or more. Adrienne said she thinks it would be more. Kim asked if it could be on another side of the welcome center in a plasticized case.

Doug said the selectboard would have to approve the expenditure of \$638.40 for the map. Jan and Adrienne said they feel that is quite expensive. Doug said we could ask the selectboard if they would pay for it. Kyle said if we say no to paying for it they will also say no. Kim asked if we want to budget for a kiosk. Doug said we won't get the maps until late fall next year.

Kim said she doesn't know if the money we have can be carried over until the next year for maintenance of the welcome center, picnic tables, etc. Doug said if we do not spend it by July 1 it belongs to the selectboard to do what they want with. They may choose to make it available to us.

Kyle said she thought a brochure might be more useful than a map – something people could take with them. Doug said the only brochure he knows is coming out is one about Trail Friendly Businesses. Jan said there are no printed map brochures available at any of the trailheads. The person she talked to at LCPC said they didn't think they would be reprinted for at least a year. Mary Lou said people today are not into paper. They would rather scan a QR code. Jan said some people would rather have paper. Maybe the town could print some more map brochures.

Kim said it sounds like we are committed to paying for the county map. If we don't pay part of the cost other towns will have to pay more.

BJ brought up the green space we will have from buyout properties as a possible map location.

Kyle said our cost is not just the cost of the map but also the cost of building infrastructure to house it, which will about double the cost. Doug suggested maybe the town could build it. BJ said the town should have a good idea how much a kiosk will cost since they just replaced the one outside the municipal building.

Mary Lou suggested we offer to pay for the map out of our budget and ask the town to build a kiosk. Jan said we can try to get money from businesses if we need to. Mary Lou asked if the town can spend money on something that will go on village property if the village gives permission. Kim suggested we could ask Bob Hoag to let us put the map on his property.

The village has agreed to install the bike rack at the Cold Spring. BJ said it will be cheaper to get concrete for the project if we wait until the village is doing sidewalk work and buying a larger amount of concrete at one time. But that will not happen until late summer next year. Doug said the village trustees said Nate Brigham and Erik Bailey need to decide where the bike rack will be placed. Kyle said there are 3 benches at the Cold Spring but only 2 ever really get used. We could take out the one closest to the trash can and put the bike rack there. Maybe we could put that bench on Pearl St. in place of the one there now that is in bad shape. BJ said the village is looking at replacing the boards

on the benches. Ken Tourangeau was in favor of including that in the budget developed this fall. Doug said he thinks the cost of cement will be insignificant.

**Kyle moved to pay for the county-level map and ask the town to pay for materials for the kiosk, Jan seconded and the motion was passed with Adrienne opposed.**

**6. *Report on Status of Trailhead Map***

Adrienne showed the latest version of the map she is working on. The committee discussed a few changes.

**7. *Mapping of Proposed Gravel Road Routes***

Jan passed around a copy of a map she made showing suggested routes that she and people she knows love to ride that are in close proximity to Johnson. Mary Lou suggested we could have a QR code for this map at the trailhead. Jan said she thinks it should be on the website.

Doug said Yva Rose said people may be passing through Johnson and not staying overnight, but they have extra time on their way to Hardwick. The goal is to have Johnson be a destination. Maps of gravel road routes would help with that. Kim said the people who want to ride gravel roads are the people who will want to find camping spots and stay in Johnson. Some may want to go to Johnson and stay multiple nights so they can try all the gravel routes.

Doug suggested that Jan circulate the map so committee members can provide input.

**8. *Report on Meeting at Holmes Meadow***

Doug said he, Mary Lou, Seth Jensen, Duncan Hastings, and engineer Jessica Louisos met at Holmes Meadow. The plan is to remove 5 feet of soil from Holmes Meadow. There was discussion about whether some could be left for a camping area. It depends on whether the area to be used is out of the 100 year floodplain. They are going to try hard to do that. Phil Yuris was there too, looking at minimum requirements for camping.

Mary Lou said there was discussion about whether it would be possible to use some fill to make a gradient for a bike trail down from Old Mill Park. Initially they thought that was a good idea, but then it was determined that there is a trail from Old Mill Park already, though it is too steep for bikes. Doug said the further from the river you go, the more walkable the route from Old Mill Park is.

Jan asked if anyone has thought of using the old mill house for a hostel. Kim said Tom Galinat is in favor of that idea and is looking into it.

**9. *Report on Phone Conference with Vermont Huts***

Doug said he talked to RJ Thompson of Vermont Huts. They have earmarked funds through Sen. Leahy's office and they are building a hostel in Hardwick. They are also putting one in Randolph that may be for mountain bikers and they are building a couple of huts. RJ and Doug talked about the mill house. Doug also suggested they could consider using an existing dorm at the college. He has talked to Yva about using her shuttle to bring people there. Doug tried to get RJ to come here and take a look at what we have. He mentioned all the buyouts. RJ said they would be willing to help us but they are not going to be the entrepreneur.

Kyle said she likes the dorm idea. There are two dorms not being used at the college. Interim president David Bergh told her they have empty buildings and they are ready for them to be used. They would like to start talking to the town and village about possible uses. The dorms also have a dining hall nearby where for \$10 you can get all you can eat. But who brokers this? Doug said he thinks the Re-Imagine Johnson task force working with the college could work on it. Kyle said Peggy is on that task

force. The dorms are ready to use and the college has a swimming pool and tennis courts. Kyle said she thinks we should get David Bergh to come and talk to us. Kim said she thinks we would need a person to oversee the hostel – a host of some sort. Jan said there is usually someone at a hostel – maybe not 24/7 but probably 18 hours out of the day someone is physically there. Mary Lou said that would provide a job and housing for someone.

Doug said he believes Vermont Huts said we could use their booking system. Adrienne asked if we can invite RJ Thompson and David Bergh to a meeting. Doug said RJ thought the college was too far from the rail trail. Kyle said she thinks we need to see if the college is even a possibility. Kim suggested setting up a hostel could be a project for an intern. Kyle said the college has a hospitality program. Doug said RJ can help us with a business plan – determining how much to charge, etc.

It was agreed that Doug will invite David Bergh to a meeting. Kim suggested if he is not able to attend a meeting we should find a time when he can meet briefly with someone from the committee. *(Kyle left at 7:16.)*

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

Doug said they sent a contract for the wrong amount so it has to be re-sent.

**11. Proposed Rail Trail Committee Budget for 2024-2025**

Doug said he thinks this is too big a topic to go into tonight. Mary Lou asked about the timeline to talk to the town about the budget. Doug said we need to start talking to them in early November. If we had a grant applications that required a match, that is something we might want to ask for.

Adrienne asked if the rec committee has a reserve fund. If so, maybe we could merge with them.

Doug said the rec committee has generally been well funded but they are not an economic development program like the rail trail committee. He thinks it would dilute our purpose. Jan said she thinks we are too big to be part of the rec committee.

**12. Trail Friendly Business Program**

Doug said he thinks someone should post about the Trail Friendly Business program.

Kim asked why the Johnson town offices are not on the list of Trail Friendly Businesses. Other town offices are on it. Doug said they are not a business. Kim said they have a bathroom. Doug said the town offices are taxpayer funded. The Trail Friendly Business program is trying to help businesses earn money from people coming in.

Doug said the state is now saying there are requirements to be a Trail Friendly Business. But they also have a list of businesses they are saying they will include unless they opt out, whether they have applied or not. He doesn't know how that will work if there are requirements. Maybe we should wait to tell people about the program until it is more defined.

Kim said she will ask the town to join. She thinks that is important.

Doug said there will be a separate map with all these businesses on it and a pamphlet at trailheads. They are saying businesses have to provide at least 2 of a list of things, including public bathrooms and trail maps. He thinks we ought to hand out trail maps to all our businesses. We are supposed to send in suggestions about businesses that are missing or should not be included, then they will be reviewed. The state will not know whether the businesses have the things that are supposed to be requirements. Doug will see if he can get a list of businesses that have applied for the program from Tori Hellwig.

**13. *Witch Ride***

Committee members discussed having a “witch ride” on the same Sunday as the haunted house and the pizza party at the pizza oven. Adrienne suggested starting about 2:00 when a lot of people will be walking from the haunted house to the pizza oven. Committee members discussed riding from the rail trail to Legion Field and back.

**14. *Next Meeting***

The next meeting will be November 20.

**15. *Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 7:37.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*

UNAPPROVED