

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

Present:

Committee Members: Doug Molde, Peggy Williams (via Teams), Mary Lou Kopas, Adrienne Parker, Kim Dunkley, Jan Gearhart, BJ Putvain

Others: Charles Flaum, Charles Gallanter, Daniel Langevin (via Teams)

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

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Consider Approving Minutes of November 20, 2024

Jan moved to approve the minutes of November 20, 2024, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.

4. Report on LVRT Community Fund Grant Application

Doug said the LVRT Community Fund grant application is due on December 20. Our committee had voted to submit an application for a 5-unit Bikekeep bike charging station and granite steps at the welcome center. (*Peggy joined the meeting at 6:08.*) The total cost was \$39K – \$14K for the steps and \$25K for the charger. (*Mary Lou arrived at 6:09.*) The charger had a monthly maintenance charge. That turned out to be for remote adjustment. These chargers are made for major metropolitan areas with staff to handle anything that can't be fixed digitally. So he decided to drop the idea of buying one. He and Kyle did further research and located another supplier with chargers that are much more basic and less expensive. He suggests we consider a simpler charging station for another grant application.

Peggy asked, we can't go after a different product with this grant? Doug said he doesn't think so. We need permission from the selectboard and village trustees and the new product he and Kyle found probably needs a 3-sided shelter over it, which changes the aesthetics. His suggestion is to look for grants early next year that might fund something like this. For this grant, we have to prove that our project is accepted by both boards and the application deadline is 2 days from now. We are going ahead with an application for the stairs.

Kim asked if there is a way to get money to give to merchants to be able to have them allow use of their outdoor outlets. Jan said she would be willing to talk to businesses. We should think about a ballpark figure.

Doug said Randall Szott will submit the grant application for the stairs.

Charlie Gallanter asked how much the match is. Doug said 20%, which is \$2800. We have the match available. Charlie asked where the committee got it. Doug said from the Community Foundation.

5. Budget Request to the Selectboard for 2025-2026

Doug said Tom Galinat asked for the committee's budget request for 2025-26. We should also advise him of what funds we have collected and what has been committed. The selectboard has established a reserve fund for grant matches and he thinks they want to know how much we might need for grant

matches. We currently have \$20K from the Community Fund and \$4100 from Eddie Gale in Lea Kilvadyova's memory. We have approved an expenditure of \$715 for the bike rack at the Cold Spring and \$6425 for a 50% match for a grant we received in the same amount for finishing off the trailhead building. If we get the LVRT Community Fund grant we will have a \$2800 match. Tom wants to know what money we need that would come out of the town budget.

Kim asked what the town budgeted for this committee for this year. Doug said nothing. He doesn't think they had the reserve fund for grant matches until this year.

Adrienne asked if we should keep our request at zero since anything we buy will be large and would require a grant. Doug said when we ask to apply for a grant the selectboard always asks what the match is. He thinks they are willing to consider providing grant matches. Kim said it would be reasonable to say we would love to have \$5-10K set aside in the reserve fund to access for matches. BJ said we will need a little money. The trustees wanted the town to pay for power for the charger. Jan said we also have expenses for the map and kiosk. Peggy suggested \$10K would be reasonable.

BJ moved to ask the selectboard to budget \$10,000 for the rail trail committee, Jan seconded and the motion was passed.

6. *Coordination of New Town Website, Marketing Johnson and the Rail Trail*

Doug asked Charles Flaum to talk about the new town website. Charles said there is an issue going on with budgeting. The town administrator appears to want certain things that weren't previously spelled out and that has boosted the cost, so he has to go back to selectboard and hash it out. Hopefully it will be taken care of at the first selectboard meeting in January.

Doug asked Charles to talk about how the town website can coordinate with marketing. Charles said he is thinking of forming a 501(c)(3) organization that could market all recreation. Even if there is a great page about recreation on the municipal site, it can get lost there. The municipal site is not for marketing. He is hoping there could be a 501(c)(3) website dedicated to Johnson tourism. The organization would be an entity that could go for grants.

BJ asked if this would be a standalone site with its own domain. Charles said yes. It would be created by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit like Johnson Works. BJ asked who would pay for the website. Charles said grants. It could have information on the college, the Studio Center, the rail trail, fishing, hunting, hiking, etc.

Jan asked who is working on that. Charles said right now it is him. He is gathering people. Mark Woodward has agreed to join the board of the nonprofit.

Doug asked if this marketing would be able to brand the town. Charles said they would work with whatever branding is already there. Consistency is important. He thinks the site should have maps of things people can do, with different layers for things like hunting or fishing or charging stations. An example of a marketing site that has nothing to do with the municipality's website is Randolph Vibe. It is funded by the Town of Randolph, but Randolph has a long-term marketing plan. He thinks it would be easier to set up a standalone organization.

Adrienne asked if he envisions the Town of Johnson website being more for residents and the recreation website as something separate. Charles said yes. Every town group can have its own page

on the town website, with the ability for people to sign up for a mailing list. But that is not the same thing as a marketing site.

Adrienne said she had envisioned the rebranded town website as being more like the websites for Stowe or Boston – more focused on information for non-residents while allowing residents to find information related to them in the hamburger menu. She wonders if it would be confusing to have two different sites. She asked if the village is planning to have its own website. BJ said yes. Adrienne said she thinks it is confusing if there is a recreation website, a town website and a village website. People just want to go to one website. BJ said the village website is resident and utility focused. It would be good for it to link to Charles' website because the village site will not be concerned with that type of information.

Adrienne said a site run by a nonprofit doesn't sound like a long-term plan that will last forever. Charles said he thinks it will. We will always be pushing tourism in this town. Adrienne asked what happens when Charles dies. Charles said there will be a whole board.

BJ brought up the Go Stowe site. Charles said he is envisioning something just like that. Daniel Langevin said he thinks this is a good idea. Charles said the site can also push businesses.

Peggy asked if the Reimagine Johnson task force that wants to promote Johnson as a recreation location is involved in this conversation. Charles said he has spoken to the task force he is involved in and also talked to Diana Osborn of the recreation task force.

Kim offered to help with non-technical work.

Charles asked who set up Johnson Works. Doug said Walter Pomroy did the paperwork.

Adrienne asked if Morrisville has a recreation website. Mary Lou said most towns have a marketing website. Adrienne said one issue is that Johnson is not a very unique name, unlike Stowe. BJ said Morrisville has myrec.com.

Doug said a webpage like this would have Jan's gravel bike routes. Charles agreed. He said it would not stay static. It would be updated. BJ asked if it would just be recreation or would include all businesses. Charles said it would include businesses too. He could even see information about why people might want to locate their businesses in Johnson.

Adrienne asked if the same designer doing the town website would do this one. Charles said that is doubtful. The sites don't need the same things.

Adrienne said she would be happy to attend any meetings about this. Mary Lou said there is a Reimagine Johnson task force on downtown development. It would probably be worth talking to them. Charles said he envisions huge input from all these groups.

7. *Brainstorming of Rail Trail Related Subjects for Articles to be Posted on Front Porch Forum*

Doug said it would be nice to have a periodic presence on Front Porch Forum with articles to promote the rail trail and encourage people to think about businesses that could serve rail trail users. Kim suggested we could give an update on the grant. Jan said she will bring a list of ideas about promoting the rail trail from a previous brainstorming session.

8. FEMA Properties – Creation of Subcommittee to Consider Potential Rail Trail Related Uses

Doug said he got a list of all the buyout properties and sent it out to committee members. Adrienne showed a map she had created with all the properties located.

BJ said nothing permanent can be on the properties that are bought out. He thinks the town should try to buy some of the major parcels instead of having FEMA buy them because then we are not restricted in how they can be used. Daniel said that is a great plan. It gives the town more freedom. Kim said we could do flood mitigation on part of a parcel and have a flood resilient building on another part. Charles asked, isn't Pomerleau trying to use buyout money to try to build something much smaller at the industrial park? BJ said if Pomerleau does a buyout we lose that whole property.

Kim asked how this ties into the rail trail committee. Doug said we may not be able to build structures on buyout properties but we might have parking or a park on them. As a town committee, we might have suggestions for their use. BJ said if the town bought the properties we could have a gazebo or power there. Adrienne said the Lamoille County Planning Commission is going to reduce the level of the ground along the river, which can prevent other areas from flooding again. Daniel said it would be helpful to have green space where groups of riders felt they could gather. When 20 people come through town together they need a place they can stop or they will go on by.

Charles asked if the town has to agree to allow the buyouts. Doug said yes, and they have agreed to buyouts for the properties he put on the list.

Adrienne asked if the town would have enough money to buy the Sterling Market parcel. BJ said they could get a bond.

It was agreed that the committee should bring up to the selectboard the idea of the town buying properties instead of letting FEMA buy them. Adrienne said she will go to a selectboard meeting to talk to them about it.

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

Doug said VHB sent us a contract for a \$47K project, which was not what we approved. We approved \$27,700. They have been asked to submit a revised contract but we haven't seen it yet.

10. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be January 15. Doug may not be able to be there. If he is not, BJ can run the meeting.

11. Adjourn

Kim moved to adjourn at 7:20, Adrienne seconded and the motion was passed.