

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15, 2025

Present:

Committee Members: Doug Molde, Adrienne Parker, Kim Dunkley, Jan Gearhart

Others: Kyle Nuse, Lynda Hill, Yva Rose, Charles Flaum

Absent: BJ Putvain, Mary Lou Kopas, Peggy Williams

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. Call to Order

Doug called the meeting to order at 6:12.

2. Changes or Additions to Agenda

No changes to the agenda were needed.

3. Consider Approving Minutes of December 18, 2024

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

4. Report on VOREC Grant and Contract

Doug said the contract with VHB has been signed. VHB has proposed some possible dates for a virtual kickoff meeting for the scoping study that would include a variety of stakeholders. Doug suggested to Tom Galinat that the meeting should include Tom and Randall, liaisons from the village trustees and selectboard, LCPC representatives and Railroad Street residents, among others. Doug sent Seth Jensen of LCPC the previous study on an ADA-compliant pathway through Holmes Meadow. Seth thought there should be coordination with the engineers doing the flood study on the Tatro property behind the library. Doug thinks we need to figure out when we would want VHB to be done by, in case there is a deadline for a grant application that we need to consider.

5. Holmes Meadow Status of SLR Engineering Planning

Doug said there was hope that some of Holmes Meadow would not be in the floodplain and fill could be added to it, but it is all in the floodplain. But the engineer is saying they still will see what they can do there. There should be coordination between the engineering firms working on Holmes Meadow, the Tatro property and our scoping study.

Kim asked if people are aware of past plans for a pathway going from the right side of Old Mill Park past Lea's house to River Road West. Doug said yes, the Otter Creek Engineering plan goes that way and they are aware of it.

6. E-Bike Charging Stations – Potential Purchase and Placement in Johnson

Kyle said Doug learned when he talked to the company that the charging station we were initially considering could not just be serviced by a local electrician. Doug said we would need a trained staff member. It is not a good fit for Johnson. Kyle said we decided to pull the charging station from the grant application and just apply for the stone stairs, which did get funded. Now we are back to the drawing board on charging stations. The state was excited about Johnson getting a charging station. No other towns have them. There are some single hardwired charging station units that are less fancy and more affordable. Gene Richards of Johnson Woolen Mills said he is willing to host or sponsor one. She is thinking of a station that can charge two bikes at a time and can be added onto. It is like a bike rack with a plug in it, so people can lock up their bikes and charge them at the same time. Right now a lot of available outlets are on buildings so people would have to get their bike right up to the building to use the outlet.

Doug said because we are in the middle of the rail trail he thinks we should go all in on e-bike charging stations and advertise ourselves as e-bike friendly. He thinks we should find places that would be happy to have them and work on getting them in. We should spread them all over Johnson.

Yva Rose said our trail is 93 miles long. Most rail trails over 100 miles are more outfitted with charging stations. A lot of rail trails under 100 miles don't have bike charging stations anywhere on the trail. She believes that is due to bikes coming out with longer battery ranges. Rail trail bikers typically go 30 to 40 miles a day and can easily make it on one charge, so demand for charging stations is not that high. She thinks it is critical to get some e-bike charging infrastructure but probably not a mass quantity. She doesn't think there will be a huge demand for village charging. (*Charles Flaum arrived at 6:32.*)

Linda asked about charging people who use charging stations. She has no idea what the electricity costs. She thinks getting business from the people using the chargers would be enough compensation for businesses that hosted them. Committee members agreed that there should not be a charge for using the stations. Kyle suggested we would stipulate that businesses agreeing to host a charger we provided would need to cover the cost of the electricity.

Adrienne asked if we could hire someone to make a charging station. Linda agreed that maybe a contractor could make one and make it look like part of the building. Adrienne said if a charger was made by someone local they could probably fix it if repairs were needed. Kim suggested there could just be racks attached to buildings and outlets with covers. She feels this is overkill. Doug said he disagrees. One reason he disagrees is that we have the money to buy chargers. We have a \$20K grant we have not spent. Linda said she thinks a charger needs to look like part of the building. She doesn't think it will look nice to have a big metal thing in front of a building. Kim said we also talked about a map kiosk. Maybe there could be outlets on the back side of the kiosk. Doug, Kyle and Yva said commercial chargers are organized and user-friendly. (*Yva left at 6:42.*)

Committee members suggested possible locations. Charles Flaum said we might want to consider having space for more than 2 bikes in one place because people often travel in groups of 4. Committee members said there could be regular bikes racks near the chargers. Doug said he will talk to the Studio Center about hosting a charger. Kim said she will talk to Two Sons/Jenna's Coffee House. Linda will talk to Marsala Salsa. Jan will talk to the owner of the new grocery store.

Linda asked if the bike racks have to be on a slab. Kyle said they have to be secured by drilling into cement. Jan said when we talk to business owners about charging stations we should know how they will be secured. Doug described two different kinds of charging stations that are available.

- 7. Projects for 2024-25 Fiscal Year to Use Non-Earmarked Vermont Community Fund Grant Funds**
Doug said we have already planned to use \$6,425 for work on the welcome center, \$2,960 for the granite steps and \$715 for a bike rack at the Cold Spring. He thinks we have agreed we should have two kiosks.

Charles said the committee should not overlap with what he is trying to do regarding tourism.

Doug said we need to spend the funds we have by the end of June. But it is possible to ask the town if we can save the money to use in the next fiscal year. Kyle is doing a petition for the Beautification Committee to be able to automatically save unspent money at the end of the fiscal year. Jan said she

thinks that would be a good idea for us. Adrienne said she doesn't think we have time to petition for an article for this year. Doug said he thinks we should have a longer history before asking to be able to roll over funds. The town is putting \$10K in a grant match fund for us. They will ask why we need that if we can roll over funds from one year to the next.

Doug said we have about \$14K left to spend. Committee members said they think the sign Eddie Gale wanted would cost about \$1400.

Doug said at one point the committee had thought about putting money into public art. Kyle said the Beautification Committee has arranged for Michael Stanley to put a sculpture at Old Mill Park. It will be a big whimsical flower located near Lea's playground. He is also willing to fabricate sculptures for the pedestals in the village. He is loaning us the flower sculpture for 2 years for free. He would make the sculptures for pedestals from scratch and he would like to be paid for materials and maybe more. The village trustees seem keen to get sculptures on the pedestals, but the Beautification Committee didn't budget for that. If this committee felt sculptures in the village would be beneficial to people coming off the trail or would encourage people to come to Johnson and use the trail, that could be a use of grant funds. Charles said he thinks the Studio Center will be putting sculptures in the arboretum.

Doug suggested that committee members come back next month with more information on art possibilities and on who might be interested in bike charging stations.

Jan asked, businesses who host charging stations are not paying for them, right? Others said they will be expected to pay for the electricity but not purchase or installation of the charging station.

Kim asked if we still need to find out the price of a kiosk. Doug said yes. He thinks that should be the first thing we allocate money for. The map will only cost \$100 or \$200. Kim asked if we got permission to build a kiosk in the village. Doug said no.

Charles said he and the committee should try to coordinate. There should be a kiosk in the village but there should be information about more than just the rail trail. He would like to provide information about businesses and all forms of recreation. Kim asked if Charles has discussed with anyone where the kiosk he envisions would be located. Charles said no. Linda suggested he should approach Bob Hoag about putting it on the corner of Main St. and Railroad St.

Kim said Scott Meyer might be willing to give us a quote on building a kiosk. Doug said he will call Peter Ingvaldstad in Cambridge to find out who built their kiosk.

8. *New Town Website, Marketing Johnson and the Rail Trail*

Charles said the contract for the municipal website was signed on Monday. Town Web is saying the fastest they could get it up is 6 weeks. The new website will have a carousel of about 3-4 pictures. He is hoping there could be a seasonal contest for people to submit images for the site.

Charles said he incorporated a 501(c)(4) organization to promote tourism in the Johnson area. A 501(c)(4) can raise money from for-profit businesses. He envisions a website that is very graphic, probably with multiple map overlays. It will be Johnson-centric but will include some information about things in neighboring communities like Hyde Park and maybe Jeffersonville.

Adrienne asked what projects he is thinking of besides a kiosk. Charles said he is only thinking about online activities right now.

Adrienne asked if his site would have town events like the Easter egg hunt. Charles said he doesn't see why not.

Doug asked what the recreation economy task force thinks about this. Charles said they are excited about it. He had an interesting discussion with them. Ben Waterman dropped by. They talked about the granary and how Hardwick is developing a hostel. It seems like it would be good to have a multi-town committee. Someone suggested talking to Greg Tatro about possibly rejuvenating a building to make a hostel. Kyle said she thinks the college is interested in providing lodging there. Charles said he thinks their Senator building will be torn down. Doug said he has tried calling Dave Bergh and has never gotten a return call. He saw that the task force had discussion about a barn. Charles said that is one owned by MSI. But it would pull people away from the center of town. Linda said the problem with using a college building as a hostel is that someone has to run it. There is a cost. Usually someone lives there. Someone has to coordinate that. Doug said Tom Galinat thought we should give the food shelf building to someone who would turn it into a hostel.

9. FEMA Properties – Review of Map, Creation of Subcommittee to Consider Potential Rail Trail Related Uses

Kim said she had sent Adrienne some information on things that can't be done on FEMA buyout properties.

Adrienne said she asked the Lamoille County Planning Commission to make a better, more official map of the FEMA buyout properties. (*Kyle left at 7:33.*) Once they do that she can get big print of it and put up for the committee to look at. The committee looked at Adrienne's map of potential buyout properties and discussed the properties.

Jan asked if the town is interested in buying out any larger properties. Doug said they would have to match the FEMA buyout price and then pay to tear down the building. FEMA tears down the buildings that are in the FEMA program.

Kim said if there is a brownfield on a buyout property the taxpayers will bear the burden of cleaning it up. She has suggested subdividing the Pomerleau property and keeping a corridor along Route 15. She would think Pomerleau would give it to the town for a dollar. She is thinking something could be built on that property near Route 15, but it would need to be elevated to mitigate flood risk.

Adrienne showed the committee a proposal for a water plaza that could potentially go where Sterling Market is. Putting in a water plaza would be an option if that property doesn't go through a buyout. If it does, we would have to get more creative or not do it.

Charles said another town he knows of has a property that was in a buyout. It has structures with a metal roof and no sides on a concrete slab platform, a picnic table under a roof and a barbecue pit. They rent it out for parties.

Adrienne said permanent structures after a buyout are pretty much limited to bathrooms that can be flooded. There can be a parking lot that is not concrete. The land can have wetlands or parks. We could do something like the water plaza idea as long as it is not concrete. A water plaza can capture water when it is raining. When it is not raining it could be used for concerts or ice skating.

Doug said the Village Green is fairly insubstantial. The Pomerleau property could be a terrific green.

Adrienne said there are pros and cons to the town buying it. A lot of the cons are financial.

Linda said she recently read the reviews of her Airbnbs. People love Johnson. There is not one bad review about this town.

Adrienne asked if she should present her idea to the selectboard and see if they want to consider not letting the Pomerleau property go through the buyout. The committee agreed she should.

Charles said he was going to go to their next meeting and talk about the issue of brownfields and the fact that the deed requires that there be shared parking for Community Bank. He wants to see if there is a way to leave that parking.

10. Inventory of Short Term Rentals and Accommodations in Johnson Available to Rail Trail Users

Doug said he thought we should try to figure out how many short term rentals there are in Johnson.

Linda said part of the problem with short term rentals is that a lot of them have 2-3 night minimums. She will look into it. A hostel would really be the way to go, but we have to find an appropriate building.

11. Adjourn

Adrienne moved to adjourn at 8:00, Jan seconded and the motion was passed.

Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths