

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026

**Present:**

Committee Members: Jan Gearhart, Doug Molde, Kim Dunkley, Mary Lou Kopas, Lynda Hill, BJ Putvain (via Zoom)

Others participating via Zoom: Daniel Langevin, Yva Rose

**Absent:** Adrian Schmidt

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

At 6:16, when a quorum was still not present, the committee started an informal conversation.

Doug said Adrienne was going to present her map tonight, but she sent him a text apologizing that she can't get it done now and suggesting that we could hire a graphic designer to do it or we could wait until spring. Doug told her he would call her at the beginning of each month to see if she can have it ready that month.

Lynda and Mary Lou arrived at 6:18, making a quorum.

Doug called the meeting to order at 6:19.

No changes to the agenda were needed.

**Lynda moved to approve the minutes of October 15, 2025, Jan seconded and the motion was passed.**

Yva Rose said 2025 was a good year on the rail trail. About 5000 guests came to Lamoille Valley Bike Tours in Johnson to do day tours on bikes. Her business almost doubled in a year. That doesn't include everyone who came to the trailhead on their own. There was flooding in 2023 and in 2024 things were still very stagnant with the second flood. By comparison, this year was a great year. About 500 people used the Lamoille Valley Bike Tours shuttle. Most of those did the entire trail. Yva organized a lot of full trail tours across the state for guests who wanted her to customize their adventures. She knows there would have been a lot more people using the rail trail in 2025 if the flooding in 2023 and 2024 had not stagnated momentum. Five miles on the east end of the trail are still closed. Some people are waiting until that opens.

This time last year Yva started working with customers in winter. That number is increasing a lot this winter. A lot of people are planning trips and booking lodging now. It gets busier throughout the spring. She predicts an even bigger year in 2026 based on the number of pre-planners she has heard from.

One thing that is challenging Johnson is the lack of development along the west end of the rail trail. The most common way to ride the whole trail is to break it into 3 days of 30 miles each. Those who want to take more time than that are having a hard time finding lodging between Cambridge and Swanton. That pushes everyone to land in Cambridge as the first town that has what they need. Any way we can support towns west of Cambridge will help us. If it were easier to find a place to stay west of Cambridge, people might be more likely to go 20 miles their first day and then 20 miles to Johnson. People who ride the trail in 2 days are more interested in lodging in Johnson or Morrisville. She just reached out the other day to

some of the towns between Cambridge and Swanton to see if any more developments have been going on. She is waiting to hear back. Both food and lodging are lacking along that part of the trail. There are a lot of options from Johnson to St. Johnsbury. Cambridge and Hardwick are the most popular overnight destinations because of their mileage. Both are 30 miles from the end.

Kim asked Yva if she foresees the amenities, gravel roads, swimming holes, etc. we have in Johnson attracting people. Yva said yes. If people are on a 3-day trip, the day they cycle through Johnson is the most flexible day of their trip. It only takes about 4 hours to bike from Cambridge to Hardwick. She is trying to figure out how to encourage people to spend 2 nights here.

Daniel Langevin said Sojourn led 2 rail trail tours last year that went through Johnson. Their tours usually include a cultural component. Johnson has a story about its library. Sojourn guests would be interested in that. If a local person joined forces with the tour leader we could provide a fantastic cultural component.

Daniel said he likes the idea of a protected bike path bringing people into Johnson. Yva said there is a grant that is focusing on that. Statistics show that it is access, not what is there, that brings people into a village. She brings people into Johnson on a lot of tours. She takes them onto back roads. But the majority of people on the trail are not on tours. She talks to people when they are riding the shuttle and gives them information about places and activities along the trail. Some say they have already planned their itineraries and wish they had had that information earlier. She is glad the Discover Johnson website is being developed. She thinks it would be helpful to people planning trips on their own if we had a listing on the Vermont Department of Tourism page, but that costs money. She thinks it costs about \$1K per year for a listing on the Vermont Department of Tourism page and inclusion in paper brochures at rest areas. It might be a good investment for the town.

Currently the demographic using the trail tends to be older. She knows there will be more younger people in the future. There is not very high demand at the moment for campgrounds and camping. She thinks that will come in 5 years as younger people come from out of state.

Kim asked if Yva partners with any businesses on canoe/bike trips. Yva said her business partners with Vermont Canoe and Kayak. They send a lot of people to them by bike. There is a combo bike/paddle tour that is popular. She is not sure there are any river/canoe businesses along the rail trail outside Lamoille County.

Doug said the Paddlers' Trail will do another peddle/paddle this year. He thinks they will start at Moog's and ride to Crossing Falls and back to Moog's.

Doug asked if there is a town west of us that we would be better off talking to. Yva said Swanton is very on board. Two years ago when she tried talking to towns along the western part of the trail she got brushed off a lot. They didn't really understand the economic opportunity. The trail does not go into the villages at all on that section so it is hard for them to feel the impact the rail trail is having. Sheldon is definitely one town that is more engaged than others. There is demand from customers to stay overnight in Fairfield. Sheldon would probably be the most interested. They are at the intersection with the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail.

Doug asked how access to Fairfield is off the rail trail. Yva said there is a little gas station. It is pretty lacking. But the trail goes near Fairfield village.

Doug asked how far it is from Swanton to Sheldon. Jan said she guesses it is about 10-15 miles. She thinks Fairfield/Bakersfield makes the most sense as a stopping point based on distance. Yva agreed. She said a lot of families want to do shorter distances each day.

Doug asked if it would be better to inform people of the opportunities here and encourage them to spend time here than to try to generate something in another town. Yva said she thinks so. That is probably where our energy is best spent. But anything we can do to communicate the opportunity to towns west of us would be helpful.

Daniel agreed that younger ridership will eventually provide different opportunities. People on Soujour's tours stay at the Topnotch. That aligns with what their target demographic is looking for. There is a missed market of younger riders who might want to pitch a tent. Right now the big hotels will work best with tours, but a younger ridership will be looking for other options. Mary Lou said younger people who are bikepacking are more likely to do the trip in 2 days, which would put them in Johnson. Jan said if we get a campground and Gene Richards gets his lodging going, that will fill a lot of holes. A lot of big groups of friends like to bike together. There are currently not many lodging places that have room for a big group, so groups often need to split up and stay in multiple places. It would draw people to Johnson if we had a place a whole group could stay without splitting up, which is what Gene plans to provide. It would be one of the only places for large groups other than the Sunset Motor Inn.

Daniel asked if Lamoille Valley Bike Tours has any bundled itineraries with other businesses. Yva said they do different day tours where people drive to Johnson and go on an adventure for a day. She also incorporates side trips into full trail tours. They have a Cabot tour. They send people there by bike and they get a tour and a goody box and get shuttled back. Daniel asked if lodging is tied to their packages. Yva said no. That is tricky logistically. She has occasionally helped arrange lodging for people and she is frequently asked to do that.

Doug asked if any bike tour groups have approached the Johnson campus of VTSU about their lodging. Daniel said that is a good idea. Jan said she believes VTSU has talked to Johnson about doing more with the community. She thinks they would be perfect partners. Doug said he thinks someone should approach them on housing. They have a lot of recreational facilities on campus.

Jan said the first job we have is getting people from the rail trail into the village. Doug said the solution chosen in the VOREC grant process was Railroad Street. VHB's proposal was approved. The problem is that some of the infrastructure that should be repaired, such as curbing and storm drains, is the responsibility of the village.

Mary Lou asked what happened to the idea of a bridge over the river. Jan said that doesn't bring people into the village. Doug said there were 2 proposals for bridges. VHB's recommended plan was to start with Railroad Street because it would be quick and easy and to consider a bridge across the Lamoille to the trailer park area in the future. From there, people would go up Wescom Road and down Route 15. He told the selectboard he thought that plan would be a bad idea. That route does not fit into the scope of the grant, which was to look at getting people to the village. There was another potential plan to cross the river from Holmes Meadow to Mark Woodward's property. That did not get recommended.

Mary Lou asked how they are going to have a bike lane on Railroad Street, which is narrow. Doug said they can't. Kim said she thinks marking the road with sharrows (markings indicating the road is shared with bicyclists) is the best they can do. Doug recommended reading the plans.

Jan said she thinks we should stop going forward with the VHB plan and go through Holmes Meadow. Doug said we would have to wait for buyouts to go through and there are some other issues.

Doug said his question is what we can do in our community now to make it more welcoming that we are not doing.

Daniel said Vergennes has some beautiful road cycling routes and Vergennes village has sturdy tire pumps with common tools adhered to them. If there is a bike lane from the rail trail into the village, wherever it stops would be a good spot for something like that. Jan said we have permission from the Masons to put whatever we want between the Masonic Temple and Marvin's.

Yva suggested we could have something like a punch card to encourage people to go to different businesses. They could get a token or stamp at each business. She is working on something like that for the whole trail. Maybe people could get a small prize like a sticker at Lamoille Valley Bike Tours if they show they went to 5 businesses.

Doug said he has a list of maybe 40 Johnson attractions with GPS coordinates. Yva said that would be helpful to her.

Lynda asked if there is anything where people document they have been to each town along the rail trail. Yva said she and Victoria Hellwig at the Lamoille County Planning Commission have talked about the idea of a passport program. There are 18 towns. We would need someone like Jackie Cassino of VTrans heading up this effort.

Mary Lou said the Vermont Super 8 bikepacking ride came through Johnson the year before last. There are towns around the country where there are bike races that come through every year and people get excited that the bike race is coming through and set up coolers and tables for riders and provide them places to stay.

Doug said VTrans' Trail Friendly Business program is an attempt to give an incentive to businesses and help businesses. He gave committee members some information on the program and encouraged them to read it. There is a map on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail website that shows trail friendly businesses if you drill down. You can click on a business and get location and contact info. We should look at that and see if all our businesses are included. Doug went door to door and signed up Johnson businesses.

Doug said he will send out a letter from Victoria Hellwig about trail friendly businesses and access to them. They have mapped all the trail friendly businesses within 2 miles of the trailhead and graded the quality of the access from the trail to the business. We need to look at that list. We have 2 weeks to give them corrections.

Doug said he has a list of Johnson businesses. He would like committee members to visit each of them and hand out information we got for businesses that signed up for the trail friendly program. For those who are not in the program, we should ask if they would like to be. If they are in the program, they will get on the map and they will get a window cling.

Doug suggested having a subcommittee to look at bike racks and their cost and also a charging station. Mary Lou, Lynda and Jan said they have already worked on this and are willing to continue. Doug said he will check how much money we still have.

BJ joined the meeting by Zoom.

**Doug moved to appoint Mary Lou, Lynda and Jan to a subcommittee to investigate bike rack and charging station options and costs, Kim seconded and the motion was passed.**

Mary Lou said she thinks it would be easier for Adrienne to complete a map if we gave her a clear directive about what kind of map we want. Jan showed a map from the college that looks like an air photo but is not a photo. She thinks if we showed that to Adrienne and told her that was what we wanted, she could do it.

Jan said we had talked about having push pins corresponding to a legend that could be changed whenever a business changes. We would need a door to give access to the map to change it.

Jan said she thinks we need a subcommittee to determine what gets put on the map. She will ask Adrienne if she could do the map if we gave her all the components we wanted included and showed her an example of what we wanted it to look like.

The committee talked about getting someone to take an air photo with a drone or supply an existing air photo. Then Adrienne could digitize it.

Daniel said there is an app called Ride with GPS that many cyclists use for drawing up routes. It can create a detailed map with a trail overlay in 5 minutes.

The next meeting will be on February 18 at 6:00 p.m.

Doug said he thinks committee members should hold off on going to businesses with info on the Trail Friendly Business program because we need to learn more about it, but he wanted to get the information into committee members' hands.

Kim said on the next agenda she would like discussion about getting permission to put a sign with arrows and information at the corner of Railroad Street and Route 15. BJ said we already brought that idea to the village trustees and he thought they were okay with it. Kim said we need to come up with a design. Doug said the state has asserted what signs have to look like and put out wayfinding guidance.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:51.