

JOHNSON RAIL TRAIL COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Present:

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

Others: John Sutherland, Yva Rose, Daniel Langevin (via Zoom)

Absent: Kim Dunkley

Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.

1. *Call Meeting to Order*

Doug called the meeting to order at 6:04.

2. *Changes or Additions to Agenda*

It was agreed to add to the agenda discussion about getting permission to put a sign with arrows on the corner of Railroad Street and Route 15.

3. *Introductions*

Introductions were made for the benefit of new town administrator John Sutherland.

4. *Consider Approving Minutes of January 23, 2026*

Jan moved to approve the minutes of January 23, 2026, Lynda seconded and the motion was passed.

5. *2026 Projections for Rail Trail and Relationship to Johnson*

Doug asked Yva Rose to share her thoughts about the rail trail in 2026. Yva said in 2025 her business accommodated about 5000 day visitors and served about 1000 on their shuttle. About 75% of those using the shuttle were doing the full trail. She works with bike groups and private users to plan trips and itineraries and create tours. This year she is seeing a huge jump in early planners and early bookings. She is in contact with a lot of area lodgers and they are getting a lot more early bookings. People tend to do 3 days of 30 miles each and those who have lodgings right on the rail trail in convenient locations for people doing 30 mile days are already booked solid. She is seeing about a 30% uptick from last year. She studies rail trails around the country and the world. The pattern we are experiencing is similar to other rail trails in their first years of operation. You only see increase. You don't see a plateau, just continuous increase.

Those doing the whole rail trail typically do the portion of the trail that includes Johnson on their second day. Their second day is the most leisurely and flexible. We have the opportunity to capture all those people who have 16 hours of daylight and only 4 hours of biking. Creating safe access to the village is one thing we have been discussing. If we don't have safe access it doesn't really matter what we have in the village. Safe access attracts people more than food or lodging. It really helps economic development of towns on a rail trail. She thinks that should be one of the big focuses. She sees many people stop at the intersection of the rail trail and Railroad Street and not make the turn. She can see them thinking about it, but it is ambiguous whether there is a village that way. At her business, they always tell cyclists that stop by about the village, but people get discouraged by traffic. A bike lane adds safety and also tells people that there is something to see that way. She doesn't believe any of the other village access towns have bike lanes into the village. Jeffersonville has the Greenway, but people using it have to cross Route 15 to get into the village.

Doug said VHB did an engineering study on access. John said he understands that one of the issues is that the road is so narrow. The question is where to put a bike lane. Doug said the selectboard approved a proposal from VHB that calls for making the road narrower and fixing the bumpy areas around grates. The idea was to do something as quickly as we can. That would be Railroad St. Then we can follow up with something else. But he doesn't think the proposed changes to Railroad Street will be quick because he doesn't think the village will be quick to work on their infrastructure. John said he talked to Jason Whitehill about paving Railroad Street. He has talked to the village about them doing the infrastructure work they need to do there and then the town paving it afterwards. It doesn't make sense to pave and then have them do their work a couple of years later. Storm drains and sewers belong to the village. Doug said he told VHB they should talk to the village trustees and he told them that again after the last meeting. Lynda said this would be a good topic for a joint trustee-selectboard meeting

Doug asked about any cooperation on the college. Yva said one of our most important assets is food, especially since Johnson is not so much a lodging destination. Food is the biggest draw after lodging. It is good to know that the college dining hall is a food opportunity for cyclists. She is just learning about that. It has the capacity to feed large groups. That is beneficial for Johnson. There are not a lot of other opportunities like that on the rail trail. She can promote the food and activities at the college through her business' website and when she is talking to people directly. A challenge for Johnson is that there are not many places open at lunchtime, which is when most people would want to eat here.

Jan asked if Lamoille Valley Bike Tours can shuttle people to the college if they do not want to ride their bikes. Yva said no. Their big shuttle is on a schedule and they would need staff on hand with a vehicle if they wanted to provide a local shuttle. Jan suggested maybe a senior citizen in the town would be able to shuttle people. Yva said lodgers are learning to offer pickup at trailheads.

Doug asked what people like to do in Johnson. Yva said people always ask about ice cream and swimming. We have had people cycle to Journey's End. In summer, food, ice cream and swimming are activities that are in demand for people traveling from Jeffersonville to their lodging in Hardwick. In fall, people are interested in Vermont products like maple syrup, cider donuts and apple cider. It would be nice to get people to spend a couple of days here. For those people, we need activities that are accessible and doable by bike. Food, bathrooms, water refills, shade and a comfortable place to sit are things many people want. The Woolen Mills is attractive. She thinks in the future it will appeal to a wider audience. There will be room for larger groups to stay there. There is not much lodging on the rail trail with capacity for big groups. Lynda said she has one rental that can accommodate 11, but she has a 2-night minimum. It is difficult to do changeover for one night.

Yva said there is a rail trail in Canada with QR codes at the trailhead with information about assets in the village and QR codes at attractions with information about them.

Yva said our town is doing the most active work to take advantage of the rail trail. She is on the VOREC steering committee. She will be meeting with them tomorrow. She will let the rail trail committee know what they are planning to do to support our efforts. *(Yva left at 6:45.)*

6. Rail Trail Committee Budget Funds Available

Doug handed out budget information from Rosemary Audibert. We have \$17,244.71. When we subtract the 20% match for the grant to put in the stone steps, that leaves \$14,284.71. The Vermont Community Foundation approved us spending money on projects Doug listed in a letter to them and they are willing to extend the deadline for spending the money until September 30.

7. Selection of Bike Racks and Charging Station

Mary Lou said she talked to Duane at Lamoille Woodcraft. She, Jan and Lynda talked about getting recycled plastic bike racks and a picnic table. They will last forever. American Recycled Plastic in Tennessee sells a bike rack. She showed what it looks like.

Daniel said he likes the idea of plastic bike racks. People with nice bikes avoid racks where there is a risk of dinging their frame. A plastic rack can be moved around as needed.

Mary Lou said the plastic rack weighs 115 pounds. It doesn't have to be secured. They sell hardware for securing it, but she thinks it is not needed.

Mary Lou, Jan and Lynda talked about getting 5 bike racks – 2 at Jenna's Coffee House, 1 at the Masonic Temple, 1 at the Johnson General Store and one at the Cold Spring.

Daniel showed an example of a type of bike rack where the bike hangs by its seat. Lynda suggested those could be put on Legion Field by the oven. Daniel said that type of rack tends to be used at races or group rides where there are temporarily a high volume of cyclists.

Mary Lou said the bike racks from American Recycled Plastic are \$839 each. Duane doesn't usually sell those, but he suggested Mary Lou could send him the dimensions. Adrian said the price is higher than other bike racks we looked at, but these would have greater longevity. American Recycled Plastic said the distance between the bars can be varied, allowing for fat tires. They will ship 4 or more for free, but there is an extra charge if we don't have a loading dock. Jan said she knows of a loading dock we can use.

Mary Lou said she, Jan and Lynda talked about an octagon or hexagon picnic table with a bench. Lamoille Woodcraft doesn't have a delivery charge for municipalities. They would deliver the table and put it together. They charge \$1600, or \$1700 for a realistic wood grain pattern.

Jan said we had talked about having a picnic table at the Masonic Temple, but there are picnic tables across the road at the Village Green, so maybe we should just let all the tables be there, where there are garbage cans, and put a nice bench at the Masonic Temple. Others agreed with that idea. American Recycled Plastic and Lamoille Woodcraft both sell benches.

Mary Lou moved and Jan seconded to purchase 5 recycled plastic bike racks from Lamoille Woodcraft if possible or from American Recycled Plastic otherwise, at a cost not to exceed \$850 each. Mary Lou suggested dark green and brown for the colors and others said they like those colors.
The motion was passed.

It was agreed to discuss benches at the next meeting. Mary Lou will send out information on the options.

Doug asked, are we not going to think about a charging station? Mary Lou said no, because all that is needed is an outlet. Lynda said Jenna's Coffee House is okay with having an outlet for charging there. Jan said the thought is to have outlets on the side of the Jenna's Coffee House building, between the Studio Center building and the coffee shop, with a bike rack below them and a roof over them. It was suggested that a roof would not be needed, just a small cover for the outlets. Doug said he thinks we need to get an estimate on putting in the outlets.

8. *Status of Trailhead Lease and Planning for Spring Kiosk Installation*

Doug said the trailhead lease has been signed by the town and sent to the state. We will be able to put a kiosk there in the spring. We should start planning for spring installation of a kiosk. Jan said Brian Currier, who built the kiosks, is willing to help install them. Doug said he thinks we will need the village to drill the holes. Jan asked BJ if that can be arranged. BJ said when the committee talked to the village trustees about that, he believes the board said the village would be able to do it. There was agreement that the end of April would be a good time to install the kiosk. Donna Griffiths said at a selectboard meeting Carl Rogers said he and someone else he had talked to agreed that the kiosks should be installed by a contractor to make sure it was done right, and selectboard members seemed to agree. Doug said he was the person who had agreed with Carl about that. Other committee members said Brian Currier will ensure they are installed correctly.

The second kiosk will go on Legion Field. Jan said we have discussed having a map stand rather than a kiosk by the Masonic Temple.

9. *Map of Community Businesses and Local Attractions to Replace Current Trailhead Map*

Doug said the regional map for the kiosk at the trailhead is done. He is meeting with Tori Hellwig of LCPC on Monday to look at a map like the one they have in Jeffersonville. We generated a list of important places in Johnson and Tori is willing to work with us to get them on the map. The list was developed by Doug, Eric Nuse and Kyle Nuse. Jan asked if Doug has looked at the lists we generated as a committee. Doug said he thinks so.

10. *Discussion on Johnson Committee Structure and Attracting New Members*

Doug said asked John for his thoughts on committee structure. John said he would like to get reports from committees to share with the selectboard and then if the selectboard wants a committee to focus on something in particular he can pass that on to the committee. There are a lot of committee openings currently. It seems like committees are having a hard time attracting new members. Giving this committee credit for new things showing up in town could help motivate people to be on the committee. We need to consider how we can bring on new people to keep the work going.

Adrian said offering food and childcare would help. Lynda suggested connecting with parents of students at the elementary school so they get to know us and feel comfortable joining us.

John said he would like to have communication from committees to the board. Doug said he thinks communication is important. He thinks there needs to be discussion about the roles of the CEDS and the town administrator.

Doug said he has seen comments from Adrienne Parker about possible committee restructuring. He talked to Lisa Crews, who used to run the recreation program. Many of the people who used to participate have kids who got older and moved on to other schools. There is a connection with Healthy Lamoille Valley. He is interested in many aspects of recreation, but he is not interested in working on recreation programs for kids. He doesn't think reorganizing people so they are on committees they don't want to be on will do anything but kill participation. John said Adrienne Parker wants to talk about getting committees together at the March 2 selectboard meeting and making sure they are not overlapping or duplicating services. Doug said he doesn't like Adrienne's reorganization idea.

11. *LVRT Trail Friendly Business Program*

Doug said new, simpler paperwork for the Trail Friendly Business Program will be coming out.

12. New Members

Doug said Carl Rogers will advertise for 2 new members of this committee. He recalls that Daniel might be interested in being a committee member. Daniel said he is not a Johnson resident. He is willing to keep coming to any meeting if he is invited. Doug suggested he could apply to be on the committee if he wants to.

13. Set Next Meeting Date

It was tentatively agreed to meet next on Thursday, March 12.

14. Other Business

Mary Lou said she will send John information on the bike racks we are interested in.

Jan said Adrienne Parker said she will help us do the map as long as we are not asking her to do it in the next month, because she is very busy. We have a couple of examples of maps that would be simpler for her to design. Her map will be on the Welcome Center wall. Jan showed two examples of what the map could look like.

There was discussion about what will be displayed on the building and how it can be organized. Jan said Eddie Gale would like Lea Kilvadyova's photo on the building.

Daniel said he sent out an email after the last meeting with a link to Ride with GPS. He developed a quick map of the Johnson area using Ride with GPS. He talked about how people can use Ride with GPS on their bikes.

The committee agreed to use Adrienne to create the map for the Welcome Center.

Mary Lou asked about the proposal for the Cold Spring. Doug said that is a project the beautification committee is doing. They are seeking a grant for it. Mary Lou said we should discuss how our bike rack will fit into their vision.

15. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59.