

Community Relations Plan: Three Rivers Trailhead at 195 Bay Street, St. Johnsbury

History

The building at 195 Bay Street in St. Johnsbury, previously known both as the KNTT Investments and the KC Rentals property, has been **vacant since at least 2006**. The property was acquired by the Town of St. Johnsbury through a **tax sale in 2012**, with the intent to demolish the building and to create a trailhead for the Three Rivers Path – a local extension of the cross-state Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.



The **Town entered the Vermont BRELLA program in 2012**. Assessment work at the project site from **2012 to 2014** was funded by an EPA Brownfields grant awarded to the Town of St. Johnsbury and managed by the Northeastern Vermont Development Association (NVDA). In **October 2012** a Phase I ESA was completed, in **January 2013** a Brownfields Work Plan and Site Specific QAPP was prepared, and in **August 2013** a Phase II ESA was completed.

On **April 3, 2014** a **Certificate of Completion (COC)** was issued by the VT DEC. The COC places a land use restriction for the site that requires that prior to conducting any subsurface work, excavation, or groundwater extraction, the Waste Management Division of the VT DEC be notified.

Throughout the course of the environmental assessment work at 195 Bay Street, the public was kept informed of the proposed future use of the site as a parking area for the Three Rivers Path. The use of brownfield assessment funds for site investigation work was authorized by the St. Johnsbury Planning Commission at public meetings from 2012 to 2014. **On April 23, 2014**, The Caledonian Record reported on the decision by the St. Johnsbury Planning Commission to fund a demolition and abatement plan for the site, *St. J Planners Want to Demolish Bay Street Building*.

In **July 2014**, a site redevelopment plan, including specifications for the removal of asbestos and hazardous materials, was completed by Weston & Sampson and Clay Point Associates.

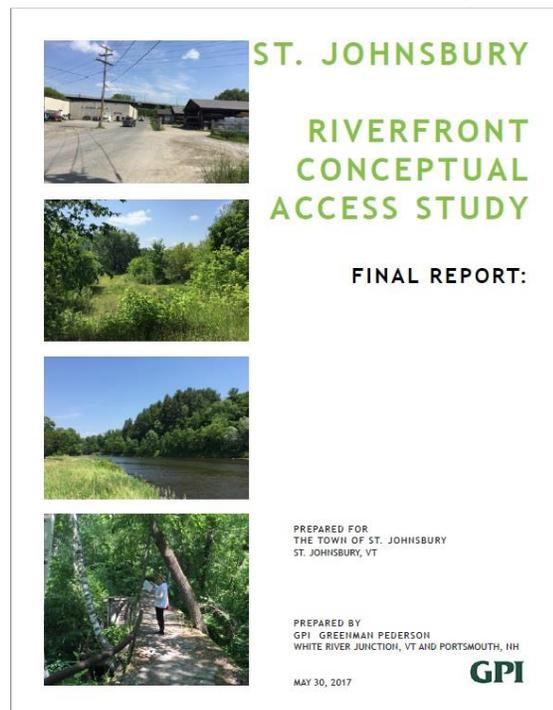
However, due to the lack of funds available for demolition and hazardous waste cleanup of the building, the project stalled in 2014.

Public Involvement and Community Outreach

Progress on realizing the vision of the Three Rivers Path Extension and Trailhead Center has been propelled by local community groups, local nonprofit organizations, the Town and the regional planning commission. Each has played a role in organizing events, issuing press releases, applying for grant funds, providing cash contributions, and contributing in-kind staff hours towards administrative tasks. These groups include The St. Johnsbury Chamber of Commerce, the St. Johnsbury bike & pedestrian committee, the St. Johnsbury riverfront revitalization committee, Catamount Arts, the Fairbanks Museum, the St. Johnsbury History and Heritage Center, the St. Johnsbury Rotary Club, and NVDA.

In the **Spring of 2015**, at the invitation of the Town, the Vermont Council on Rural Development facilitated the St. Johnsbury Community Visit program. This 3-part event, attended by more than 260 community members, rekindled interest in development of the Passumpsic Riverfront for recreational uses, including the extension of the bike path along the river (see attached Community Visit Report). A riverfront revitalization committee was formed that summer, and by September 2015 the group had partnered with the St. Johnsbury Rotary Club on a community river cleanup event on the Passumpsic River.

In **October of 2015**, the Town applied for a Municipal Planning Grant from the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development, which was awarded in early 2016. The resulting



Riverfront Conceptual Access Study prepared by Greenman Pederson, Inc. (GPI) was completed in **May 2017**, and serves as a blueprint for future recreational development and access to the downtown riverfront. The planning process included robust public involvement, as documented in the final report. The integral feature of the access plan is the extension of the Three Rivers Path into the downtown along the riverfront, and the creation of a trailhead at 195 Bay Street with space for bike rentals and other recreational equipment. The GPI plan identified an alternative to complete demolition of the former KC Rental building at 195 Bay Street: partial demolition of the building and renovation of the 2-story portion of the structure to serve as a trailhead center.

In **June of 2017**, the Town of St. Johnsbury and the St. Johnsbury Chamber of Commerce submitted an

application to the Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) for an infrastructure grant to fund the Three Rivers Path Extension and Trailhead. The application had strong community support, as evidenced by numerous letters of support submitted on behalf of the NBRC application (see attached letters).

In **August of 2017**, NBRC awarded a grant of \$425,000 to the Town to fund the extension of the Three Rivers Path into the downtown and the creation of a new trailhead on Bay Street. The meeting at which the St. Johnsbury Selectboard accepted the terms of the grant award was covered by The Caledonia Record in its **August 30, 2017** article, *Select Board Gives Final OK For Bike Path Project*.

The NBRC grant is being matched by funds from multiple local organizations for a total project cost of \$540,153. A major partner in the project is Green Mountain Power, which owns the property on which the riverfront trail will be developed and has agreed to donate an easement over the proposed trail location.

In **March 2018**, the Town issued a Request for Proposals for the Three Rivers Project. The Notice was posted in multiple locations, including the Town's website and in the NVDA newsletter. The **March 30th, 2018** edition of The Caledonian Record published the article, *Breathing New Life Into NEK Downtowns*, which discussed the plans for a trailhead at 195 Bay Street.

In **May of 2018** a design consultant team led by VHB was chosen by a selection committee comprised of Town officials and members of the riverfront revitalization and bike & pedestrian committee, and the Town signed a contract with the consultant in June. On **July 13, 2018** a kickoff meeting was held at the St. Johnsbury Welcome Center with the consultant, Town and State officials and members of the riverfront revitalization committee to discuss the project timeline and to walk the site (meeting minutes attached).



On **September 8, 2018**, the St. Johnsbury bike & pedestrian committee, in conjunction with the St. Johnsbury Chamber, held an event at the St. Johnsbury Welcome Center. The Caledonian Record ran an article in its **August 30, 2018** edition advertising this event, *Community Event to Focus on Riverfront Projects, Feature Live Art*. At the event, public input was sought on the amenities most desired at the new Trailhead and

on the downtown riverfront. A picnic area, water fountain, and public restrooms were high on that list, based on public voting. A mural, which was commissioned with the assistance of an AARP Grant, was created that day under the eyes of everyone in attendance. This mural will be installed in the completed picnic pavilion.

Notwithstanding the town's diligent efforts to reuse the existing shell of the KC rentals building, the results of a structural assessment report completed in **late September 2018** by the consulting engineer deemed the adaptive re-use of the KC rental building infeasible. As a result, the KC Rentals building will be demolished (as originally contemplated in 2014), and a landscaped picnic pavilion and parking area will be constructed (see perspective view below by Duncan Wisniewski Architecture). The rental of bikes and other recreational equipment is still planned to occur at the site, and the location of a water fountain and power hookup for a food truck is provided for in the plans. A fully realized Trailhead Center building is still contemplated for a future phase, should funding be secured.



On **February 28, 2019** a well-advertised and attended public informational meeting was held at the St. Johnsbury Welcome Center to provide a status update on the Three Rivers project (see attached sign-in sheet). An article on the upcoming event was published in the **February 26, 2019** edition of The Caledonian Record, entitled *Public Presentation On Three Rivers Path And Trailhead Project*. The

findings of the structural engineer's report recommending demolition were discussed at the meeting and the most current layout of the trail and perspective views of the proposed picnic pavilion at the new trailhead were displayed.

An account of the meeting was covered in the **March 2, 2019** edition of The Caledonian Record, in an article entitled *Public Shows Support For Bike Path Extension Plans*. The meeting was filmed by KATV, the local cable access channel, and is available for viewing on the KATV website here: <https://www.katv.org/vod/forums/2019/3rivers022819>

In **April of 2019**, KATV aired an episode of the local talk show, *In and Around St. Johnsbury with Susan Cherry*, where status of plans for the Three Rivers Path Extension and new trailhead were discussed and residents were encouraged to get involved. That is also available for viewing on the KATV website here: <https://www.katv.org/vod/studio/2019/iastj031219>

Consideration of Alternatives

Various alternatives for 195 Bay Street have been considered since the Town of St. Johnsbury entered the property in the Vermont BRELLA program in 2012. Alternatives included A) no action -- leaving the vacant KC Rentals building standing; B) removal of hazardous materials and demolition of the entire building to allow creation of a parking lot for the Three Rivers Path; C) selective demolition of the building with stabilization and remediation of the remaining portions of the building to serve as a new Trailhead center for the extended Three Rivers Path; and D) demolition of the entire structure and construction of a picnic pavilion and parking to serve as a new Three Rivers Trailhead.

Each of these alternatives were evaluated as to effectiveness, implementability, and cost.

Alternative A: The “no action” alternative is not effective in allowing the Town to realize its vision of a revitalized downtown riverfront focused on recreational uses. The building has remained vacant since 2007, is in a deteriorated state and cannot be leased to a commercial tenant without substantial interior renovation work. The property in its current state has a depressing effect on Grand List values.

Alternative B: After Phase II assessment work was completed at the site in 2013, the Town authorized the use of brownfields funds to commission plans for abatement for hazardous materials at the site and demolition of the building. The intended reuse of the site was a parking area for the Three Rivers Path, which according to early plans was intended to extend to this location on Bay Street. Demolition plans were prepared by Weston & Sampson engineers in 2014, with the hazardous materials remediation plan prepared by Clay Point Associates. The cost estimate for the demolition & abatement work was estimated in 2014 as ranging from \$110,00 to \$124,00. An updated estimate for this work in 2016 was \$116,000 to \$131,000 (see attached cost estimates)

Although this alternative would have been fairly simple to implement, the effectiveness and cost of the project did not support moving forward with this plan in 2014. Although early plans (ca. 2007) placed the terminus of the Three Rivers Path on Bay Street, subsequent plans ended the trail on South Main Street and Route 5, outside the downtown. As such, a parking lot at 195 Bay Street would not effectively serve users of the Three Rivers Path since it was too far removed from the trailhead. The high price of this demolition and remediation project was therefore not supported.

Alternative C: The alternative to demolish just portions of the building, remediate hazardous materials and renovate the remaining structure for use as a Trail Head Center was explored in the *Riverfront Conceptual Access Study* prepared in 2017. This 2017 Plan also proposed the extension of the Three Rivers Path into the downtown with a new terminus at 195 Bay Street. This alternative for the site was determined to be highly effective in transforming the riverfront to a recreational focus, had strong public support, and was the basis for a grant application to

the Northern Border Regional Commission, which was awarded in 2017 (see attached letters of support for that grant application). However, the results of a structural engineer's report prepared in September 2018 determined that renovation and stabilization of the structure to serve as a trailhead center was infeasible (see attached report by Hardy Structural Engineering).

Alternative D: The alternative to remove all hazardous materials, demolish the entire building and place a picnic pavilion and parking area on the site is the chosen alternative (see perspective view above). As part of the demolition contract, all materials that are able to be recycled will be reclaimed, such as metal components and any reusable timbers. Like alternative C, this alternative is highly effective in serving as a catalyst for the transformation of the underutilized Bay Street riverfront area to one focused on outdoor recreational uses. Preliminary plans demonstrate that this plan is implementable. The cost of hazardous materials cleanup will be supported by funds from ACCD's Brownfields Revitalization Fund, and the already secured NBRC grant will provide funding for the improvement of the site with the picnic pavilion and parking area. This alternative will have a beneficial effect on nearby property values, and has the potential to bring income to the Town through concession fees (bike rental business, food truck, etc.).

Implementation

A press release will be issued in **May 2019** by the VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development regarding the award of a \$35,000 in clean up funding from the Brownfields Revitalization Fund.

Once a permit has been obtained from the VT Department of Health for work to be completed in accordance with the updated abatement plan prepared by Clay Point Associates, public notice of the impending hazardous materials abatement and building demolition at 195 Bay Street will be issued by the Town.

Should plans for the Trailhead development change to require excavation of soils at 195 Bay Street, the VT DEC Waste Management Division will be notified in accordance with the provisions of the COC.

The public will continue to be kept informed through press releases and public meetings of progress on this project, which is slated to be completed by **October 1, 2019**.