

## **Town of Bristol Development Review Board**

c/o AZ Larsen, Zoning Administrator  
Town Clerk's Office  
Bristol, VT

### **Re: Application for Conditional Use Approval – Timberlands Multi-Use Recreation Trail Project**

Dear Members of the Development Review Board,

Mountain Bike Bristol respectfully submits this application for Conditional Use Approval pursuant to Section 353 of the Bristol Zoning Regulations for the proposed **Timberlands Multi-Use Recreation Trail System** located on the A. Johnson parcel in Bristol, Vermont.

## **1. Property Identification and Ownership**

The project is located on a privately owned parcel of approximately 2,000 acres (A. Johnson Timberlands), currently managed as a working forest supporting logging, sugaring, and other traditional land uses.

- **Property Identification Number(s):** Parcel ID 060112-1
- **Owner of Record:** The A. Johnson Co., LLC, 20 North Street, Unit E, Bristol, VT
- **Adjacent Landowners:** See attached
- **Prepared by:** Samantha Morrissey, Mountain Bike Bristol & Addison County Bicycle Club

A conceptual site map meeting required specifications (scale, north arrow, date) is included in the application materials. A final trail map will be produced after trail flagging has occurred and trail corridors are final.

## **2. Existing Site Conditions**

The parcel is characterized by varied terrain including forested slopes, ledge outcroppings, logging roads, drainages, and scenic viewpoints. Existing features include:

- Active forestry infrastructure (logging roads, landings)
- Informal and legacy trails (including the Ledges trail)
- Natural features such as streams, vernal pools, and wildlife habitat
- Watertower and buried water lines

The site is currently used for recreation (hiking, biking, hunting) in an informal capacity, resulting in unmanaged impacts such as erosion on certain trails.

### 3. Proposed Development

Development includes the construction of hiking, mountain biking, multi-use and ADA accessible trails using both hand and machine built methods. “Machine built” refers to the use of a mini-excavator to build and shape the trail. Wooden structures such as boardwalks may be installed to protect the integrity of the landscape and the trails and/or create ADA access. Additional infrastructure will include trail signage and informational kiosks at trail entry point, intersections, and points of interest.

No buildings or structures or motorized traffic is included in the current phase of the project. A parking area may be created on the West side of the parcel adjacent to Rt 116 and across from the Tillerman. Parking would utilize existing log landing areas and enable ADA access to the trails.

Our project is actively evaluating dedicated parking areas at appropriate access points. Formalizing access and parking is a priority to address existing informal use and community concerns regarding traffic and neighborhood impacts.

The project emphasizes minimal site disturbance and integration with the natural environment:

- Trails will follow sustainable design practices (VMBA Best Management Practices)
- Existing vegetation will be retained wherever possible
- Disturbed areas will be stabilized and revegetated
- Natural buffers and terrain will provide screening

No large-scale clearing or structural development is proposed beyond necessary trail infrastructure (e.g., bridges, drainage features).

### 4. Narrative Description and Project Purpose

The A Johnson Timberland Recreational Area is intended to create a **sustainable, community-oriented recreational resource** that:

- Enhances access to nature close to Bristol village
- Supports local economic activity through outdoor recreation
- Promotes environmental stewardship and education
- Demonstrates compatibility between recreation and working forest uses

The project builds on existing community use while addressing current unmanaged impacts such as erosion and degradation from overuse of a trail not designed to withstand current traffic volume.

We have planned for a phased development of a **multi-use recreational trail system** designed to:

- Formalize and improve existing trail use

- Provide designated hiking and mountain biking trails
- Develop a limited number of multi-use connector trails
- Improve safety, accessibility, and environmental sustainability

Our project will advance with three priorities:

1. Establishing a hiking only trail across from the Bristol Elementary School. This trail will lead to the Ledges viewpoint, be more scenic and better suited to handle the volume of foot traffic than the current Ledges trail which is facing severe degradation due to overuse. By accessing the multi-use trails in zone 1 hikers could create a loop from the Bristol Elementary school across the ledges traverse and down the multi-use trail (or vice versa), or if they wish to avoid multi-use trails completely this will be possible via this trail.
2. Establishing a machine built multi-use trail to replace the current ledges trail. This trail will offer better ecological integrity and improved grades. Mountain bike use will be strictly uphill only ensuring safety for hikers and that there is no risk for collisions. A separate downhill trail for mountain bikers will be built and restrict downhill access to this trail only.
3. Building an ADA accessible boardwalk trail near Beaver Brook across from the Tillerman with parking. Further assessment and planning is required for this aspect of the project.

## **5. Construction Sequence and Timeline**

After a full terrain assessment the parcel is broken down into eight zones.

1. Zone 1 is categorized as town access via Mountain Terrace; it is the location of the existing Ledges trail.
2. Zone 2 is categorized as Town Access via Bristol Elementary school and includes a narrow access point to the parcel currently used by the school for outdoor recreation and classroom.
3. Zone 8 is categorized as the Tillerman Accessible Trail area and includes the mostly flat area adjacent to 116 and the Tillerman.

These three zones, 1, 2 and 8, are prioritized for development for this first phase of the project. All other zones will be reserved for future development and require more assessment. The first phase of the project will commence this spring and continue until the trails are completed. The exact timeline will depend on availability of volunteers, professional trailbuilders and success of fundraising efforts to fund the full phase 1. Trails in zone 8 require further assessment and design before building can occur. Anticipated timeline is 2026-2027.

## Conceptual Trails Zone 1

The conceptual climb trail would be a multi-use machine built trail that would start from the log landing at the end of Mountain Terrace. The trail would climb up using switchbacks to relieve the grade and terminate in another log landing on the plateau where the main logging road comes up. This trail would be roughly 5,500ft in length with an average grade of 6 percent. It is recommended that this trail is bi-directional for hikers and a climb only for bikes. This would keep the mountain bike traffic moving slowly and allow for safe passage for both users.

The conceptual traverse trail would be a multi-use machine built trail that would share the main logging road and traverse in the forest when the grades become too steep. This would allow access to the existing hiking trail and the conceptual downhill trail. This trail would be roughly 3,400ft with an average grade of 5 percent. It is recommended that this trail would be bi-directional for both mountain bikes and foot traffic. With adequate site lines and lower mountain bike speeds this would allow for safe multi-use.

The conceptual downhill trail would start off the main logging road at the top of a recent clear cut. It would descend through recently logged terrain until crossing the drainage at the bottom into the log landing. The terrain in this area would be suitable for building a machine built downhill only flow trail. This trail would be roughly 6,329 ft with an average grade of 8 percent. It is recommended that this trail be directional for bikes only to travel downhill to make sure there are no user conflicts.



Example Climb Trail



Example of Traverse Trail



Conceptual Downhill Start



Example Downhill Flow Trail

## Conceptual Trails Zone 2

The conceptual hiking trail would begin across the street from the Bristol Elementary School. The terrain in this area is steep with limited space to traverse making it more ideal for hiking access. There are several points of interest on the way up the hill including a waterfall. The goal for this trail would be to access the existing view point on the ledge. Utilizing switchbacks to gain elevation while keeping the trail grade to a minimum would be possible but there would be areas where the grade would need to be steeper and rock hardening would be necessary.



Location of conceptual hiking trail



Waterfall feature on conceptual hiking trail

### **Conceptual Trails Zone 8**

While most of this parcel is steep mountain terrain, there is a suitable location for an ADA Trail / Boardwalk on the east side of the mountain next to Beaver Brook. This area is directly across the street from the Tillerman Restaurant and would offer great views of Beaver Brook. Ideally this could be located on the south side of the access logging road but also could be possible on the north side. There would also be ample space for a parking area for the boardwalk in this location.

#### **Next Steps:**

Our team is working with L&D and VYCC to advance on trail flagging this spring. The trail flagging effort will enable us to understand exactly where the trails will be located and conduct more detailed planning and assessments. Through flagging we will also understand more clearly what terrain can be volunteer built versus what will require professional building.

We will also engage with the Trail Accessibility Hub through the Vermont Trails & Greenways Council to advance planning for the ADA trails in Zone 8.

## **7. Energy Utilization and Conservation**

As the project is primarily non-structural, energy use is minimal and the project promotes low-impact, human-powered recreation.

## **8. Hours of Operation**

The trail system is intended primarily for daylight hours use only, consistent with typical recreational trail systems in Vermont, unless otherwise permitted.

## **9. Signage, Lighting, and Noise Mitigation**

- **Signage:** Trail, safety, and educational signage will be installed
- **Lighting:** No permanent exterior lighting is proposed
- **Noise:** The use is passive recreation; noise levels are expected to remain low and consistent with existing conditions.

## **10. Compliance with Section 355 – General Criteria**

### **Capacity of Community Facilities:**

The project will not burden municipal services. It is a low-impact recreational use with no demand on water, sewer, or emergency infrastructure beyond typical outdoor recreation.

### **Character of the Area:**

The project maintains the forested, rural character and enhances it through sustainable trail design. No buildings or large-scale development are proposed.

### **Traffic Impacts:**

Traffic will be managed through distributed access points and designated parking areas.

### **Compliance with Regulations:**

The project will comply with all applicable local, state, and environmental regulations.

### **Renewable Energy Resources:**

The project will not restrict access to sunlight, water, or other renewable resources.

## **11. Compliance with Section 356 – Site-Specific Criteria**

### **Circulation and Parking:**

Trail access and parking will be designed to safely accommodate users and minimize roadside impacts.

### **Pedestrian Connectivity:**

The system enhances connectivity within the parcel and to the surrounding community.

**Landscaping:**

Natural landscaping and forest cover will be preserved and enhanced.

**Stormwater and Drainage:**

Trails will incorporate drainage features to prevent erosion and avoid impacts to neighboring properties.

**Environmental Protection:**

Trail siting will avoid sensitive habitats, wetlands, and critical ecological areas through field verification and use of state mapping tools.

**Building Design:**

Not applicable at this stage (no buildings proposed).

**Lighting, Noise, and Signage:**

All will comply with relevant sections of the zoning regulations.

**Energy Conservation:**

Low-impact design and minimal infrastructure support energy conservation goals.

**Conclusion**

This project represents a thoughtful and community-supported approach to enhancing outdoor recreation while preserving the ecological integrity and working forest character of the property. The proposal aligns with the Town Plan and meets the Conditional Use standards set forth in the Bristol Zoning Regulations.

We respectfully request approval of this application.

Sincerely,

Samantha Morrissey

Board Member Mountain Bike Bristol/Addison County Bicycle Club

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