

Town of Johnson Vermont

Community Profile



Introduction: This Community Profile is to provide baseline information about the Staffing Study RFP being advertised. It is intended to provide information to prospective consultants about the community.

The Community: The Town of Johnson is located in the center of Lamoille County, in the state of Vermont. It has a population of app. 3491 (2020 census data) which includes an incorporated Village, pop. 1332 (2020 census data). The Village of Johnson owns and operates a small Municipal Electric Utility, Water and Sewer Utilities and a Fire Department. The Village has a separate governing body (Trustees) and their own Municipal Manager.

The town is bisected by the Lamoille River and is therefore a beautiful mix of river valley and mountainous terrain. Unfortunately, the location of the river, and it's propensity for flooding also presents a significant challenge. It is also bisected by the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, a four season multi use recreational trail. The trail is one of the longest in New England at app 97 miles long, originating in Swanton Vermont and crossing the state to St Johnsbury Vermont. Johnson is located approximately halfway on the trail. The Long Trail also crosses the town, which is a renowned hiking trail offering more wonderful hiking and recreational opportunities.

The natural features and rural nature of Johnson provide multiple recreational opportunities including hiking, walking, biking, swimming, canoeing, hunting and fishing, snowmobiling, cross country skiing, snow shoeing and a host of other activities. It is also close to Stowe, Smugglers Notch and Jay

The town owns or maintains Journey's End (remote swimming and natural area on Foote brook), Beard's Recreation Area (popular swimming hole on the Gihon River), The Ted Alexander Welcome Center (welcome center, access and parking for the Rail Trail), The Talc Mill Recreation Field, an Arboretum, Legion Field (Tuesday Night Live Music venue, Community Oven and winter skating), two Town Forests and access points on the Lamoille River for canoes and kayaks.

Johnson has a vibrant "downtown", but like many small-town communities, it struggles with attracting and retaining businesses. That said Johnson is home to the Johnson Woolen Mills, the Vermont Studio Center (a world renowned arts center), a Gallery, a grocery store, a couple restaurants/cafes, a Bank, Butternut Mountain Farms Maple Products and a host of other small businesses offering goods and services, catering to local needs.

It is also home to Northern Vermont University (Formerly Johnson State College). The college has been an important part of the community for decades and we hope it will continue to be into the future.

Town/Village: As mentioned, there is an incorporated Village, with it's own governance and Manager. The Town is governed by a five member Selectboard. The town has a Town Administrator form of government and the Town Administrator has powers and duties granted in a Job Description. There is some administrative assistance available but no Assistant Administrator.

The town has contracts for police (Lamoille County Sheriff's Dept), fire (Village of Johnson FD), and emergency medical services (Newport Ambulance Service). The town has a Public Works Department, currently staffed at four full time employees, including a Public Works Foreman, who is responsible for day to day operations. One of the questions of the study is to determine the need for a fifth employee

The town owns and maintains all of the highways, including those within the Village. The Village is responsible for sidewalks (including snow removal) and storm drains within the village limits.

The town provides recreation programs (mostly for youth) and Recreation areas, has an active Historical Society (including a building and collections), a Skate Park, a Public Library, and has numerous Commissions, Committees and volunteer groups. These include: Beautification Committee, Community Oven Committee, Racial Justice and Equity Committee (inactive), Skate Park Committee, Recreation Committee, Rail Trail Advisory Committee, Conservation Commission, Planning Commission, Development Review Board, Tree Board, and Tuesday Night Live Committee.

Johnson has a Form Based Code, primarily in the Village area, but does not have zoning or subdivision regulations. The Town Administrator has acted as the Form Based Code Officer. Johnson has a Flood Plain Zoning Regulation (with it's own administrator). It also has numerous other ordinances including" Animal Control, Dilapidated Buildings, Solid Waste, ATV, Noise, E-911 Road Naming, Speed Limit, and by virtue of state statutes enforces Health Regulations. For most of these ordinances, the Administrator may be required to provide some basic support, administrative and coordination services, but is not directly responsible for enforcement.

The town has a part-time Recreation Coordinator (24 hrs/wk), which is under the general supervision of the Town Administrator. At the last Town Meeting the voters authorized the Selectboard to appoint the Town Clerk and Town Treasurer. An important aspect of the Study will be to consider how this change will affect staff. The Administrative Clerk provides limited administrative support to the Town Administrator.

The town recently lost it's part time (24 hrs/wk) Community and Economic Development Specialist (CEDS), but has hired an interim CEDS.

An important part of the Study will be to review the the relative roles of all town employees both shared cost (with the village) and not.

The Municipal Office building is jointly owned by the town and village and serves as the main administrative office for both entities. The town and village are also joint owners of app. 200 acres of land (the former Talc Mill), which includes a Village Public Works Garage, a Town Public Works Garage, a shared "cold storage" building (for storage of tools, supplies and equipment for the town and village) and a "Mill House" which currently serves as a local Food Shelf and office space.

The town operates on a fiscal year of July 1 to June 30. The most recent approved budget (FY 26) is \$3,699,957.00 with an estimated municipal tax rate of \$0.9459. The town has numerous Reserve Funds, including: Tax Anticipation, Highway, Buildings and Grounds, Recreation, Historical Society, Grant Match, Arboretum, Skate Park, Reappraisal, Bridge and Culvert and a couple small Cemetery Funds.

Challenges and Opportunities: Johnson is a small rural community with a limited tax base. Therefore, leveraging other funding sources for projects is very important.

One challenge is merger discussions between town and village. There has been a merger study done and the voters of both entities instructed their respective boards to continue investigating options. Last year the Town had the following articles in the Town Warning:

Article 10. Shall the voters of the Town of Johnson authorize their Selectboard to prepare (or have prepared) and act upon a Preliminary Plan for Merger with the Village of Johnson in accordance with the provisions set forth in Title 24, VSA, Chapter 49?

Article 11. Shall the voters of the Town of Johnson authorize the Town to raise, appropriate, and expend up to \$60,000 for the purpose of Article 10, contingent on the voters of the Village of Johnson approving a similar article to Article 10?

Article 10 failed by one vote so Article 11 was moot. The Village had an article similar to Article 10 in their Warning. Since the article failed at Town Meeting, the Village passed over the article during it's meeting.

Though these articles failed, it is hard to have to study the staff of just the town as there is a lot of employee and shared space overlap.

The town owns a parcel of land that was purchased seven years ago, with the goal of creating a small Light Industrial/Commercial Park. An Engineering study is being updated with the goal of filing for an Act 250 permit, which has not been done yet. A Northern Borders Regional Commission grant was applied for and awarded and will pay for 50% of the original budget submitted with the grant. The town has secured required match in the form of bond approval and assignment of surplus funds. The project is underway but is still a work in progress.

Johnson experienced a significant flood in 2023 and is still dealing with the consequences, including up to 17 possible FEMA "buyouts" of property. Obviously, this will impact the Grand List. There was significant damage to private and municipal property.