

Lamoille County Planning Commission
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April/May 2014

Barnes Camp Restoration Approaches Finish Line Grand Opening Planned for June 14th

After years of planning, renovation, and restoration of Barnes Camp, the project is almost complete. The historic building, built in 1927 on the site of a logging camp, is situated along Route 108 at the southern “gateway” of Smugglers’ Notch.



Barnes Camp is looking like its old self! The “south wing,” reconstructed based on historic photos, is awaiting siding. The “south wing” will house much needed restroom facilities and a water collection system.

Once the restoration is complete, Barnes Camp will serve as a visitors center for the Smugglers’ Notch Scenic Highway and the State Park and will act as a hub for educational and conservation activities occurring throughout the Notch. The visitors center will be managed through a partnership with Green Mountain Club, Stowe Mountain Resort, and the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation.

Since 1995, the Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) has facilitated a group of public and private organizations in planning for the future of Smugglers’ Notch. Barnes Camp is the capstone of these efforts. For more information contact Seth Jensen at seth@lpcvt.org or visit www.friendsofsmugglersnotch.org.



Restoration of the second floor porch is almost complete. The porch was restored using Vermont grown spruce beams and will look much like it did when the Camp was first built in 1927.

The porch and second floor of Barnes Camp are supported by large spruce beams. New Vermont grown spruce has been spliced seamlessly together with the historic beams.



The historic stone fireplace and chimney are being carefully restored, with the original stones placed back into their historic locations.



Patrick Redden, Ralph Eames, and Bill Grady (l to r) of Upland Construction, the general contractor for the Barnes Camp Restoration.

For information about the new flood resiliency element or to discuss how your community might address the element, contact Taylor Foster, Regional Planner at Taylor@lpcvt.org.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Next Round of Municipal Planning Grants – Coming Soon

DHCD will announce the details of the FY15 Municipal Planning Grants (MPGs) in June. MPG applications are due on September 30, 2014 and grants will be issued by the end of the year. To be eligible, towns need Regional Planning Commission approval of their municipal plans. For more information, contact LCPC or Annina Seiler at 802.828.1948.

Vermont Bike/Ped Program is accepting applications through June 27th

The Bike/Ped Program provides funding for either a scoping study or a design/construction project for the following facilities:

- Bicycle lanes (on-road facility delineated with pavement markings and signs)
- Shoulders (generally a minimum of 3-feet wide to accommodate bicyclists)
- Sidewalks
- Pedestrian crossing improvements, including median pedestrian refuge islands
- Pedestrian signals
- Improvements that address requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Shared-use paths (designed for use by both bicyclists and pedestrians)

For a copy of the VTrans 2014 Bicycle and Pedestrian Program Guide and Application, visit the VTrans website: <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/>, and look under the Spotlight heading or go to http://vtransengineering.vermont.gov/sections/ltfbike_ped. You may also obtain a copy or ask any questions about the program or application process by contacting Jon Kaplan by phone at (802) 828-0059 or email jon.kaplan@state.vt.us.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

LCPC Board of Directors

May 27, 6:30 pm, Tegu Building

Monthly TAC Meeting

May 28, 12 noon, LCPC Conference Room

LCPC Board of Directors Annual Meeting

June 10, 6:00 pm, Smugglers' Notch Resort, Spruce Room

Barnes Camp Visitors' Center Ribbon Cutting

June 14, 1:30 pm, Stowe

Please contact LCPC for more information on upcoming meetings, workshops, and conferences.

Jeffersonville Flood Hazard Study Complete

Like many Lamoille County communities, the Village of Jeffersonville experienced severe flooding in the Springs of 2011 and 2014. Like many communities throughout Vermont, Jeffersonville was built near the Brewster and Lamoille Rivers to take advantage of the opportunities for transportation, energy, and agriculture that the rivers provided. However, this location at the confluence of the Brewster and Lamoille Rivers also makes areas of the Village particularly vulnerable to flooding.

In order to better understand the risks posed by flooding, the Village partnered with Lamoille County Planning Commission (LCPC) to hire the engineering firm Milone and MacBroom to develop a Flood Hazard Model and Alternatives Analysis. The study can be found on LCPC's website under the Jeffersonville link on the home page.

The model was built using new and existing surveys, as well as historical data from stream gauges throughout the Lamoille River watershed. The model tested flooding during different sized events (10-year, 100-year, 500-year floods, etc.) The model also evaluated potential courses of action which could reduce flood risks in the Village. The model revealed at least four "preferred alternatives" that, in combination, could reduce flood levels by a foot or more in some areas of the Village. Potential alternatives range from modifications to transportation infrastructure, particularly along Route 15, to restoring floodplain access along the Brewster River. LCPC is now working with the Village of Jeffersonville, the Town of Cambridge, and various State agencies to determine the feasibility of implementing these alternatives.



The old railroad bridge (now part of the Cambridge Greenway) over the Brewster River in Jeffersonville.

Information from the model will be incorporated into Jeffersonville's new Hazard Mitigation Plan and will also assist the Village in meeting the newly required "flood resiliency" element for its Municipal Plan. For more information about the model, contact Seth Jensen, Senior Planner, at seth@lpcvt.org. For more information on Hazard Mitigation planning throughout Lamoille County, contact Taylar Foster, Regional Planner at Taylor@lpcvt.org.

New Flood Resiliency Element for Municipal Plans

In order to comply with State Statute, Municipal Plans adopted after July 1, 2014, will need to contain a "flood resiliency element." According to Statute, the flood resiliency element should:

- (i) identify flood hazard and fluvial erosion hazard areas, based on river corridor maps provided by the Secretary of Natural Resources . . . or maps recommended by the Secretary, and designat[e] those areas to be protected, including floodplains, river corridors, land adjacent to streams, wetlands, and upland forests, to reduce the risk of flood damage to infrastructure and improved property; and (ii) recommend policies and strategies to protect the areas identified and designated . . . and to mitigate risks to public safety, critical infrastructure, historic structures, and municipal investments.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Friends of Bobolinks

Over the next few weeks, thousands of bobolinks, a grassland species that nests in fields, will land in the Vermont valleys to seek nesting sites and fledge their young. By the time they arrive, they will have completed a perilous 12,000-mile round-trip journey since their departure to South America last fall.



Several factors have made it increasingly difficult over the last half-century for the bobolink to reproduce. They are considered a "species at risk" in Canada. And the recently published Vermont Bird Atlas reports that their numbers in this state have declined by 75 percent since 1966.

For one, bobolinks are picky about where they nest. They avoid fields where cows graze and prefer large, square hayfields of 20 acres or more. Such fields have become scarcer as dairy farms have been sold off and subdivided for housing. Plus, in recent years, many farmers have started plowing their hayfields for corn, which has gained value due to the federal requirement for ethanol in gasoline.

The hayfields that remain are precious commodities to farmers who aim to maximize their productivity by scheduling three cuttings instead of the typical two. Depending on weather, they end up mowing during the bobolinks' prime nesting and fledging period in June and July.

Bobolink populations have been reduced by an average of 80 percent over most of their breeding range in North America. Returning migrants need to luck out and "choose" a field that will not be mowed before they have fledged successfully around mid July, or early August if they fail at the first breeding attempt.

However, in the Stowe valley and several areas in Northern/Central Vermont, private landowners control a substantial amount of land where the demand for early mowing may be reduced. Herein lies an opportunity for bobolinks. A group of enthusiastic birders and conservationists led by Elmore resident Michael Sweatman, "Friends of Bobolinks" (FOB) wants to work with private landowners and farmers who mow their grass to encourage mowing schedules that will be more bobolink friendly and allow them to breed successfully.

Already, several landowners practice delayed mowing. They do so because they feel strongly about the bobolinks' survival and want to continue to enjoy that irrepressible bubbling song in their hayfields into the summer.

Last summer, LCPC provided maps to the FOB group to help them identify around 250 fields that would be large enough to potentially draw and sustain bobolinks. Then the group spent the season driving to each location several times to see if they could find the birds. FOB monitored 272 fields over a project area consisting of 96 square miles between the Lamoille and Winooski rivers along the Morrisville/Stowe/Waterbury valley.

Out of the 272 fields, they found around 50 where bobolinks are present and where it was possible to delay mowing until after the breeding season. It is estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 acres of unmowed fields were “saved” through delayed mowing, allowing not only bobolinks but many other grassland species to survive.

FOB membership has grown dramatically since last summer, with the project area being expanded to 7 new towns. For more information about this project, please contact Michael Sweatman at michaelsweatmam@gmail.com, or 253-8142 (home) or 371-9025 (cell).

—A version of this article originally appeared in the Stowe Reporter.

Wolcott Park Improvements are Multi-beneficial

A community group in Wolcott, together with Healthy Lamoille Valley, is working to make improvements to the athletic fields on School St. in Wolcott. This project was initiated after the results of a Health and Wellness Community Survey conducted in Wolcott in 2013 showed a community need and desire for enhancing recreational areas in town. Improvements identified include a walking path, playscape area, park signage, benches, and landscaping. Local partners have been engaged in the effort, including LCPC, Green Mountain Technology and Career Center, and the local elementary school. Students will be working on a project to create individual mosaic pavers to be added to the playscape area at the park. A community workday is being planned for the spring of 2014.

Planning for parks and green spaces and incorporating them into our communities is one strategy that helps to create an environment that makes it easier for people to live healthy active lives. Research shows that when parks are available in a community, regular exercise is increased among residents by up to 25%. Parks create a sense of place, they increase our physical and mental health, they can have a positive impact on the local economy, and they help to build strong communities.

Through the work of the Lamoille County Conservation District, the School St. Park will include native tree plantings along the Lamoille River. Re-vegetating areas along river banks and shorelines helps curb erosion and stabilize banks. It also helps filter and reduce the amount of sediment and pollutants that go into the river.

This effort is part of Healthy Lamoille Valley’s “Healthy Community Design” initiative which focuses on the relationship between the built environment, our behavior patterns, and its impact on health outcomes. LCPC assisted Healthy Lamoille Valley with the community survey and a walk audit in Wolcott. Future projects will build off of these tools to increase walkability and bikability throughout Wolcott.

From a public health perspective, making the connection between our health and the built environment is an important part of a comprehensive approach to promoting and protecting the population’s health and wellness. From a floodplain protection perspective, parks, open space, and vegetated streambanks all reduce the negative impacts of flooding and reduce the risk of danger to people and property.

To learn more about the Wolcott Park Project, visit “Health and Recreation in Wolcott” on Facebook or contact Kate at 279-1869. To learn more about vegetating streambanks, call Taylar at 888-4548.

Take A Trip... Along A Byway

Looking for new places to explore? The Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing (VDTM) has recently coordinated a project to identify interesting sites along all the Vermont Byways. They are all profiled online at www.vermontbyways.us and are perfect for afternoon drives and identifying other places that are easy to visit. Click on the Byway name on the left and then look for the “Travel Itineraries” tab on the right. LCPC is involved with the efforts of both the Green Mountain Byway and Smugglers’ Notch Scenic Highway which run through Lamoille County.

EMERGENCY MANGEMENT

Hazard Mitigation Grant Funding for Property Owner Buy-outs

Through the federal Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), funds are made available to states with federally declared disasters in order to mitigate future damages. Mitigation can be done by structural elevations and floodproofing, property acquisitions, or other infrastructure projects.

What this means for Vermont is that after receiving a federal disaster declaration, FEMA provides the State with 15% of the total cost of storm-related damages for funding projects to mitigate future storm damage. Since 2010, Lamoille County has been affected by six federal disaster declarations. Since 2010, there have been nine federal disaster declarations in Vermont. Mitigation funds are made available on a statewide basis.



Funds are available for municipal projects, such as culvert upgrades or bridge repairs, but funds are also available for projects that benefit property owners. Property acquisitions (“buy-outs”) are the most common project for homeowners. A buy-out is when an eligible organization, such as a municipality or a land trust, purchases a property that then becomes permanent open space. Applicants to the HMGP must be a municipality or a non-profit organization.

The buy-out is a real estate transaction whereby FEMA funds 75% of the total project cost for the municipality to purchase the property, remove any existing structures, and restore the site to green space, such as a park or flood storage space.

Because a property acquisition is a long process, applicants are encouraged to plan in advance of a disaster and keep records of any damage-related costs. Documentation of damages, cost estimates for the project, and a list of eligibility requirements must be met in order to proceed, so starting early to assess your options is recommended. If you or someone in your community may be interested in learning more about a property acquisition through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, please call Taylar Foster or email Taylar@lcpcvt.org.