

DRAFT
INITIAL ANALYSIS AND DRAFT PLAN FOR PARK DEVELOPMENT FOR THE JACOB PARCEL
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November, 2018

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Organizational Overview The Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) is a partnership of seven member communities: Burlington, Colchester, Essex, Jericho, South Burlington, Williston, and Winooski. WVPD's mission is to plan, acquire, and manage lands and waters within the boundaries of its member municipalities in the Winooski River Valley for purposes of conservation, preservation of natural areas, establishment of parks, and resource-based education and recreation. The Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) is a hybrid non-profit and municipal corporation.

The Town of Williston, a WVPD member community, is one of the fastest growing communities in Vermont. In response to development pressures, the town has taken a highly proactive approach to land conservation, utilizing a comprehensive Open Space Plan and acquisition fund to carry out conservation priorities. As a result, the town has assembled a large and growing portfolio of conserved lands and path easements.

Project Overview Peter Jacob donated a 29-acre parcel of land to the Town of Williston, closing the transaction on January 3, 2018. The parcel has high conservation and recreational value, and the Town of Williston and the Winooski Valley Park District (WVPD) are discussing a transaction that would deed the park to WVPD. If this occurs, WVPD would develop it into a natural area, preserved in perpetuity, with a trail system and multiple points of access open to the public.

RECREATIONAL VALUE

The potential of the Jacob parcel as a valued recreational asset is high:

- The parcel is located in an area that is rapidly developing and in need of accessible green space;
- The park offers a diverse landscape with ridgeline, floodplain forest, wetlands, shoreline, and a tributary stream;
- The dense forested habitat abutting a river corridor features a broad variety of wildlife species;
- The public has already been using the site for informal trails and has done some maintenance over time to keep trails open;
- The Park is already a 4-season destination for local walkers and birders;
- The trail system will offer enough variety and distance to accommodate multiple uses and accommodate differing abilities.
- There are three adjacent neighborhoods, each one offering direct access potential for residents;
- On the Trinity Baptist, Green Mountain Power and/or Global Foundries properties, there is the possibility of creating a parking lot and formal trailhead to expand public access.

CONSERVATION VALUE (REFER TO FIGURE 1)

The parcel has been rated as a “top priority” by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources BioFinder system. This means that based on a wide range of data, the conservation value of the Jacob parcel is rated at the highest level.

BioFinder is a comprehensive “mapping tool for identifying Vermont's lands and waters that support important ecosystems, natural communities, habitats, and species...highlights networks of forests, streams and other features that together create the heart and backbone of Vermont's landscape.” BioFinder takes a holistic approach to identifying the most crucial lands used by these components as they work together to create a functional system.

PARK DEVELOPMENT SCHEDULE

It is anticipated that it will take three years and approximately \$50,000 to develop the Jacob Parcel:

Year 1:

- Conduct comprehensive outreach with WCC, adjacent neighborhoods, abutting landowners;
- Complete comprehensive Natural Resource Inventory;
- Contact permitting/regulatory agencies to get preliminary assessment on wetland, shoreline, zoning, cultural resource and any other requirements;
- Contact Trinity Baptist regarding potential access/parking lot on their property;
- Contact Global Foundries regarding potential access/parking lot near solar array;
- Work with GMP on ensuring access to utility corridor is established; getting permission for shoreline access along edge of park; sharing use of their ROW; and potential for sharing resources during park development and future maintenance;
- Complete first draft park design and submit permitting requests to regulatory agencies;
- Establish first access, make basic trail improvements, post project signage to allow public use and build awareness of the new park and development process

Year 2:

- Install main park entrance sign(s);
- Finalize project budget, submit application for Trails Funding and/or other sources;
- Begin fabrication of major elements (bridges, puncheons, steps) for initial access;
- Mobilize volunteers for trail projects, invasives removal;
- Initiate negotiation on potential Conservation Easement with town and land trust.

Year 3:

- Utilize Trails grant funding and/or capital funding to complete construction of parking lot(s) if easements are secured;
- Complete remaining structures and trails;
- Recruit Park Attendant to open and close the park gate (if needed);
- Complete Management Plan for Park;
- If Conservation Easement obtained, record as Warranty Deed in Town records.

ANALYSIS OF POTENTIAL ACCESS POINTS (REFER TO FIGURE 2)

Potential Access “A” A Right of Way owned by the Town commences at the end of Northview Court, and runs over Green Mountain Power property along the utility pole ROW, intersecting with the Morgan Parkway access then turning into the Jacob parcel. Use of this corridor for access would require consultation and support of the Northview Court neighborhood. There may be the opportunity to create a small parking lot and/or formalized trailhead and signage on Green Mountain Power property.



Potential Access “B” Located at the end of Morgan Parkway, this is presently the easiest point of access to the Jacob parcel. There is an existing trail (and decaying boardwalk shown here) that commences at the edge of the Septic Substation parking area, including a wood bridge and puncheon in poor condition. There may be the opportunity to create several parking spaces at the substation, or cars can park on the side of Morgan parkway. Developing this access as a public asset would require consultation with and support of the Morgan Parkway neighborhood, and with Williston Public Works to ensure that access to the septic substation and security issues would not be negatively impacted.

Potential Access “C” This is a privately maintained path created and maintained by a resident on Stirrup Circle. It is unclear what the resident’s plans will be for this path once the park becomes more of a public asset – but it has no possibility for public access unless the owner allowed the public to cross their property. If the path remains, signage can ensure that park users do not encroach on private land.

Potential Access “D” This potential access begins at the end of Primrose Lane, a recently developed street in the neighborhood. This site is very close to the edge of the Jacob parcel, but would require bridge/puncheon work to create a trail.

Potential Access “E” The town owns a path easement across a Global Foundries parcel that is flat, dry, and already walkable – connecting with the existing ridge trail that will become the core trail the park system. If the Trinity Baptist Church is willing to grant an easement, a parking lot could be built (or park users could use the existing lot), along with a bridge and puncheon to create an excellent public entrance to the park. The connecting trail to the park could also serve as an asset for the students attending Trinity Baptist School.



TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

WVPD will design and build a trail system that will allow for multiple points of access, accommodates four season recreation, provide access to the Riverbank, and allow users to complete a loop.



A first step will be to identify and map areas and setbacks within which access should be denied or limited. WVPD will work with regulators to ensure compliance and clearances for wetlands, rare and endangered species, riparian buffers, cultural resources and other potential issues.

As the design/permitting work progresses, WVPD will consult neighbors, seek to secure the access at Morgan Parkway (Access "B" in figure 2), and improve the main existing trail that runs at the top of the ridge. This will provide immediate public access to the new park. Signage with project updates will be posted, including a map of the proposed trail system and contact information for WVPD.

Once a draft park design is completed, WVPD will present the plan to the Williston Conservation Commission and Selectboard for comment before submitting to the Zoning administrator for a permit.



Depending upon how many accesses can be secured, it is anticipated that at least two bridges will need to be constructed to cross the tributary brook. They will be similar to this bridge seen here that was constructed by WVPD at Wolcott Family Natural area.

There are also several locations where puncheons (boardwalks) might be required, as well as possible stairs, erosion control structures, and culverts. These will be designed to prevent park users from creating erosion going off-trail, or damaging habitat and/or endangered species.



MAPPING AND SIGNAGE

The new park will be included in WVPD's Master Map, and a trail map will be created and placed online for easy download/access. This map will be in PDF format to allow for easy production of paper maps. A signage plan will be devised and installed to provide a trail map for park users and information on park policies and rules.

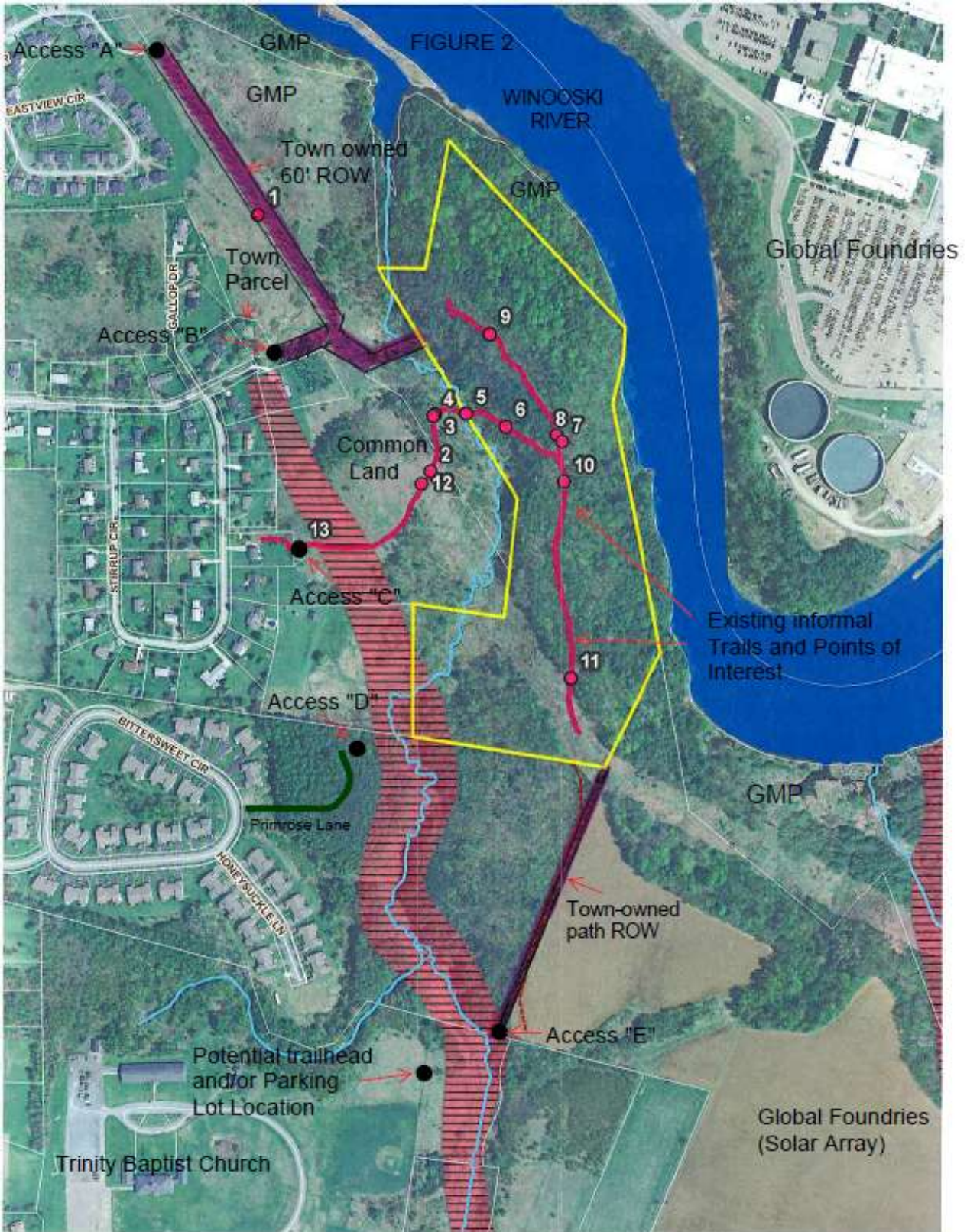
FIGURE 1

FROM VERMONT BIOFINDER: CONSERVATION VALUATION SYSTEM

Dark green area shows "highest priority" for *landscape conservation*, light green shows "priority" areas for *landscape conservation*, and dark grey areas show highest priority areas for *species conservation*.

Red line shows approximate course of unnamed tributary that runs into the Winooski River.





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