

Community Rallies To Revitalize The Groton Rail Trail

By Trish Griswold

GROTON, VT - Neighbors helping neighbors has been a long-standing tradition in the small, rural community of Groton, VT, and newly-elected Selectman Mike Nahmias, who moved to the area in 2017 and has served as Planning Board Chair for several years, has had the privilege of experiencing first-hand the power of

many hands making light work for the Town.

"Groton has got a lot of heart," remarks Nahmias, who estimates that, over the last 50+ years, 250 of the town's 950 citizens have been directly involved in helping Groton's Gateway Project, a grass roots economic growth initiative, come to fruition. The intent of the Gateway Project was

to upgrade Groton's portion of the Cross Vermont Trail (CVT), a four-season, multi-use trail network that spans the State of Vermont, east to west from the Connecticut River at the Vermont/New Hampshire border in Wells River to the shores of Lake Champlain in Burlington. The CVT follows the railbed in Groton for 10 miles, the longest segment of the CVT in any town.

"Groton is located at the highest elevation on the trail, the summit, and we are a destination for trail users as we have campgrounds, lakes, ponds, hiking trails, and the forest," explains Nahmias. "I see us as one of the anchor communities along the trail. Having the new surface in both the town and



Members of the Buckaroos of 302 Snowmobile Club repaired the Stephen Hatch Memorial Bridge, providing safe, dependable snowmobile access to the Cross Vermont Trail.

the forest, we really have the best segment at this time along the trail."

The Gateway Project has been a collaborative ef-

fort, states Nahmias, who has spearheaded much of the Project in recent years and shares a common vision for the future of Groton with Gary Lamberton

from the Buckaroos of 302 Snowmobile Club, Groton Recreation Commission's

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The newly designed Buckaroos of 302 Snowmobile Club trail map showcases snowmobile trails in Groton as well as other noteworthy landmarks and reference points.



The view from Groton's Gateway Park along the Wells River is absolutely breathtaking.

GROTON TRAIL
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other puddles are gone. “[The railroad bed] is vastly easier to ride on now that it has been upgraded, which makes it much more accessible to me at 75 years old.”

Many local businesses, Vermont-based companies, and community volunteers, including: Berry’s Forest Products, Blue Mountain Excavation, Oliver Landworks, Rise and Run Timber Frames, Robco, SE Group and the Buckaroos of 302, have been instrumental in bringing the Gateway Project to life. “Over 1000 volunteer hours were put into this project,” Nahmias says, “and we couldn’t have done this work without them.”

More information about the CVT, including up-to-date trail maps, are available online at <https://crossvermont.org/>. Additional information is available on the Groton, VT, website at <https://grotonvt.com/>.



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Rob Farley, owner of October Siberians Vermont Sled Dog Rides & Adventures, is seen dog sledding in the Groton State Forest in February of 2024.

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Mike Gaiss, and Greg Western, Executive Director of the Cross Vermont Trail Association (CVTA). “This project was the genesis of several like-minded, hardworking Groton residents who were in the right place at the right time.”

Nahmias also credits previous Groton Selectboards, Planning Commissions, and other Town Officers for “their forethought in acquiring the railbed from the State of Vermont when it was offered to the Town in the 1980s, for putting an ordinance in place to preserve the railbed as a recreational property with limited access for vehicles, and for drafting a Town Plan with goals and strategies that laid the groundwork for the Town to continue to maintain and improve the trail and embrace its presence as an economic driver for town businesses.”

Funding for the Gateway Project was made possible through a \$225,000 grant from the Ver-



Repairs to the Stephen Hatch Memorial Bridge have increased safety for nature goers by getting bicycle traffic off the roadway and onto the Cross Vermont Trail.

mont Outdoor Recreation Economic Collaborative (VOREC), a state-run program managed by the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation (FPR) in partnership with the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD). One of VOREC’s primary goals is to “strengthen connections between Vermont’s outdoor recreation re-

sources and the benefits that come from participation in outdoor recreation.”

According to Nahmias, the Gateway Project is multifaceted with many different segments. One portion of the project was to regrade sections of the existing railbed, install and replace eight culverts along the railbed, and



The “before” picture on the left shows the surface of Groton’s rail trail (between the Village and Pine Mountain) prior to recent changes. The “after” picture on the right shows the revitalized trail roughly one mile east, closer to Pine Mountain. Courtesy Photos

install two barrier gates. A landslide in 2023 and a major flood in 2024 caused delays to this portion of the project, but townsfolk and volunteers have persevered despite these challenges.

Another key component of the Gateway Project was to build a 60’ by 100’ all-season parking area near the Vil-

lage Center (at the old stump dump) and a trailhead with 10 parking spaces, making the CVT fully accessible to snowmobilers, bikers, snowshoers, cross country skiers, horseback riders, walkers, runners, dog sledders, etc. Crucial to the project was acquisition of the lower Groton hydroelectric power station property, a 3-acre parcel of land formerly owned by Green Mountain Power, and the development of a master plan for the proposed 12-acre Groton Gateway Park, which includes the former stump dump and gravel pit as well as retention of its current emergency management use.

Signage and wayfinding for the project were completed in collaboration with the CVTA. This included the design and installation of 50 directional signs on the railbed trail, 6 wayfinding signs, one sign on the road, 2 kiosks, 12 winter trail maps, and a digital map of the railbed trail for the Town’s website. Separate from the grant,

Nahmais says, the Buckaroos of 302, whom he refers to as “the unsung heroes of the project,” also repaired the Stephen Hatch Memorial Bridge. These repairs have improved trail accessibility for snowmobilers in the winter months and helped get bikers off Route 302 and onto the trail, increasing safety for everyone.

According to CVTA Board Chair Mike Thomas, the hope is that the newly revitalized rail trail will provide an inviting, safe recreational opportunity for everyone to enjoy the benefits of nature and an active lifestyle. “The Park will be a draw for people to the area, and locals can take advantage of it too with access to the Village of Groton. It ties the community together.”

Former Selectboard Member Deb Jurist is one of many Groton residents who have utilized the CVT for years. “I have been riding my bike on the railroad bed since 1984 when I bought the Stoneshed in Ryegate and built my business, Mountain Meadows Pottery. I have seen a lot of changes over the years for sure. But it still holds true that there is always something to discover on the railroad bed. It might be a green heron, the sound of croakers in the spring, or sumac with leaves in green, yellow and red. The railroad bed never disappoints.”

The revitalized trail, Jurists says, makes for a smoother ride. She recently shared that, decades ago, she and her then 3-year-old daughter nicknamed one of the biggest puddles on the old trail “Sinker.” Thankfully, “Sinker” and the

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