

CASE STUDIES OF BICYCLING & WALKING IN SMALL COMMUNITIES: *MORRISTOWN, VERMONT*



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COVER IMAGES

Front Cover Top: A bicyclist on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT)

Front Cover Middle: A rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) across Main Street

Front Cover Bottom: Information on a business along the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT)

The back cover presents a photo collage of people walking and bicycling in Morristown, Vermont, as observed by the case study researchers while on-site.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this case study was to identify bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and programs in Morristown, Vermont that would be of interest to other peer communities. Morrisville is a village within Morristown, and generally, locals refer to Morristown as Morrisville. Morristown has leveraged the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT), with connections between companies and the downtown core of Morrisville. In addition, it spurred the presence of a bikeshare system for several years. Presently, the LVRT is being used by the Morristown Centennial Library for Storywalks, which integrates active living and childhood literature. Morrisville also partnered with Local Motion, an advocacy group that originated in Burlington, Vermont, to pilot parklets. Today, these parklets remain in the downtown Morrisville core, personalized with art. While for a variety of reasons movement towards implementing bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure and programs have waned in recent years, with new funding being dedicated to complete the LVRT by the state, the town leadership envisions this to bring additional visitors and consequently economic benefits in future years.

INTRODUCTION

Walking and bicycling have become increasingly popular modes of transportation and the existence of dedicated infrastructure to support active modes offers benefits to a community and its residents. While examples of active transportation infrastructure found in larger communities are well documented, this infrastructure can look different in rural communities and documented examples are lacking. This research effort aims to address this gap. Case studies from fifteen communities with fewer than 10,000 residents were developed. The case studies feature existing rural bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure located across five states, to include: Arcadia, LaBelle, and Taylor Creek in Florida; Calvert City, Corbin, and Morehead in Kentucky; Pelican Rapids, Pipestone, and Walker in Minnesota; Ruidoso, Silver City and Truth or Consequences in New Mexico; and Fair Haven, Morristown, and the Town of Hartford in Vermont. Communities were selected using a prioritization process developed through a cooperative effort between the state departments of transportation and the researchers. More details about the research project, Case Studies of Communities of Less Than 10,000 People with Bicycle & Pedestrian Infrastructure, as well as additional case studies can be found at:

https://westerntransportationinstitute.org/research_projects/case-studies-of-communities-of-less-than-10000-people-with-bicycle-pedestrian-infrastructure/

Case studies provide a detailed description of each community including a discussion of recent planning efforts related to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, supporting programs, and partnerships. Site visits, approximately one day per community, were conducted from June through December of 2021. During these visits, researchers collected spatial data and photographs to document existing infrastructure. Within this day visit, researchers also captured photos of people walking and bicycling in the communities, which can be found on the back cover of each case study. They also reached out to local advocates and community leadership. Lessons learned and best practices were documented from reviewing the planning documents and speaking with advocates and community leadership. The case studies aim to provide peer communities with the knowledge and encouragement to support additional implementation of active transportation infrastructure in rural communities across the US.

This case study focuses on Morristown, Vermont.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNITY

Established on August 24, 1781, Morristown, Vermont has approximately 5,451 residents (2019), and has experienced a 0.2% population increase since 2010. Notably, Morristown is the only town in Vermont that has had steady population growth in every U.S. Census from 1791 (except 1850, because of the gold rush). It is located in Lamoille County, in north-central Vermont. The community's boundaries encompass 51.7 square miles, a product of land being surveyed and divided into chunks and then chartered for sale to prospective

settlers. Many of Morrystown's settlers came from Connecticut. The land was purchased, but settlement did not necessarily come until later. Sometimes, settlers would come to find that the land that they had purchased was not as desirable as originally assumed (it was at high elevation, it was swampland, or just generally untillable).

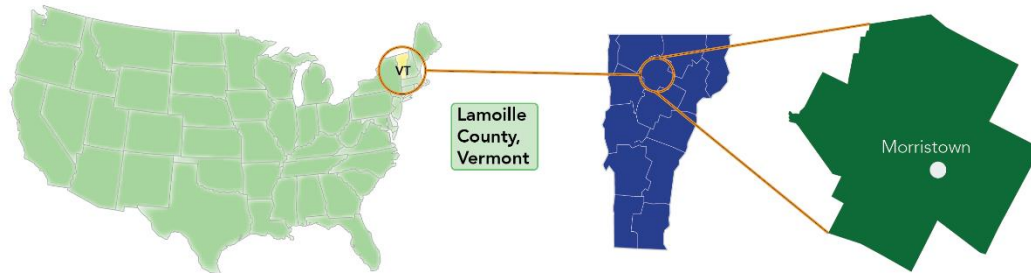


Figure 1: Location of Morrystown, Vermont of Lamoille County in north-central Vermont.

Morrisville is a village within Morrystown, having been incorporated on June 13, 1890. There is a lot of confusion regarding what is Morrisville and what is Morrystown. All of the addresses within the Morrystown boundary have Morrisville mailing addresses because the post office for Morrystown is in Morrisville. Morrystown is the official designation for which demographic and economic data is available.

The following paragraphs provide demographic and socioeconomic data about the community, so that peer communities can better understand similarities and differences between their community and this case study community.

The average age of Morrystown residents is 35.6 years old (2019). Approximately 15.5% (2019) of homes in Morrystown are vacant with the vast majority of that percentage being used as seasonal housing and short-term rentals. Morrystown is adjacent to The Town of Stowe and Stowe Mountain Resort, which is a popular skiing area. While historically Morrystown is a local's town, with prices going up in Stowe, housing prices in Morrystown have been dramatically impacted by buyers looking for seasonal housing in close proximity to Stowe.

Approximately 29.8% (2018) of Morrystown residents are employed within the community; a statistic which may provide a level of understanding regarding residents' commute distance and potential interest in walking or biking to work. According to the 2019 American Community Survey, 4.9% of people in Morrystown walk and 0.5% bicycle to work for their daily commute. Morrystown has a 3.6% (2019) unemployment rate. Morrystown's median household income is \$63,592 (2019), with 5.0% of households earning less than \$10,000 and 5.2% earning more than \$200,000. Approximately 13.6% (2019) of Morrystown's population lives in poverty, as defined by the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14.

COUNTY TYPOLOGY

According to the rural classification methodology used in *Emerging Technology and Opportunities for Improved Mobility and Safety for Rural Areas*, Morristown is located within a county that was designated as a Destination County Type. A Destination County Type offers recreational opportunities and is popular among retirees.

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Morristown is in the Lamoille Valley, which affords residents access to many natural amenities, including swimming and hiking. The village, Morrisville, views itself as the working town next to Stowe (a popular Vermont tourist community). In fact, many in Morrisville are reportedly employed in Stowe (recall from above, only 29.8% of residents are living and employed within the community above). In addition, Morrisville is home to or in proximity to many renowned breweries.

Many of the key destinations reside within Morrisville (Figure 4). A grocery store is located on the outskirts of Morrisville and there is a bicycle rack on the property (Figure 1). There is a bank in the downtown Morrisville core that is also in a historic building (Figure 3).

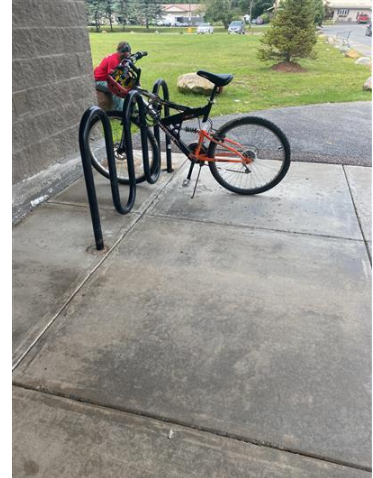


Figure 2: A bicycle rack at the grocery store



Figure 3: A bank in a historic building in downtown Morrisville, Vermont.

A post office is also present in the downtown Morrisville core. There is a library located in the downtown core, and as a Carnegie Library (Andrew Carnegie gave the community \$7,000 in 1911 to build the library), it is also a historic building. A branch of the Community College of Vermont is also located in Morrisville (see the center Figure 4).



Figure 4: City map of Morrystown, Vermont showing boundaries and services.

HEALTH

Copley Hospital, in Morrisville, has completed a community health needs assessment and implementation strategy in 2018. They recognize the tie between biking and walking and being healthier. Bike lanes had been painted with support from Healthy Lamoille Valley, “a

coalition of community organizations and individuals working collaboratively to reduce youth substance misuse and encourage youth to make substance free healthy choices.”

RiseVT is part of OneCare. OneCare is Vermont’s “local, 501(c)(3) Accountable Care Organization (ACO)” who partners with “health care providers to transform the state’s health care system.” RiseVT reports an intent to “Improve health outcomes through the environments where we live, work, learn, and play.” In a video by RiseVT, they identify providing “excuses to exercise” (i.e. providing grant funding to purchase snowshoes that can be borrowed in a community), encouraging organized group walks, and advocating for adding sidewalks and crosswalks.

TIMELINE

A timeline of events is provided in Table 1 to describe major milestones for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure development and supporting programs in Morristown, Vermont. Previous bicycle infrastructure or programs no longer in place are noted as “Pre-2021” in the date column.

Table 1: Timeline of major milestone events for bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Year	Milestone Event
1781	Morristown is established
1890	Morrisville is incorporated
1997	The Lamoille Valley Rail line was proposed to be converted into a four-season recreational trail
2005	\$5.2 million in federal money was secured to transition the Lamoille Valley Rail line into a trail
2014	Morristown bypass is completed, also called the Alternate Truck Route
2015	The Vermont Agency for Transportation On-Road Bike Plan was written
2015	Bike lanes were striped on Congress Street in Morrisville
2015	October 6 - the Morristown Sidewalk Policy was approved by the Planning Council
2015	October 13 - the Morristown Selectboard approved the Morristown Sidewalk Policy
2015	July - Morrisville formalized a free (to residents and visitors) bikeshare program starting with 10 bikes
2015	October - Morrisville’s bikeshare program expanded to 30 bikes, ranging from toddler to adult sized
2017	Morristown Walk Bike Safety Action Plan was published; the bikeshare program was still in operation
2017	Local Motion assisted the community with conducting a pop-up of bump-outs and roundabouts
2017	Morristown Elementary offered BikeSmart, using a trailer from Local Motion; the program targets 5 th and 6 th graders
2017	Two radar speed detection/feedback signs are installed in Morrisville
2019	July 27 - the Morristown Selectboard approved modifications to the Morristown Sidewalk Policy
Pre-2021	Bike lanes on Congress Street were paved over and not repainted
Pre-2021	Morrisville’s bikeshare program sunsetted
2021	33 of the proposed 93 miles of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) had been completed, in large part constructed to date by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST)
2021	Vermont’s governor dedicates \$2.8 million in state funding to match \$11.3 million in federal funding to complete the LVRT

EVOLUTION OF *PLANNING* FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The 2017 Morristown Walk Bike Safety Action Plan intended to identify “short and long term options for road improvements that will increase walking and biking in Morristown...” while also making them safer. The Action Plan also indicated that there are environmental (reduction of the carbon footprint) and health (physical fitness, mental wellbeing) benefits associated with supporting walking and biking. The Action Plan indicated that two radar speed detection/feedback units (#5 in Figure 8) were implemented to “collect speed data and encourage slower traffic.” The plan also references a 2015 Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTTrans) process for developing the On-Road Bike Plan. Community members have identified some challenges of the Selectboard with implementing recommendations from the Action Plan.

A significant change to the community which supports biking and walking was the bypass built around downtown Morrisville in 2014. It took large trucks out of the core of the community. However, while it was envisioned to make additional infrastructure modifications to the roadways then after (i.e., shorter mid-block crossings, bike lanes), reflecting the reduction in turning radii needed as a result of the removal of large vehicles, the roadways (i.e., Portland Street) has yet to be reconstructed.

Local Morristown officials noted that when a parking lot is created in Morristown with ten or more spaces, a bicycle rack must also be included.

The Morristown Sidewalk Policy requires sidewalks on at least one side of the street, in all areas except the Rural Residential Agricultural Zone and Industrial Zone. The Policy identifies the size (at least 60” wide), the thickness (at least 4”, 8” for driveway crossings), the required separation from roadways (at least a 2’ grass strip) and indicates that they must be Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. It also requires application of a sealant to protect them from salt.

EXISTING BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Table 2 summarizes bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure identified across all case study communities, noting which ones were observed while on-site in Morristown, Vermont.

Table 2: Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in case study communities.

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Infrastructure in Case Study Communities	Presence in Morristown
Bicycle Lane	
Bike Rack	X
Shared Lane Markings	
Side Path	
Defined Bike Route (by signage)	
Multi-Use Pathway	
Trail (soft surface)	X
Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) Crossing	X
Mid-Block Crossing	X
Crosswalk	X
Sidewalks	X
Bridges that enable walking or biking	X
Underpasses that enable walking or biking	
Parklet	X
Benches	X
Repair Station/Air Pump	
Speed Bump/Speed Table	
Speed Feedback Sign – Permanent	X
Speed Feedback Sign – Portable	
Signage	
<i>Bike/Ped Crossing Sign with light emitting diode (LED) lights</i>	
<i>Bicycle May Use Full Lane</i>	
<i>Share the Road</i>	
<i>State Law, Yield/Stop for Pedestrian in Crosswalk</i>	
<i>Steep Grade</i>	
<i>Drive Slow in Residential Areas/Please Slow Down</i>	
<i>Traffic Calming Area</i>	
<i>Weight Limitations</i>	
<i>Interpretative/ Wayfinding Information</i>	X
<i>Walking Routes</i>	X
<i>Entertainment District</i>	

The community has an extensive sidewalk network around downtown Morrisville (Figure 4).

Local Motion, originally a bicycle and pedestrian advocacy group only focused on Burlington, Vermont issues, continues to expand their focus to the entire state. Local Motion helped to pilot a parklet in downtown Morrisville. (A parklet repurposes parking spaces into public seating; see the National Association of City Transportation Officials' *Urban Street Design Guide*). The pilot became more permanent with concrete barriers that were personalized with art (#1 in Figure 8).

A phenomenal asset within Morrisville is the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT). When complete, it will run for ninety-three miles from St. Johnsbury to Swanton, Vermont. Funding allocated by the Vermont Legislature in 2021 will accelerate the completion of the remaining sixty miles of unfinished trail. The LVRT is significant in that it connects to other recreational trails in Vermont and Canada: The Long Trail, the Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail, and the Cambridge Greenway. Once complete, the LVRT will be the longest rail trail in New England. Within the Lamoille Valley, the LVRT is particularly appealing, as its one of the few flat bike ride options, thereby making it accessible to the young, the old, and those getting active again.

Within Morrisville, there is easy access to a restaurant (with bike racks (#2 in Figure 8)) and Oxbow Riverfront Park. In the summer, Oxbow Riverfront Park hosts Wednesday Night Live. As the LVRT heads west out of Morrisville's core, it crosses the Lamoille River, across a trestle bridge (#3 in Figure 8) where art has been installed. In addition, the LVRT passes several businesses which provide bicycle racks (Figure 6 and #6 in Figure 8).



Figure 5: Sidewalk in Morrystown.



Figure 6: A business along the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail with a bicycle rack.

Parallel to the LVRT crossing is a bridge for VT-100, which has space on both sides of the bridge for pedestrians (#4 in Figure 8). As identified in the Morristown Walk Bike Safety Action Plan, a speed feedback sign is located on Brooklyn Street (VT-100) (#5 in Figure 8). Several rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB) signs (#7 in Figure 8) can be found in the community to facilitate roadway crossings by pedestrians and bicyclists. A bicycle rack is also located at a public transportation shelter (#8 in Figure 8). A tour of the community's historic and art assets is facilitated by following a green line painted on the sidewalk (Figure 6) and supported by plaques in front of the points of interest (#9 in Figure 8).

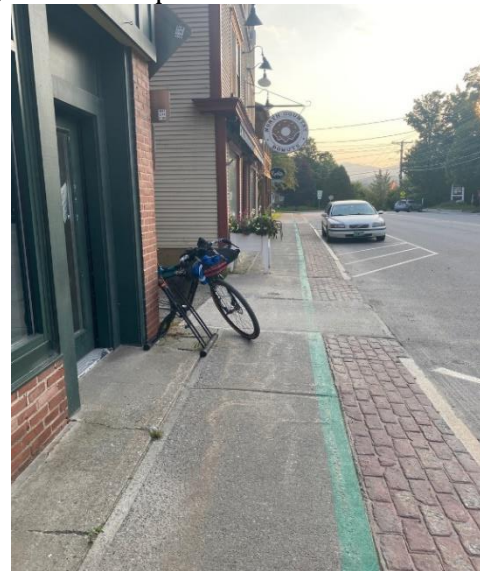


Figure 7: Green line showing the path for the historic walking tour.

The Morristown Centennial Library is encouraging active living, the use of the LVRT, and education among families by posting Storywalks (#10 in Figure 8) along the LVRT. It is part of a statewide effort of providing stories in outdoor places, connecting literacy with activity.

BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE MAP

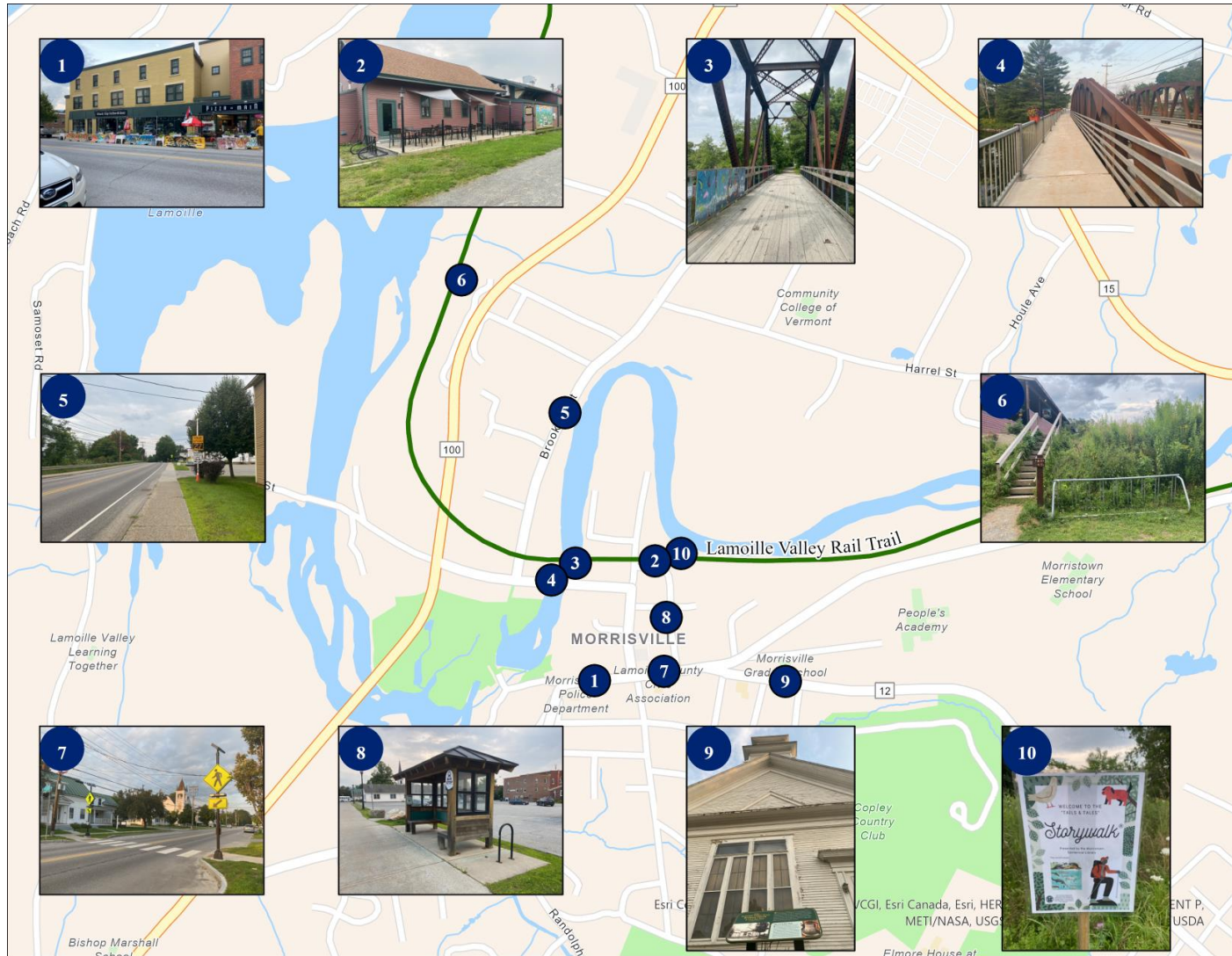


Figure 8: Morrystown, Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Infrastructure Map.

SUPPORTING PROGRAMS FOR BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Morristown has implemented several programs that support walking and bicycling within the community that were observed while on-site or documented in reports (Table 3).

Table 3: Bicycle and pedestrian supporting programs in case study communities.

Bicycle and/or Pedestrian Supporting Programs in Case Study Communities	Presence in Morristown
Demonstration/Pilot Projects	X
Art Walks/Historical Walk/Children’s Walk/Health Walk	X
Sculpture(s)/Statue(s)	
Mural(s)	X
Little Free Library	

At one point, there was a Morristown Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee. It has since been integrated into the Parks & Recreation Committee.

The recreation center within Morrisville had partnered with Local Motion to offer a bike rodeo for children. Bicycle safety tips and helmet giveaways for children have also been offered during Spring Bike Day.

A local resident started collecting and painting bikes, lending them out for community members to use them once the rail trail was open. A formalized program began in July of 2015, with about 10 bicycles. A visitor or resident interested in using a bike as part of the bikeshare system only needed to register at the Morristown Town Offices on Portland Street in downtown Morrisville by signing a waiver. A bike could be borrowed for up to 72 hours; helmets were offered as well. Bicycles could be accessed by opening a combination lock. Bicycles were available at bicycle racks in front of the Town Offices, at Oxbow Park, and at the Morristown Centennial Library. The decision was made to not spray paint the bicycles a unified color (i.e. brand the bikes), so as not to stigmatize users. Unfortunately, tracking the bicycles became difficult. Bicycles were thrown in the river or reportedly sold in other communities in Vermont. As a result, over time the bicycles for the system were lost. And then the coronavirus pandemic happened. Consequently, Morrisville’s bikeshare program no longer exists.

The community has not one, but two bicycle shops. Both shops offer bicycles to purchase or rent and provide repair services. The bike shops have also participated in Spring Bike Day, offering bike tune-ups. Community members have noted that leadership within one of the bike shops helps facilitate an exchange of bikes, which is particularly useful as children outgrow their bikes or an older resident considers a newer bicycle style. One bike shop owner was recognized as “Mr. Lamoille,” voted entrepreneur of the year, and the bike shop earned best bike shop honors as identified in the Vermont Community Newspaper Group.

There has been some interest in having the Morristown Centennial Library host a bicycle library program. The library has a program that supports walking by offering birding backpacks that can be checked out at the library and used for a bird walk. They offer a similar program for snowshoes, which can be checked out by patrons. Patrons can walk the LVRT in the borrowed snowshoes.

PARTNERSHIPS TO PLAN & IMPLEMENT BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The community takes significant pride in implementing infrastructure and programs independently. However, they have been able to leverage the support of Local Motion. They had also historically worked with the Vermont Agency of Transportation for the Morristown Bypass.

FUNDING FOR BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The community has had some successful applications for state funding and others not. In addition, the community has found reporting requirements by the state and federal government to be cumbersome. A local hospital and Village Trustees have each donated \$1,000 to support bicycling and walking.

Morrisville Centennial Library applied for a grant from RiseVT to purchase snowshoes. The provision of snowshoes has been described by RiseVT as facilitating an “excuse to exercise.”

As a part of the Vermont Governor’s FY21 budget, the LVRT will receive \$14.1 million (\$2.8 million from the state, \$11.3 from the federal government) in funding to complete it by summer of 2022.

LESSONS LEARNED

The community was able to offer a bikeshare program that was impactful. At least one resident was identified as having purchased bikes after using the system to rekindle her enjoyment of riding a bike. Making the program more formal, by potentially branding the bikes, could reinvigorate a future program.

Completed plans and studies from around 2016 show a lot of enthusiasm for programs and infrastructure supporting bicycle and walking. While many programs and infrastructure improvements were successfully implemented, interest waned over time. This may reflect the challenges of continued engagement, particularly if a key player experiences life changes. However, the very recent support of the LVRT may be the spark needed to advance additional suggestions from the Action Plan.

THE FUTURE OF BICYCLE & PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE COMMUNITY

The 2017 Morristown Walk Bike Safety Action Plan indicated that with the construction of Alternative Route 100, Morristown streets can be right sized. Unfortunately, this does not appear to have been implemented as of 2021.

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) is a gem of a facility that passes through Morrisville. When complete, the LVRT will traverse ninety-three miles from Swanton to St. Johnsbury. It would be the longest rail-trail in New England. Community leadership anticipates that it will bring in more visitors (including international visitors), and consequently more patronage of local businesses and restaurants.

Community members have envisioned a pump track, with mellow trails for children or adults learning to mountain bike, accessible from Morrisville's downtown core.

KEY POINTS

Some key points learned by Morristown, Vermont is that branding bikes in a bikeshare may be necessary. They have also been able to build on assets in town (LVRT) by offering supporting programs (Storywalk, snowshoes).

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES TO APPLY IN OTHER SMALL COMMUNITIES

The following are successful strategies employed by Morristown:

1. Connect walking and biking facilities (i.e. LVRT) to businesses
2. Encourage walking by creating a story walking path and/or a connection to education

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