

The following documents were scanned on 08/28/2019 by Rama Schneider.

These documents come from a larger packet of paper documents that have been provided by the Williamstown town manager. This packet contains petitions and letters regarding an ATV trails ordinance that have been submitted to the Williamstown select board. These documents reflect the views of the submitter only.

PETITION

To the Williamstown Selectboard Regarding the Proposed ATV Ordinance

We, the undersigned Williamstown residents, property owners and taxpayers, urge the Selectboard to reject the proposed development of an ATV trail system on 20 public road segments in the Town of Williamstown, as proposed for consideration at the June 10, 2019 Selectboard meeting.

This proposal would result in serious safety issues regarding travel on class 3 roads, increased public expenditures on expanded law enforcement to control and regulate this traffic, reduced property values for homes close to the trail system, and additional noise, garbage and associated dumping on and near such trails. We value the peaceful, rural, natural environment in and around our properties in Williamstown and believe the introduction of this trail system will negatively affect the enjoyment of our property, the quality of life and the character of the community. Accordingly, we urge you to reject this proposal.

Respectfully,

Name (signed/printed)	Address
Gordon A. Murray	1586 Pleasant St.
Barbara Smith	2473 Rt 14
Keith Gann	2490 VT Rte 14
Marsha Mart	4520 VT Rte 14
Willie Thylt	124 Spider Web Farm Rd
Theresa Knight	124 Spider Web Farm Rd.
Theresa Murray	1586 Pleasant St.
Kristin Goodwin	1586 Pleasant St.
Richard A. Batchelder	468 Road Pond Road
CAROLAN P. BATCHELDER	468 Road Pond Road
Helen S. Sutton	22 Weir Rd.
William J. Green	22 Weir Rd.
Conrad Lyon	286 Road Pond Road.

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Respectfully,

Name (signed/printed)

Address

BRENDA PALIN *Brenda Palin*
William Palin

251 SOUTH HILL RD

251 South Hill Rd

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Name (signed/printed)

Address

Benjamin Goodwin

1586 Pleasant St

Dan Thorington

5800 VT ROUTE 14

J. Keyler Tazir

5800 VT RI 14

PETITION

To the Williamstown Selectboard

Regarding the Proposed ATV Ordinance

PAGE 1 OF 2

Received
By Sandy Hutchinson
PAID
JUN 07 2019
WILLIAMSTOWN
TOWN TREASURER

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Respectfully,

Name	Address
Rich Chalmers	777 Grandview Rd, Williamstown VT 6/5/19
Tom Karet	777 Grandview Rd, Williamstown 6/5/19
Beatrice Birch	985 Grandview Rd, Williamstown
Mark Siner	985 Grandview Road, Williamstown, VT 05679
Joan Barberi	281 Grandview Rd Williamstown VT 6/5/19
Shirley	205 GRANDVIEW RD WILLIAMSTOWN VT 6/5/19
Sheila Russell	2120 Tower Rd Williamstown VT 05679
Samantha Leach	1626 Baptist St Williamstown VT 05679 6/6/19
Gabe Martin	1626 Baptist St Williamstown 05679
Mark Martin	216 Yang Williams VT 05679
Martin	2637 Baptist ST Williamstown VT 05679
	" " " " "

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

PETITION

Received By
Sandy Hutchinson

JUN 07 2019

To the Williamstown Selectboard

Regarding the Proposed ATV Ordinance

PAGE 2 OF 2

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Respectfully,

Name

Address

6/7/19 *John Robbins* 936 Grandview Rd Williamstown VT
6/7/19 *Patricia Robbins* 936 Grandview Rd. Williamstown, VT

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Respectfully,

Name

Address

Victoria Heft 453 Washington Rd Williamstown VT
Christine Heft 453 Washington Rd Williamstown VT

PETITION

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Respectfully,

Name

Address

6/29/19

Paul M. Chabaux 655 THERIAULT ROAD

Evelyn Hoyt

655 THERIAULT ROAD

Donald Dyer

1284 BAPTIST ST

Donald Dyer

1184 BAPTIST ST

Edmond J. Goff

2486 GRANDVIEW RD

Wayne Weaver

GRANDVIEW RD

Wayne Weaver

May 18, 2019

TO: WILLIAMSTOWN SELECT BOARD

We the undersigned legal voters, residents and taxpayers of Williamstown, Vermont, and all maintaining year-round residences on

Boyce Road and Tripp Road hereby request that said Boyce Road and Tripp Road *not* be included in the proposed ATV Public Access

Trail and Town Highway Network:

NAME	ADDRESS
Laura Oparowski	404 Tripp Rd Williamstown VT
Kathi Flies	22 Boyce Rd, Williamstown, VT
Jessica Oparowski	404 Tripp Williamstown
William Waite III	305 Tripp Williamstown VT
Cody Waite	281 Tripp Road Williamstown VT
Michael Flies	456 Boyce Rd Williamstown VT
Donna Flies	456 Boyce Rd Williamstown VT
Kayla Bott	456 Boyce Rd Williamstown VT
Peter Oparowski	404 Tripp Rd Williamstown, VT.
Daphne Hennig	498 Boyce Rd Williamstown VT
Shawn Boyce	543 Boyce Rd Williamstown, VT
ERIK BOYCE ERIK BOYCE	543 Boyce Rd Williamstown, VT
Mike Mackitche	#262 Boyce Rd. Williamstown, VT.
Kerry Oparowski	404 Tripp Rd. Williamstown, VT.
Brian DeBaigne	367 Tripp Rd Williamstown, VT.
Sue Martin	367 Tripp Williamstown VT
Ronald O'Brien	22 Boyce Rd, Williamstown, VT.
Becky Watson for LLC	4785 VT RT 14 "

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Kate & Dick <fliesk@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 8:52 AM
To: matt@sislerbuilders.com; twnmgr@williamstownvermont.org; Jacqueline Higgins; shauke.go@gmail.com; tom@kavet.net; joparowski07@gmail.com

Chairman Rouleau and Members of Williamstown Selectboard:

As a large landowner and major taxpayer in our town, I will hope you will take seriously my concern over your recent consideration of an ATV Ordinance on Town roads.

Some of the proposed routes pass directly through our family's property owned on both sides of Boyce Rd.

I do not understand why you would consider such a proposal which will completely alter a rural way of life for so many Williamstown residents. An even more concerning note is that you entertained such a proposal with no thought of notifying landowners affected even though you stated that you agreed to notify landowners by mail in the May meeting

Washington Electric Company stops by to talk with a landowner even if they are only going to cut one tree within their legal right-of-way..

The opposite behavior by our elected town officials appearing to try to keep property owners in the dark by meeting only with the ATV group for months without any communication to any of the people affected by this outrageous proposal is concerning.

I would like to understand the research the Board has done with other towns on the supposed bogus financial benefits of ATV trails which are completely disputed by study after study of the State of Vermont. It just does not happen.

We are in the middle of an appraisal and I would like the assessor's opinion on how property values will be affected. I personally would never buy a house located on an ATV trail.

If this proposal goes through, I fully expect tax appeals being initiated by property owner along said routes.

In my opinion Select Board has poorly thought through the consequences and reality of wishes of Williamstown residences in favor of a very small group looking to create our roads as recreational outlet for their off-road vehicles. This proposal also seems to be in complete odds with the 5-year local plan approved by Matt Rouleau, Chair of the Planning Commission.

Please take the time to reconsider your support of this poorly thought out proposal and listen to the residents who pay the taxes in this town, many of whom receive little or no direct benefits from those taxes because of their rural properties.

I was also under the opinion that Select Board members run for office and are elected based on their willingness and ability to watch out for and protect the taxpayers of Williamstown and not succumb to pressure from special interest groups at the expense of taxpaying residents.

Respectfully,
Richard and Kathi Flies
22 Boyce Road

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Becky Watson <rmwlldc@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 8:59 AM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: ATVs

It has come to the attention of Lotus Lake Corporation that the use of ATVs on the "back"(class 3 and 4) roads of Williamstown will be discussed at the June 10th Select Board meeting. Lotus Lake has two businesses which operate on 330 acres of property that abuts Ainsworth State Park. The Park does not allow ATVs to use the trails there. The summer camp (200 people) uses Winchester Hill Rd. daily and has a riding program with horses pastured next to Winchester Hill Rd. During the fall and spring, Vermont Outdoor Discovery Center operates outdoors and uses the Lotus Lake property for programs. It would be extremely disruptive to both businesses to have ATVs using the road. Winchester Hill Rd runs right up the heart of Lotus Lake property. It would be unsafe and a noise nuisance for the businesses and the residents.

Lotus Lake recognizes the need for ATV off road trails in VT but ATVs are unsafe on road ways according to the Consumer Federation of America.

Thanks,

Becky Watson, Property Manager for
Lotus Lake Corporation

Becky Watson
Lotus Lake Camp and Discovery Center
Williamstown, VT

Received By
Sandy Hutchinson
PAID
CHECK #

To: Matt Rouleau, Chair, Williamstown Selectboard
Jackie Higgins, Williamstown Town Manager
6/7/19

JUN 07 2019

WILLIAMSTOWN
TOWN TREASURER

Re: Williamstown ATV Ordinance

We are writing in reference to the proposed ATV trail ordinance up for discussion at the public hearing on Monday June 10.

We feel strongly that adopting the trail network as proposed will have a significant negative impact on the quality of life, property values and safety of those who live on or near the proposed trails.

Creating an authorized and advertised trail network will greatly increase the level of traffic on Grandview Rd.

This increases the danger to us and our animals because we spend a large amount of time outside in and around the right of way. The increase in noise, exhaust and dust will be a major negative impact to our lives. This also makes it more dangerous to drive on the Class 3 section of Grandview Road as it is both narrow and windy. ATV's are not built for on-road operation and this represents a significant danger for ATV operators as well.

As longtime residents of Grandview Rd, we have a good understanding of the delicate balance between the positive and negative aspects of public access to Class 4 roads. We recognize the rights of people to travel town right-of-ways but our experience shows that increased vehicular traffic leads directly to more trash, dumping, destructive partying, trespass and property damage, crime, noise pollution, road degradation and negative wildlife impact.

While a few neighbors driving ATV's is an accepted part of living in the country, a recognized and advertised formal trail network changes the dynamic of the town by increasing ATV, mud truck and dirt bike traffic.

The proposed rules and enforcement governing ATV travel and licensing are inadequate. The 11:00 pm curfew is much too late considering the noise impact of ATV's. And we find it highly unlikely that speed and curfew regulations can be meaningfully enforced outside of high population areas.

We live on Grandview Road because of the opportunity to steward a large block of unbroken head-water forest, supporting diverse wildlife habitat and a healthy forest ecosystem. We and our neighbors have conserved close to 800 acres with the Vermont Land Trust in hopes of preserving the increasingly rare natural community that this unfragmented block of forest represents. This includes a soon to be state-recognized 55 acre Ecologically Significant Treatment Area based around a rare hotspot of 11 vernal pools. As is clearly laid out in the Williamstown Town Plan, natural communities such as this are a valuable resource that should

be treated with great care. This is especially true as the pressure of development and fragmentation increase. Establishing an active ATV trail and increasing human impact through the center of this conserved block will have the opposite effect.

Five households that we were able to contact on Grandview Road felt an ATV trail would have a negative impact on their lives and were against the proposal. We feel that ATV trails should not be located in areas where a majority of residents feel this way.

Attached please find a petition with signatures of residents on Grandview, Tower, Baptist, and Young Roads in opposition to the proposed trail network. This is only a small slice of the negative feedback we expect will come forward because landowners were not officially notified and many people do not know the details of the plan.

There must be a better way to find a balance of recreation interests that does not so negatively affect the places that we live.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Richard and Ann Chalmers in cursive script.

Richard and Ann Chalmers
777 Grandview Rd
Williamstown VT 05679

CHECK # PAID

JUN 07 2019

TOWN TREASURER

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Victoria Heft <heftvictoria@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 9:33 AM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: ANTI ATV petition

Good morning, I'm not totally sure to whom we should send our signatures, but we are very opposed to allowing widespread atv travel on our road and attached is a copy of the petition with our signatures

Thanks very much!

Victoria heft

From: Kate & Dick <fliesk@aol.com>

To: fliesk <fliesk@aol.com>

Date: Thu, May 16, 2019 8:29 am

Members of the Williamstown Select Board:

We read with deep concern the Board's considering opening considerable portions of Williamstown to ATV traffic between 7 am and 11 pm.

In fact, the Board appears to be somewhat down the planning phase, already discussing civil fines and the roads being considered.

Our hope is after reading this proposal in the paper, the residents of Williamstown will rise up in opposition to this folly.

Our town is made up of miles of back roads purposefully inhabited by residents for the peace and quiet of the countryside.

Houses are located close to the road, often with pets, horses and other farm animals, including cattle and sheep, right out to the road's right-of-way.

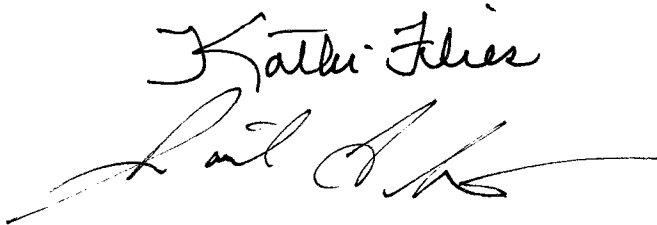
To have Chairman Rouleau "have no objection" is a shocking lack of awareness of concerns the residents of the town may reflect. Our own property including our residence and a quiet summer cottage rental at the southern end of Tripp Rd. which would undoubtedly be used as a "turnaround" as the ATVs would have no access to Rte. 14, border on at least 3 of the roads on your suggested list.

We are totally opposed to this proposal as it will forever change life on these back roads, and in the Village of Williamstown. The Town presently has very limited ability to police traffic on it's roads, let alone add another layer of policing.

The present litter, vehicles "mudding" up and down the roads, fire crackers thrown at livestock, guns going off in the middle of the night, are all presently not controlled by the town, not to mention additional drinking. How does the Select Board honestly believe this proposal will improve the quality of life in Williamstown?

Our hope is, once again, Williamstown residents will let Chairman Rouleau and other Board members know that they are completely out of touch.

Respectfully, Richard and Kathi Flies, 53 Years Residents at
22 Boyce Rd.
Williamstown, Vt. 05679

The block contains two handwritten signatures in black ink. The top signature is 'Kathi Flies' in a cursive script. Below it is a longer, more stylized signature that appears to be 'Richard Flies'.

Jacqueline Higgins

From: HollyandBrian Rawson-Ahern <hollyandbrian@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 8:14 AM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: Williamstown Proposed ATV Ordinance

Please distribute our letter to the Selectboard and other interested parties for the June 10 hearing. Many thanks!

To: Matt Rouleau, Chair, Williamstown Selectboard
Jackie Higgins, Williamstown Town Manager

09 June 2019

As property owners of circa 1199 Gandview Road, when we built our camp over 25 years ago, we chose Grandview Road because of the quiet. To be able to experience absolute silence from engine noise is a rare blessing in today's world. It sensitizes our ability to tune into the natural world and understand and appreciate that we are far from the only inhabitants on the planet.

As it happens, the camp we built is but a stone's throw from the class 4 section of Grandview Road being considered for use for ATV traffic. The onslaught of such traffic would destroy the purpose of the camp and, we fear, greatly reduce our property's value. Who would want a camp intended for silent reflection with a 3-season barrage of noise?

It is with this understanding of the importance of the natural world that we are working with the Vermont Land Trust to add our property to the growing area of conserved land surrounding the Class 4 portion of Grandview Road. We believe that experience has shown us that conserving land in support of the natural world and ATV traffic are at cross purposes. A brief look at studies exploring the impact of ATVs on the local environment clearly indicate that allowing ATV traffic has a deleterious impact on the surrounding area, thus seriously hindering the intended purpose of land conservation.

We are greatly disturbed by the prospect of this ordinance for the reasons discussed above and ask the Selectboard to reject this proposal. Thank you for your consideration.

Holly Rawson and Brian Ahern
667 Chaffeeville Road
Storrs, CT 06268

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Jessica Oparowski <joparowski07@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, June 09, 2019 9:33 PM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: ATV Concerns
Attachments: Screenshot_2019-05-17-06-53-22.png; Screenshot_2019-05-17-06-55-26.png; Screenshot_20190609-204715.png

Hi Jackie,

I am writing to share my concerns with you about the ATV access to town roads. I am very concerned with the safety issues that come with the potential to open town roads to ATVs.

Some of my concerns are about use of alcohol, speeding, and lack of alertness to children, and domestic animals along the roads. Environmental impact is also a great concern. Erosion, vernal pools, wetland preservation, and displacement of fauna habitat.

The ATV group has been stating that their focus is for families and the community. With some of the posts that they have presented on social media and emails I have received; it seems like there is a lack of care and concerns for the greater community.

The ATV club is stating that they will be policing their own group from illegal and careless behaviors, but I have doubts about this since members of their community are posting publicly pictures that show their use of alcohol while using ATV.

I am attaching a few pictures of what I have seen on social media sites that show a lack of respect for the larger community.

I am also upset by the lack of information given to town residents about the proposed trail/road use. The town seems to be with holding information, and the ATV club is as well. Why are the minutes from the last select board meeting not public? The towns people are not being informed of a very large issue that may adversely influence many tax payers, residents, and traveling public. Why is the ATV club keeping their proposals so evasive?

I think the whole town needs to receive public notice in a timely manner about the proposed ATV/Road use before any decisions are made.

Thank you,
Jessica Oparowski

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Erika Boyce <eahdesign@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 10:30 AM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: ATV Proposal

Hello Jacqueline,

I am writing to inform you of my initial opposition of the proposal to open select roads in the town of Williamstown to ATV traffic through the VASA Club.

My opposition to this proposal, comes from lack of information provided to me. I can only come to this conclusion based on my beliefs of what added traffic would mean on my already busy road: safety concerns, traffic violations/lack of patrol, litter and noise.

I feel it is in the best interest of the town to have the ATV Club members provide the full proposal and detailed map to the residents who would be directly affected by this proposal, as well as the time get any questions we have answered before we go any further.

With more time and information, I believe we could all come together and find a conclusion that the ATV Club and residents can be happy with.

Thank you,
Erika Boyce
Boyce Road

Jacqueline Higgins

From: Shaun Boyce <shaun@sboyce.com>
Sent: Monday, June 10, 2019 9:55 AM
To: Jacqueline Higgins
Subject: Open Road Access for ATVs

Hi Jacqueline,

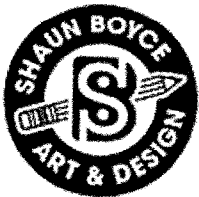
I am reaching out concerning the new proposal for open road access for ATVs. After speaking with a lot of non-atvs member club residents there is concerned about this new proposal, and it is clear that there is **not** support for the access on public roads due to traffic concerns and the issues that arise from additional traffic on back roads i.e. Litter, noise, traffic violation, air pollution, etc.. There also has not been adequate time given to have an open discussion so that both sides of this topic are heard as this new proposal was only discovered by most after last months select board meeting.

Additionally, there was rumor of a public mailer sent out to notify residents which has not happened, there also has not been a map shared with the proposed roads. And lastly, tonight's discussion will be the first time that a formal public hearing has been open to the public to discuss this topic, which just seems to lack any sort of due process for Williamstown residents.

I hope that we can have a respectful discussion that includes everyone's thoughts on this topic, and that the board does not make a hasty decision without seeing all points of view on this issue. As a resident on Boyce Road, I am not in favor of more traffic, and I am not in favor of opening public roads to ATVs. However, if ATVS would like to create a trail head, and use of private land to find trail access that is perfectly fine with me I just don't want to see ATVs on my road.

Sincerely,

Shaun Boyce



SHAUN BOYCE
DESIGNER /// ILLUSTRATOR /// ARTIST
(802) 399-1600 /// sboyce.com



Lotus Lake Camp

4785 VT RTE 14

Williamstown, Vermont 05679



est. 1952

CO-DIRECTORS

Beth Watson Allen
Dorothy Martin Milne
802-433-5451

Dear Jackie,

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal for ATV's to be allowed to use class 3 and 4 roads in Williamstown. I am concerned for the following safety reasons:

1. We operate a children's camp where Winchester Hill Rd. bisects the property, and the road is used daily by campers and staff for hiking.
2. We have a horseback riding program which operates adjacent to Winchester Hill Rd. in a riding ring, and the horses could be affected by the noise.
3. The horseback riding program also uses Winchester Hill Rd. for trail rides twice a week in the afternoon. I worry about the safety of the horse and riders.
4. We have overnight hikes on which campers and staff hike up Winchester Hill Rd. ATV's would definitely affect the hikers' safety.
5. We are concerned about the noise factor affecting our residences on Winchester Hill Rd as well as the noise disturbing the horses while in the riding ring and while pastured.
6. According to the Consumer Federation of America, ATV's were not designed for roadways, and it has been shown that a majority of the ATV accidents occur on roadways.
7. I question where the ATV's would go from Winchester Hill Rd. since they aren't allowed in Ainsworth State Park, and who would be monitoring the operating of ATV's?

Sincerely,

Dorothy M. Milne, co-dir
Lotus Lake Camp

Mr. Rouleau:

I attended the Town Meeting last night and wanted to send my thoughts as a follow-up.

- The meeting was definitely needed, as judged by the number of attendees.
- I thought you handled the meeting dynamics well: it could have developed into a "cat fight". You limited the speakers comment time + halted interruptions + gave most all a chance to talk + and kept calm yourself. Ending with the formation of a committee to determine "next steps" was a satisfying enough way to end....and go forwards. Good!
- We heard about the meeting by chance, when friends mentioned it to us. Was there an announcement sent? if not, this should be done in the future, on this sensitive topic.
- For the next meeting I would suggest:
 - have it in the gym so that there are enough seats
 - have a microphone that you can use
 - have a meeting coordinator walk the mic to those who want to speak so that all can hear. I, and others around me, heard only about half of what was said.
 - it would be good if you, as the meeting leader, repeat a very short summary of what you heard: "I understand your message is.....". This assures the speaker was heard correctly and the rest of us heard too.

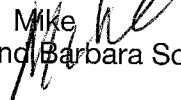
Here's what I thought were the key points:

- This is all about "Quality of Life" in the community: the riders want more access and easy recreation....and we homeowners want the peace and quiet and lack of traffic and commotion we expect (and enjoy) in rural Vermont. This is why we have chosen to live where we do.
- The young woman near me who spoke about the changes that have occurred since the road where she lives was opened to ATV traffic put it clearly: more traffic, more noise, concern for her kids, congestion. I think that she is "The Experiment Already Done". We need to gather more from her and others where this has been done; I.e., Homeowners around Washington, etc.
- Another woman suggested gathering data/information on Impact before any decisions are made. We have the time and volunteers to do this, via survey or phone calls to people on these roads....and via conversations with other Select Board members from those areas: did they make the correct decisions and what might they have done differently? This is easy information to get and learn from.
- As part of the information gathering, BE SURE TO INTERVIEW THOSE PEOPLE WHO LIVE ON THE ROADS TO BE AFFECTED.
- I think most might not mind if the ATV traffic was limited to residents of Williamstown. This would limit the number of riders, and, the riders would be more conscientious knowing their neighbors were watching.
- I saw the map and it had one long line circling the area. But, will this be the limit of the track, or is this just the first step in a wider access plan?
- One of the riders said: "Just give us a chance". I'd key off that and, if this moves forward to Approval, make the OK "Conditional to Review and Re-Approval" in one to two years. This was suggest by another person also.

My concerns are the "Peace and Quiet". We love Vermont for all the reasons cited above. Although our road is not on the map, we are adjacent to those roads. Periodically, ATV riders do venture up our marked "Dead-End class" IV road, usually fast and with a lot of noise. It's disturbing. I'm concerned that riders (Vermonters or out-of-staters for sure), will take the liberty to "explore" roads adjacent to those approved, and we'll end up with noise and congestion affecting our way-of-life. That would be a true tragedy for us, and surely affect the significant investments we've made in our home and property.

As I used to say to people when we were in the midst of a big decision: "We need to not go fast, just when we need to be going slowly": gather information, listen to input, and make a learned decision.

So, a very long note to you. Feel free to circulate this to other Board members for their awareness. And, I was asked if I wanted to join the committee, and said YES. I hope to get a call. This is a very important and long lasting decision and change: Quality of Life + Property Values and Investments.

Sincerely,  Mike
Michael and Barbara Schmidt
433-6114

THOMAS E. KAVET
985 GRANDVIEW ROAD
WILLIAMSTOWN, VERMONT 05679-9003 U.S.A.

TELEPHONE (802) 433-1360 FAX (866) 433-1360
CELLULAR (802) 433-1111 E-MAIL tom@kavet.net

June 5, 2019

Matt Rouleau
Chair, Town of Williamstown Selectboard
P.O. Box 646
Williamstown, VT 05679-9003

Dear Matt,

I am writing in connection with the Selectboard's consideration of an ordinance proposing the development of an ATV trail system on 20 public road segments in the Town of Williamstown, as announced in connection with your June 10th Selectboard meeting.

As a long-time ATV owner and enthusiast, and professional economist who has analyzed local economic and tourism impacts associated with such developments in both VT and NH, I believe this ordinance, as proposed, could result in significant unintended adverse impacts.

While sympathetic to the desire to provide safe trail options to local residents, this proposal would result in serious safety issues regarding travel on class 3 roads, increased public expenditures on expanded law enforcement to control and regulate this traffic, reduced property values for homes close to the trail system, and additional noise, garbage and associated dumping on and near such trails. Many of us value the peaceful, rural, natural environment in and around our properties in Williamstown and believe the introduction of a trail system that includes nearly 18 miles of Town roads, would negatively affect the enjoyment of our property, the quality of life and the character of our neighborhood and community.

I have heard talk of outsized economic benefits from the development of the proposed trail system, but having performed hundreds of such economic analyses, I can assure you any such effects are likely to be miniscule, if positive. While there will be some small economic benefits from increased local sales of gasoline, food and incidentals, these are likely to be offset by negative economic impacts from decreased property values, increased public enforcement and signage costs, road maintenance (both public and private) and displacement of tourists (including vacation homeowners) who seek a quiet, pristine, natural experience, in contrast to the noisy urban settings from which they come.

In addition to these negative externalities, studies have shown that ATV riders have lower per diem expenditures than almost any other type of tourist, tend to be predominantly local (lowering net beneficial impacts), and, except for food, make expenditures concentrated in goods with relatively low shares of local sourcing and content (i.e., gasoline, ATV machinery, parts, etc.). All of this results in minimal, if positive, or negative net economic impacts.

Environmental impacts associated with off-road trail systems are also almost uniformly negative, affecting air quality, water quality, soil systems and wildlife habitat. The Grandview Road portion of the proposed trail system, for example, will bisect an 800 acre area of recently conserved land with the Vermont Land Trust. This property has been made available to local residents for horseback riding (including local commercial trail rides), hiking, wild berry collection (by a local church group), commercial foraging, bird-watching, Christmas tree and holiday wreath branch harvesting (for another local church) and other non-motorized activities. It includes the headwaters to the First Branch of the White River and rare vernal pools. A proximate motorized ATV trail is inconsistent with, and potentially damaging to, this unique local resource.

It would be far less environmentally detrimental if the proposed ATV trail system could utilize the existing VAST trail network – especially between Williamstown and Washington. Has this been pursued? I believe this would be both safer for ATV riders and less adverse to the affected neighborhoods, since the VAST trails are already locally accepted motorized trails (one of which currently traverses a portion of my property) that rarely require class 3 road travel.

I have attached a recent article from VTDigger, written by Steve Wright, former Commissioner of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, outlining a few additional facts concerning ATV use of public roads. I hope you will consider these perspectives and the impacts outlined herein in making your judgment on this issue. At the very least, it seems like minimizing the total trail mileage and locating it on existing VAST trail routes would mitigate many of adverse impacts and still provide access to local and neighboring town trail networks. Please let me know if you or the Selectboard would like any supporting analysis or study citations for the information presented herein.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'John' or similar, written in a cursive style.

Attachment: VTDigger article of March 1, 2019, "Should ATV's be allowed on town roads?"

VT Digger Article - Steve Wright: Should ATVs be allowed on town roads?

Commentary

March 1, 2019

Editor's note: This commentary is by Steve Wright, of Craftsbury, who was commissioner of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department from 1985-1989.

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hen Gov. Phil Scott visited Island Pond recently, more than one resident asked to have state land opened to ATVs. It reminded me of similar ATV proposals 30 years ago; as a state bureaucrat I had a duty to consider them. Today's deliberations about ATV use have expanded to include allowing ATVs on other "public land," specifically town roads. This conversation is unfolding in many Vermont towns, mine included. The casual observer may have noticed that opening roads to ATVs has increased illegal ATV use in Orleans County. A call to the sheriff can confirm. Violations observed include riding through state waters in a wildlife management area, and driving on state highways and town roads not open to ATVs.

ATVs are not manufactured for on-road use, and do not qualify as "motor vehicles" regulated by the U.S. Department of Transportation. States have the authority to allow ATVs on public roads. In Vermont, the Legislature gave that authority to towns. Yet, the ATV Safety Institute, the not-for-profit subdivision of the national association for ATV manufacturers, Specialty Vehicle Institute of America, states in their Tips and Practice Guide for the All Terrain Vehicle Operator, "ATVs are intended for off-road use only. Never operate an ATV on public roads, and always avoid paved surfaces. ATVs are not designed for use on public roads." This disconnect sends a mixed message to towns, residents, and ATV users.

Consumer Federation of America, a 50-year-old association of nearly 300 nonprofit consumer groups, states in their 2014 report, ATVs on Roadways: A Safety Crisis: "In spite of warnings from manufacturers, federal agencies, and consumer and safety advocates that all terrain vehicles (ATVs) are unsafe on roadways, for several years an increasing number of states have passed laws allowing ATVs on public roads. The majority of ATV deaths take place on these roads and action is needed to reverse this dangerous trend."

Those promoting ATV use on town roads cite economic benefits to retail businesses, and their "right" as taxpayers to use municipal roads. These claims, like most town decisions, can be considered in the context of costs and risks to taxpayers. The tire design that makes ATVs safe off-road, makes them unsafe on roads. It's a tough sell to ignore physics.

If we look at town roads through the "public lands" lens the considerations include public safety, traffic, enforcement, noise, signage (required by statute), and road maintenance. Public safety, traffic, and noise indirectly affect a town's financial stability because each can influence property values and quality of life that drives housing purchases. (A test case in Nova Scotia resulted in a 15 percent reduction in property value on a residence adjacent to an ATV trail.) Enforcement, road signage and unanticipated road maintenance add direct costs.

Questions about public safety, noise, and enforcement are at the heart of the "do we, don't we" vote.