

Mascoma River Local Advisory Committee  
C/O UVLSRPC  
10 Water Street  
Lebanon, NH 03766



March 25, 2019

Rivers Management Advisory Committee (RMAC)  
C/O Rivers Management and Protection Program  
NH Department of Environmental Services  
29 Hazen Drive; PO Box 95  
Concord, NH 03301-0095

**Re: Surplus State-Owned Land Review – Westboro Rail Yard, NH CORD Application # 2019 SLR 001**

The Mascoma River Local Advisory Committee (MRLAC) is pleased to present comments and recommendations for your consideration regarding disposal of the Westboro Rail Yard property in West Lebanon. We hope to provide some context to this request through local knowledge of the area and interests surrounding this property. After our most recent meeting on 3/19/2019, we prepared this summary of the issues surrounding the property, specific comments and corrections on the application submitted, our recommendations for your action, and maps illustrating how these points fit into a spatial context for your reference.

**Summary of Issues:**

- Redevelopment of this site is a key component of the Master Plan for West Lebanon and there is significant public interest in redeveloping the site for recreation, including river access. The MRLAC management plan includes improving recreational access as a priority goal, the Mascoma River Greenway organization is successfully developing a rail trail through the decommissioned part of the railroad ROW, and the local Rotary Club “String of Pearls” project is working to develop a park system along the rail corridor and the Mascoma River. This community interest in recreational development along with mixed use development at River Park north of the site is moving towards increasing overall community development in this area. To this end the City has requested and tentatively secured funding in the Governor's budget to aid in cleanup of the Westboro Rail Yard site to begin redevelopment.
- Access to the site from 12A is planned to be redeveloped along with the 12A bridge work currently scheduled for 2021 to avoid an access route to the redeveloped site that crosses the tracks. The abutting residential property recently purchased by the city would be used to develop this improved access.

- The City has submitted a request to either purchase or lease parts of the Westboro Yard, but this request has been placed on hold by NH DOT because both parties are waiting on funding for demolition of the structures to be finalized. NH DOT is not willing to entertain a request by the City for all the land in the Westboro Yard because they believe some areas (the Rymes location) is still viable for railroad use.
- There is significant local opposition to this lease in part due to safety concerns raised by the Lebanon Fire Chief related to large quantity propane storage in the densely populated West Lebanon central business district. Rymes has offered to installing some, but not all the requested safety measures.
- This is a state historic site and the proposed Rymes lease would increase the land developed for the propane operation from the existing asphalt pad into the historic railcar turntable area. This expansion would stifle the use of this historic and geometric feature as part of the layout of a redeveloped site. Highlighting the historic use of this property would augment the existing small railroad museum in White River Junction, VT.
- There is land on state property with two spur tracks to the north of the railroad ROW, part of which contains one active transloading operation and should be explored as an alternative location for the Rymes operation along with any other public or private lands abutting the rail corridor that do not interfere with municipal development efforts.

**Comments on Request for Surplus Land Review Action:**

The following item numbers correspond with the NHDOT/Rymes CORD request for surplus land review action, dated by NHDOT 1/10/2019.

Item #	Comments
3	Improvements for “long-term use” conflict with proposed redevelopment by the City of Lebanon. Short-term use (2 yrs) while redevelopment progresses would be more desirable.
5	The proposed use is within the historic turntable area (turntable has been removed). Future development as city property on a historic site could retain this geometric feature as part of a proposed layout if not leased and developed by Rymes.
7	This figure is inaccurate, the lease is relative to the Westboro Rail Yard parcel (9.4 acres), not the entire railroad ROW. The 65,100 sq ft lease area is 16% of the Rail Yard parcel (not <1%).
8	Access to the property is also available from Bridge St through other state-owned land, via rail, and S Main St (12A) through a gated drive near the 12A bridge. Access from 12A is to be redeveloped using an abutting parcel recently purchased by Lebanon along with the 12A bridge reconstruction scheduled for 2021.
9b	The existing “public access” described is a paved pathway under Bridge St with no direct water access except down a rip-rap slope at the bridge footings, there is also no parking that serves this location. The potential redevelopment of this property would provide actual recreational access to the Connecticut River at the Rail Yard location.

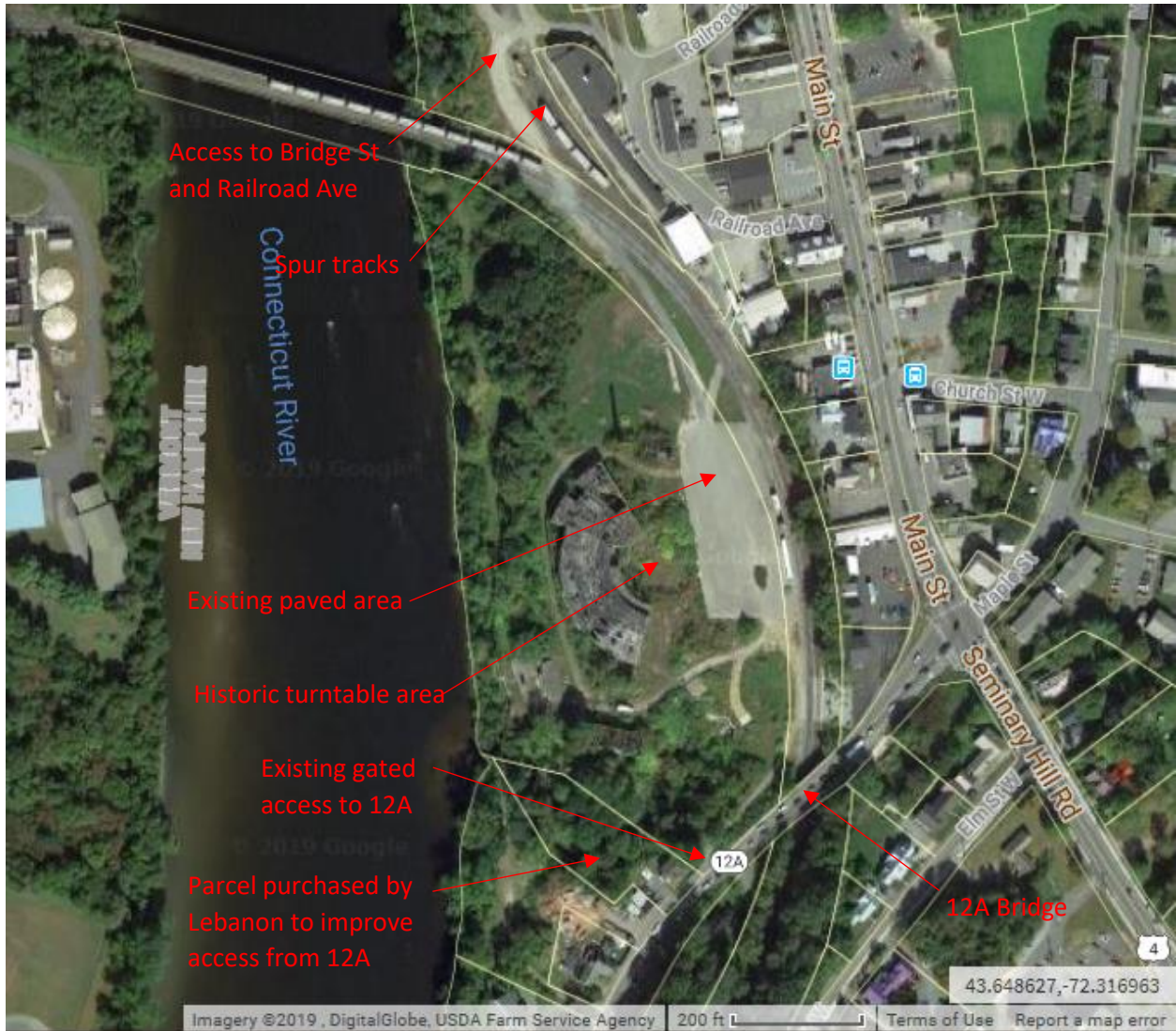
**Recommendations:**

- We recommend the lease not be approved at this time because it does not meet your review criteria for state land disposal. This propane operation would hinder municipal revitalization efforts, because the site would be better used for redevelopment of the West Lebanon central business district, because the redeveloped site at large would provide river access, and because propane storage is not the most scenic or environmentally responsible development type to place adjacent to the Connecticut River on a historic site.
- This request for state land disposal is premature and should at least be placed on hold until the budget for redevelopment is finalized. If approved, NHDOT and Rymes would be directly undercutting the City of Lebanon and the Governor's plans to redevelop this area in the West Lebanon central business district.
- If the lease is approved, we recommend the duration be shortened from 5 years to 2 years. This will allow the lease to be terminated via the currently proposed exit clause following the securing of funding for cleanup and the redevelopment of access to the site along with the planned 12A bridge work in 2021. If the lease is approved, we also recommend reducing the lease area to the limits of the existing asphalt pad to allow redevelopment efforts to occur in the historic turntable area while Rymes continues operation.

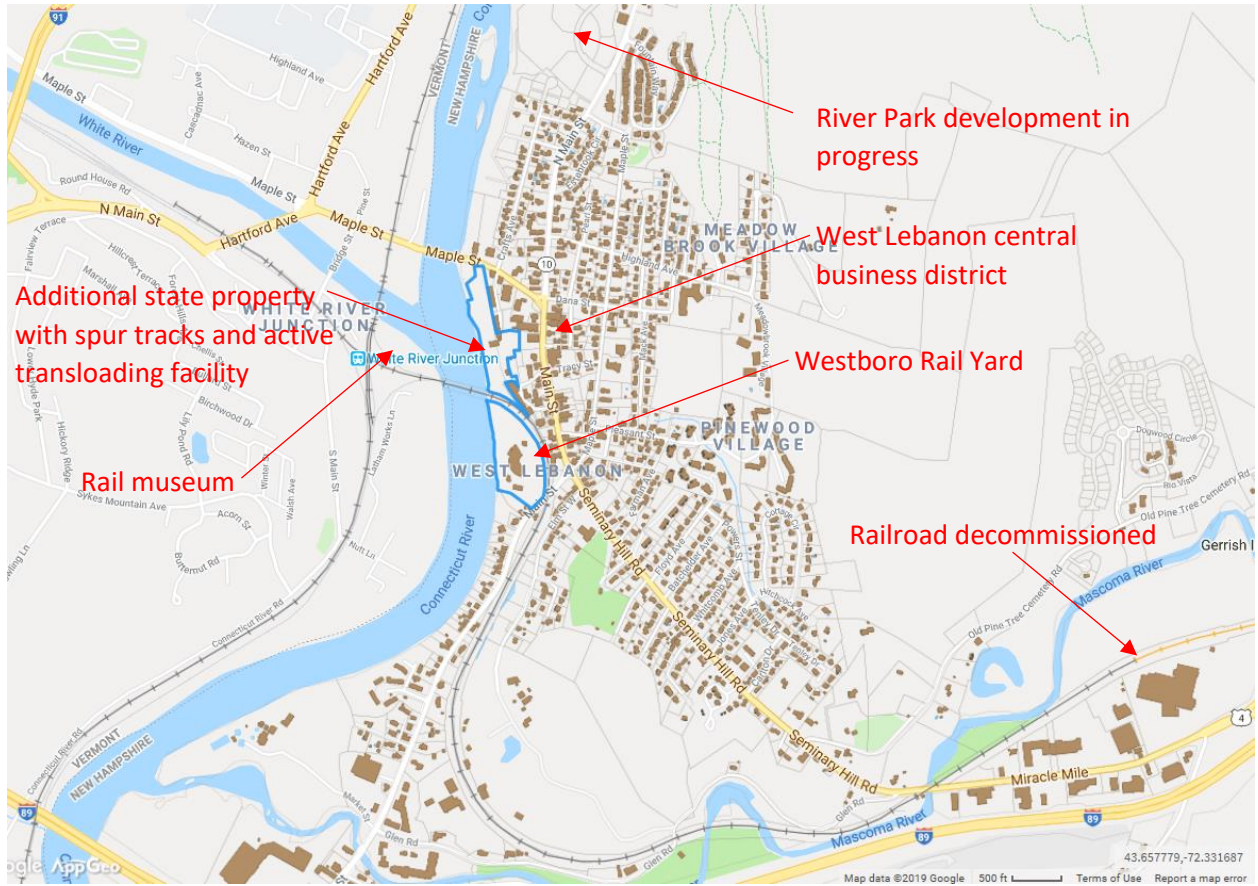
We sincerely appreciate your time and consideration regarding this matter and hope this information provides valuable insight to the implications of your decision. Please do not hesitate to contact us regarding any of the information presented here.

Sincerely,

The Mascoma River Local Advisory Committee



Map 1: Relevant features of Westboro Rail Yard parcel



Map 2: Context map of related community features