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Memorandum

To:	Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
From:	Judith Williams Ehrlich, VTrans Historic Preservation Officer
Copy:	Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer
	Elizabeth Peebles, State Architectural Historian
Regarding:	Proposal to Remove 9596 VT Route 36, East Fairfield, Vermont
Date:	May 6, 2025

Project Overview: VTrans recently purchased the parcel at 9596 VT Route 36, East Fairfield, VT, which is located adjacent to and within the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) right-of-way (ROW). The parcel contains two buildings – one constructed in the 1940s and one constructed in 1905.

The building was constructed in the late 1940s as a feed store owned by the Ralston Purina company of St. Johnsbury and serviced by the railroad. For the past few decades, the building has been used as storage and is now in poor condition. It is located on a curve very close to the Route 36 roadway and recently a car crashed into the northern elevation (roadside). The building shows evidence of rotting ceiling and frame and appears to be leaning. The property does not have water or sewer but is wired for electricity. Because of its deteriorated condition and to improve safety at this crossing, VTrans proposes to remove this building.

The second, smaller building was constructed in 1905 by the Cary Maple Sugar Company. It was used by the company as a warehouse serviced by the railroad while the company was in operation (1905-1932). There were approximately 15 warehouses like this one constructed alongside railroads in northern Vermont, though only a few remain. VTrans proposes to mothball the building to protect it from the elements and vandalism. A longer-term vision is to incorporate this building into use for the LVRT trail. Because this building is not the subject of this project, it is not discussed in detail in this memo.

Removal of the 1940s building is anticipated to be funded with state dollars only so VTrans has considered the potential impacts to the historic resources per the requirements of 22 VSA 14. Per the state statute, VTrans must afford the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to review the project as the Ralston building is considered historic and its removal an Adverse Effect. VTrans is therefore seeking consultation with the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

This memo includes a brief history of the LVRT, a summary of previously completed research and reviews related to the LVRT, a discussion of the history and significance of the 1940s Ralston building, and an analysis and recommendation of effect. Relevant images are included at the end of the memo.

LVRT Brief History: The LVRT encompasses the former 93-mile railroad corridor in northern Vermont between Swanton and St. Johnsbury. The LVRT includes the former railroad right-of-way (ROW), ballast, and associated features of the now-defunct Lamoille County Railroad (LCRR; also called the LVRR). The LVRR began as a segment of the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad-Vermont Division, which was constructed between 1869 and 1875. In 1916, the line, under new management, was renamed the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Railroad (SJ & LCRR). In 1948, the railroad was reorganized as the St. Johnsbury and Lamoille County Railroad. When it ceased full operation in 1972, it was known as the Lamoille County Railroad. Excursion trains ran in the 1980s, but the track was not maintained. The LVRR ceased operation in 1994, and in 2002 the State of Vermont began the process of converting the LVRR to the LVRT.

The Lamoille Valley Railroad is historically significant as a good example of rural, east-west rail service in northern New England. The railroad contributed to the development of rail communities such as Sheldon Junction, Morrisville, Hardwick, and St. Johnsbury. The railroad provided valuable freight and passenger service to the communities along its route, stimulating industrial, commercial, and agricultural growth.

Previous LVRT Section 106 Reviews: Design and permitting for the LVRT began in 2008. Project segments were reviewed under the project name "Swanton-St. Johnsbury STP LVRT" and identified with the individual segment numbers. The early work on the LVRT involved inventory and permitting the project. Trail conversion included clearing and grading, drainage remediation, bridge/culvert/cattlepass replacements and rehabilitation, sign installation, and crossing improvements. The Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) began construction on the LVRT in 2013. VAST completed approximately 33 miles of trail which was funded using 80 percent federal dollars through VTrans, with the remaining amount from town assistance, private donations, and VAST's own investment.

VTrans assumed responsibility for construction of the remaining 49 miles of trail in 2018. The remaining construction includes the rehabilitation of 37 bridges, several hundred culverts, and approximately 20 cattlepasses, repairs to approximately 50 embankment washouts, and dozens of roadway crossings. In 2020, funding for the completion of the LVRT under an accelerated schedule was approved due to the efforts of Governor Scott, who allocated $2.8 million of the Governor's FY2021 budget towards the construction of the LVRT. This funding was matched by $11.3 million in federal funds.

In the summer of 2021, an additional segment opened between Sheldon and Swanton expanding the trail to include a total of 45 miles of completed trail. Three more segments - Danville to Hardwick, Wolcott Village to Morrisville, and Cambridge to Sheldon - were opened for public use on December 15th, 2022. The final remaining segment, Hardwick to Wolcott Village, was completed in March 2023.

Prior LVRT Historic Resource Identification: As noted above, the LVRT project has been reviewed in multiple segments, but the resource identification process was conducted holistically. In 2009, VHB completed the Above Ground Cultural Resource Report for VTrans and VAST, in which the LVRR was determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The report includes an Infrastructure Database identifying all of the structures on the LVRR and recommending their eligibility for listing in the National Register. Since then, the LVRR ballast and features have been impacted by various actions including the removal of ballast for floodplain restoration projects; removal of rails and ties; bridge removal and replacement; and maintenance actions resulting from washouts. In 2010, VHB completed the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Resource Identification Report (RIR) in conjunction with VTrans and VAST.

VTrans concurred with the findings of the 2009/2010 reports. Since that time, VTrans and VAST have applied these reports to Section 106 memos and NEPA documents for the LVRT project.

While not explicitly stated in the early studies, the period of significance can be identified as the length of the time that the railroad operated, whether for passenger or freight. The period of significance spans 1877-1972. The study did not evaluate non-railroad-built buildings, such as the building that is the subject of this memo: 9596 VT Route 36 in East Fairfield.

Ralston Building, 9596 VT Route 36 –- Brief Description and History: The building at 9596 VT Route 36, East Fairfield, is a one-story, rectangular 70' x 30', shallow gable roof, wood-frame building on concrete piers with standing seam metal siding and a metal roof and a full width, shed roof front porch on the gable end. A large central entrance that resembles a sliding freight door is accessed from the front porch. A large window opening is to the left of the front door. The side elevations of the building have five three-pane small, hopper windows set just under the eaves. On the rear elevation is an outline of the small addition that was removed. Its gable roof ghost lines are visible, as well as a large freight door, similar to the one on the façade. See Figures 6-10.

The interior of the building is simple. Original wood flooring remains, and a drop ceiling has been added. Wallboard covers the wood sheathing. There is a small office at the front of the building and the office walls are clad in flushboard siding and a ladder is constructed into the wall. A second section across from the office has been walled off, presumably for separate storage. A large evaporator remains in the building. See Figures 11-12.

The previous building in this location was the East Fairfield depot, constructed ca. 1898 (see Figure 2). The East Fairfield depot was removed in the 1940s. The nearby Sheldon Junction depot was removed in the early 1940s (per rail valuation sheets). Passenger rail service decreased in popularity in the 1930/1940s and at that time, the St. J & LC was facing bankruptcy, and the Boston & Maine acquired the St. J & LC. Needing to cut costs, some buildings were removed. Additional evidence of this removal date is found in a set of highway plans that date to 1950. The plans show a different building in this location ("feed store" – see Figure 3) with a small "RR Sta" addition.

Given that the building on these plans does not match the footprint of the original depot, it is fair to assume that the depot had been removed by 1950, and perhaps the railroad leased space in this small addition. Passenger service ended in 1956 on the St. J & LC, at which time this portion of the building would no longer be needed. It does not appear in the 1962 aerial (see Figure 4) so the small station appendage had been removed by that time.

The railroad valuation plans note "Ralston" on this building (see Figure 5), a reference to the Ralston Company (later Ralston Purina), whose main Vermont factory was headquartered in St. Johnsbury, VT. One end of the St. J & LC RR. Ralston operated from the 1948-1974 in St. Johnsbury and had multiple buildings along the St. J & LC to serve as warehouses or stores, including one in nearby Sheldon Junction and this one in East Fairfield. During this time, the building served as a feed store. Feed stores located adjacent to the railroad in villages were common because these buildings were served by the railroad. With additional feed stores/warehouses adjacent to the rail line, it is fair to assume that this building would have benefited from the railroad.

In 1991, the Soule family of East Fairfield purchased the former Ralston building, and the Allen Soule Company, which bought and sold evaporators, used it for storage. Research indicates that, after the Soule

family, the East Fairfield Station LLC (Brendan O'Shea and Kyle Saltman) owned the building in 2024. VTrans then acquired the building in December 2024.

Archaeological Resources: Jeannine Russell, VTrans Archaeology Officer, reviewed the proposed project area, which is located near the Black Creek. The general area is considered archaeologically sensitive and there are several previously recorded sites northwest of the village within a mile of the project area. However, the area around the building to be removed was previously disturbed by the construction of the building, construction of the railroad, the parking area, and the removal of the addition from the rear of the building. VTrans does not anticipate the project will have impacts to archaeologically sensitive areas provided the work to remove the building occurs within the footprint of the previously disturbed areas. Please see the image below for details.

Historic Significance & Eligibility Discussion: The LVRR/LVRT has been previously determined eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion A – Transportation – for being an influential and major component of the State's railroad network as it led to significant expansion of commerce and industry. Additionally, the LVRT is eligible under Criterion C – Architecture and Engineering – for its design and representation of a railroad. Although some components have been removed (ballast, tracks, and ties), the railbed and infrastructure (150+ bridges, culverts, cattlepasses) and buildings (depots, for example) remain.

As mentioned, prior evaluations of the LVRT only included buildings constructed by the railroad (such as passenger and freight depots). The 2009 VHB Resource ID identified eligible historic districts; East Fairfield was not recommended as a historic district. However, a later railroad study – the 2024 railroad BUILD grant mitigation survey - conducted by VHB for VTrans, evaluated buildings within the railroad ROW, whether they were built by the railroad or by private entities. Some of these include grain elevators, creameries, ice houses, storage bins, warehouses, stockyards, and lumber yards. These buildings constructed within the railroad ROW were constructed to benefit from the transportation corridor and represent private investment in the trackside infrastructure.

A review of the rail valuation sheets, as well as a review of the 2024 VHB survey of the 281 miles of state of owned railroad, reveals that it was common to find a building constructed by a private business within the railroad ROW, often near a depot in a village. Examples of similar non-railroad-built buildings within the railroad ROW include:

- Charlotte (on the Vermont Railway (VTR)): Creamery (no longer extant except the foundation)
- Florence (VTR): HP Hood & Sons Creamery
- Arlington (VTR): Miles Lumber Buildings
- Mt. Tabor (VTR): E.C. Crosby & Sons Feed & Fuel Complex
- Barton (on the Washington County Railroad (WACR)): FC Brown Warehouse, 199 Lake St
- Barton (WACR): HP Hood & Sons Milk Station, 3 Lake Street
- Barton (WACR): Ice house, originally storehouse for Vermont Butter Tub Company, 189 Lake St
- Newbury (WACR): 8 Engle Drive Warehouse

Judging by this list from the 281 miles of state-owned rail lines, only a handful of these buildings remain within the railroad ROW throughout the state of Vermont. Certainly, many other businesses constructed buildings outside of the railroad ROW to benefit from the railroad stopping in their towns; however, non-railroad-built buildings within the railroad ROW would not have been built within the ROW (thereby having to negotiate with the railroad corporations) unless those specific companies were benefiting from (i.e. using) the railroad transportation.

Feed stores (or similar) are a distinct building type related to the railroad in Vermont and across the country. They are typically one-story gable front buildings (sometimes with false fronts), constructed parallel to the railroad tracks with full width front porches, large front doors, small windows set close to the eaves on the side elevations, and/or freight doors set on the trackside.

It does not appear that the Ralston building was constructed with trackside freight doors or a side platform; rather, the only platform is on the front of the building. However, given that feed stores were constructed by private entities, there was not a standard railroad company design to follow. The Ralston building has been minimally altered on the exterior and interior. One change to the exterior is the removal of the small railroad station addition. The removal of this small addition does not affect the integrity of the feed store, as the building operations related to freight for a greater period than as a small passenger stop. Once the original depot was removed, the passenger service was second to the commerce and freight service in this location. Similar to agricultural buildings, buildings within the railroad ROW often changed their use. It was more economical to reuse a building than to demolish it and construct a new building. Although its setting has been somewhat altered by the conversion of the railroad to the rail trail, the Ralston building retains its historic integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

It is worth noting that there were feed stores located outside of the ROW along the St. Johnsbury & Lake Champlain corridor, including one in Walden, VT. A full list of these resources would require a close reading of the 94 miles of railroad valuation sheets.

While the railroad-built buildings such as the passenger and freight depots, section houses, engine houses and others are the obvious contributing elements to a railroad historic district (passenger and freight depots), these unique commercial buildings in the railroad ROW help to tell the full story of the railroad's operation. The St. J & LC Railroad relied on freight to sustain itself; passenger service was always secondary. Its freight included talc, asbestos, limestone, gravel, grain feed, lumber, Christmas trees, and milk. Passenger service declined beginning in the 1930s and ended in 1956, but freight remained profitable and persisted for decades after passenger service ended. Feed stores such as the Ralston building represent the evolution of the railroad. The depot was removed when passenger service declined, replaced by a business that could invest in the trackside infrastructure and profit from use of the railroad through rural Vermont. The small station addition on this feed store was removed once passenger service ended. In the 1970s many important businesses utilizing the freight services of the railroad closed operations in Vermont, including the Ralston Purina plant in St. Johnsbury in 1974. With that, the East Fairfield building no longer would have benefited from the railroad and the railroad freight stopped soon after.

The Ralston building is eligible for listing as a contributing resource to the Lamoille Valley Railroad Historic District. Under Criterion A it represents the commerce and industry that benefited from the use of the railroad transportation corridor and the impact it had on the economy of the state. And under Criterion C, it is an example of a privately constructed and privately owned building operated by a significant business that benefited from the St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain (later St. Johnsbury and Lamoille County) Railroad.

Analysis and Recommendation of Effect: Due to the condition of the building and the siting of the building, VTrans proposes to remove the Ralston building to improve safety. The building is in poor condition. The walls are leaning, and the car collision appears to have weakened the already failing east elevation. The building sits on concrete piers. Its location creates poor sight distance at this curve of VT

Route 36, and at the adjacent LVRT crossing. While the design of the LVRT attempts to direct people to cross at a 90-degree angle to the road, most trail users will cross diagonally, adding to unsafe conditions. See Figures 13-14. Removal of the building will improve sight distance for drivers and trail users.

Removal of the Ralston building would result in an Adverse Effect to the building itself and to the LVRT. However, the removal of the Ralston building would improve the safety of the intersection. Additionally, the building's poor condition would require substantial funds to rehabilitate to a usable condition. The long-term vision for this parcel is to create a trail pause place with benches and interpretive signage.

As mitigation, VTrans proposes to prepare a Historic Resource Documentation Package for the Ralston building prior to its removal.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Images and Illustrations Follow on Next Page

Figure 1: East Fairfield, VT. The building in the red circle is the metal clad building. The building in yellow is the Cary Maple Sugar Co. building. Both are within the LVRT ROW.

Figure 2: The historic East Fairfield depot, no longer extant. The building in the center of the photo remains – 9534 VT Route 36. The railroad runs diagonally across the image, on the opposite side of the depot in this image.

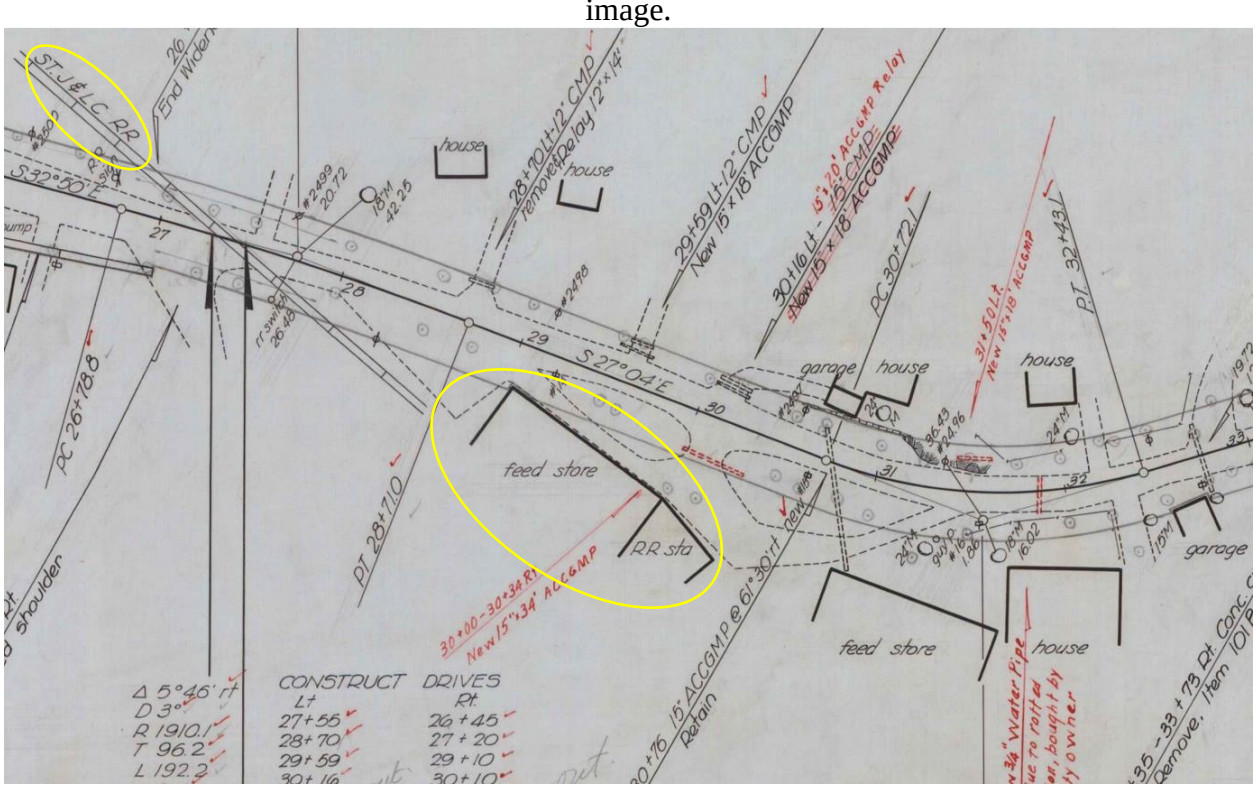

Figure 3: Vermont Agency of Transportation plans, 1950. VT Route 36 is the roadway through the center of the image. Note the St. J & LC RR as well as the "feed store" and attached "RR Sta". The second feed store to the right of the "Feed Store/RR Sta" building is no longer extant.

Figure 4: 1962 aerial, VCGI, shows only a rectangular building without its small angled “RR Sta” addition. The larger feed store to the south remains in this 1962 image. It was removed ca. 2000.

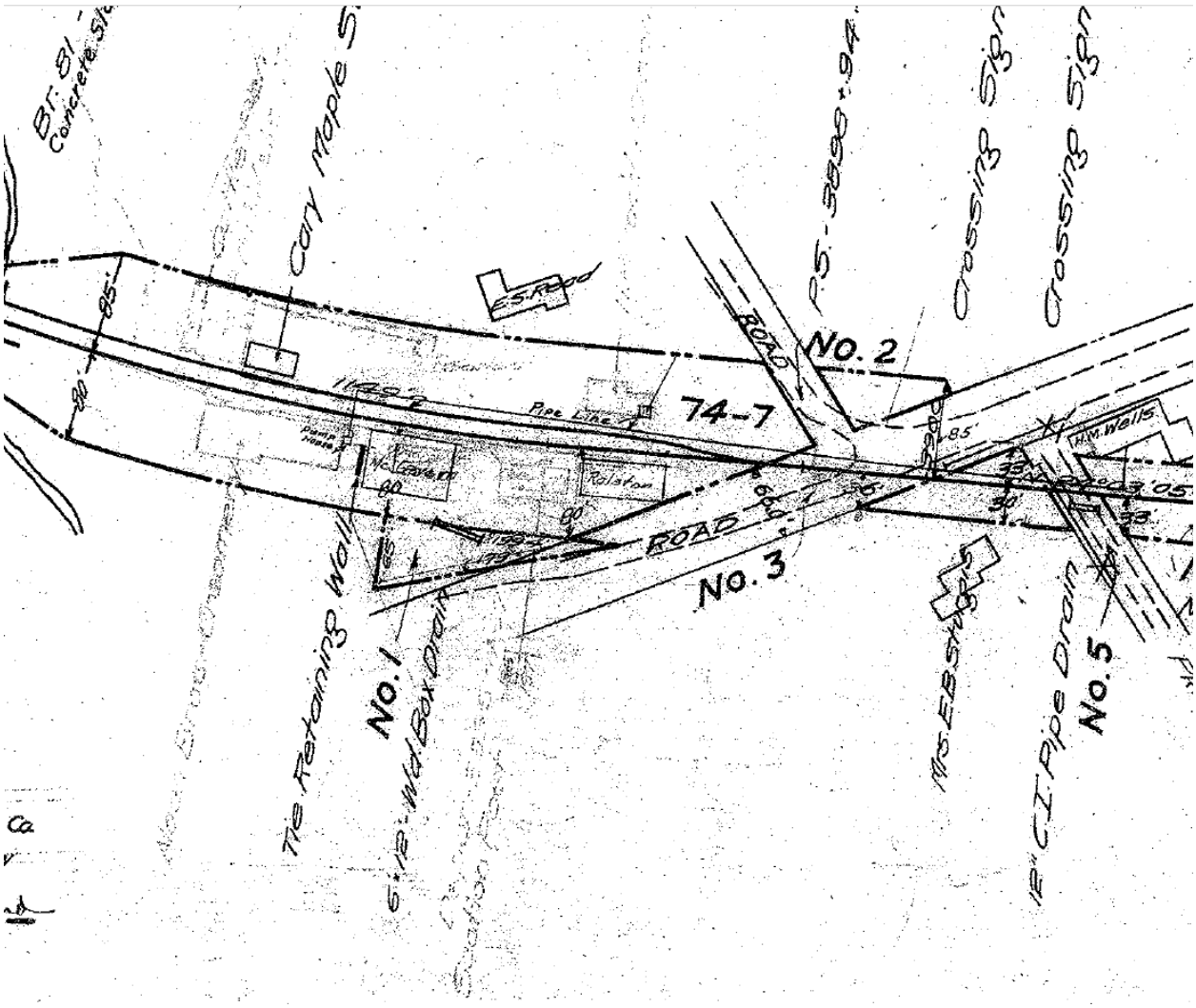

Figure 5: Railroad valuation sheets. Note the “Ralston” building and “Cary Maple Sugar Co.” buildings, which still stand. The “McGovern” building was removed by 2000. And grayed out in this image, at left, is a “Creamery” building. The building between the “McGovern” and “Ralston” buildings is not quite legible and no information is known about it at this time.

Figure 6: Ralston building façade. Note the platform and central, wide freight door. The front porch likely served as the loading platform. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 7: Rear of the Ralston building shows the outline of the former “RR Sta” addition where it was attached. Note the large freight door left of center. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 8: East elevation of the Ralston building. Evidence of the recent collision is seen at right. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 9: West (trackside / trail side) elevation of the Ralston building. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 10: View of the Ralston building from VT Route 36. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 11: Interior of the Ralston building, looking to the rear. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 12: Interior of the Ralston building, looking to the front of the building. The storage area at left is not original. The office at right is original. Photo by VTrans, April 2025.

Figure 13: Google Street View (July 2023) shows the LVRT crossing (in blue). The yellow line shows the prior railroad crossing, and the route that many trail users take. The red circle shows 9596 VT Route 36. Note the curve in VT Route 36 just beyond 9596.

Figure 14: Google Street View (July 2023), just west of 9596 VT Route 36 (left) and 9617 VT Route 36 (right, red roof) shows the poor sight distance created by the curve in the road. The curve obstructs a driver's ability to see trail users crossing VT Route 36.

Aerial view of project area showing the general outline of the approved impact area for the project. As noted above, all work shall take place from previously disturbed areas.