Wolcott Street Commercial Area

EDA Flood Mitigation – Big Picture Overview

Viability of the Wolcott Street Commercial Area is Critical for Hardwick and the Region.

Wolcott Street is one of the most economically critical areas in Hardwick and one of the most flood vulnerable.

The area includes:

- The town's only full-service grocery store
- Both local banks
- The former pharmacy site (now a pharmacy desert)
- Major employers and service businesses
- A key state transportation corridor
- Regional Busing Company
- Proximity to the wastewater treatment facility

Repeated flooding threatens not just individual buildings, but the functioning of the town and the region.

What the EDA Study Shows

The EDA-funded flood analysis shows that no single project fixes Wolcott Street flooding. The best impact comes from multiple, coordinated actions working together to reduce flood depth, velocity, and duration.

Think of this as a system.

The Four Projects and Why They Work Best Together

1. Sawmill Lane / Sawmill Park Area

Status:

- 3 of 7 buyouts completed
- Remaining buyouts pending
- No new design work until buyout outcomes are known

Why it matters:
This area is a choke point where floodwaters back up before reaching Wolcott Street. Over time, buyouts allow:

- More room for floodwaters
- Less pressure downstream
- Future floodplain restoration potential

Selectboard takeaway:
This is a long-term pressure release valve. It doesn't solve flooding alone, but it is foundational.

2. Lamoille River (Floodplain Restoration)

Status:

- Studied through EDA and other modeling efforts
- Identified areas where river behavior contributes to backwater flooding
- Funding received for engineering and implementation – to begin early 2026.

Why it matters:
Wolcott Street flooding is strongly influenced by Lamoille River backwater effects, especially when combined with heavy tributary flow.

Selectboard takeaway:
Addressing the main river improves outcomes for everything upstream and downstream including Wolcott Street businesses.

3. Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) Embankment

Status:

- Issue identified through EDA modeling
- Newer concern as trail improvements post-date earlier studies
- Discussions just beginning

Why it matters:
The rail trail embankment acts like a low dam during floods, increasing water depth and slowing drainage in the Wolcott Street area.

Selectboard takeaway:
This is a recently recognized constraint. It must be explored carefully with partners, but it appears to affect flood behavior.

4. Jackson Dam

Status:

- Feasibility study underway
- Results expected in early 2026

Why it matters:
Jackson Dam influences how fast and how much water moves downstream during storm events.

Selectboard takeaway:
This project addresses upstream flood timing and volume, which directly affects Wolcott Street flood peaks.

Why the Projects Should Be Viewed Together

Each project addresses a different part of the flooding problem:

Taken together, they:

- Reduce flood depth
- Reduce flood duration
- Reduce repeated business losses
- Improve long-term economic stability

Taken individually, they provide limited benefits.

Bottom Line for the Selectboard

- The EDA work confirms what repeated flooding has already shown: Wolcott Street flooding is systemic
- There is no silver bullet
- The Town's role right now is to:
    - Keep these four projects moving
    - Coordinate partners
    - Use each funding opportunity strategically
- This is about protecting the town's commercial core, not just mitigating water

Project Timelines & What to Expect

1. Sawmill Lane / Sawmill Park (Buyouts & Floodplain Space)

Past / Current

- 2023–2024: Severe flood impacts; area identified as a priority
- 2024–2025: 3 of 7 buyouts completed
- 2025: Remaining buyouts still pending

Next Steps

- 2025–2026:
    - Complete or resolve remaining buyouts
    - No new park or floodplain design until buyout outcomes are known

Why the timeline matters

- Floodplain restoration only becomes feasible after buyouts are finalized
- Sequencing avoids redesigning the same area multiple times

Selectboard will see next

- Buyout status updates
- A future concept discussion once property outcomes are clear

2. Lamoille River (Floodplain Restoration – Design & Implementation)

Past / Current

- 2020–2024: Multiple modeling efforts, including EDA-funded analysis
- 2024–2025: EDA study confirms Lamoille River backwater effects on Wolcott Street
- 2025: Funding secured for design and implementation

Next Steps

- **Winter 2025–2026**:
    - Project kickoff
    - Detailed design begins
    - Field verification and engineering refinement

Why the timeline matters

- This is the first Wolcott Street project moving from study into action
- Directly targets backwater flooding that impacts businesses and infrastructure

Selectboard will see next

- Verification of the selected water resources engineering firm
- Progress updates as design advances
- Implementation sequencing following design completion

3. Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) Embankment

Past / Current

- 2023–2024: Repeated flooding highlights embankment impacts
- 2025: Issue newly elevated for coordination

Next Steps

- 2025–2026:
    - Technical discussions with VTrans and LVRT managers
    - Clarify feasibility, constraints, and responsibility

Why the timeline matters

- This is a recently identified constraint, not a stalled project
- Requires coordination with a state-managed asset

Selectboard will see next

- Initial findings and options
- No immediate cost decisions, this phase is about feasibility

4. Jackson Dam

Past / Current

- 2024: Identified as a key upstream influence
- 2025: Feasibility study underway

Next Steps

- **Early 2026**:

    - Feasibility study results released
    - Determination of viable actions and next funding steps

Why the timeline matters

- Decisions must be grounded in engineering and safety analysis
- Study results guide whether and how this project advances

Selectboard will see next

- Formal presentation of feasibility findings
- Clear explanation of options, costs, and constraints

Big Picture Timing

- **Winter 2025–2026**: Lamoille River Floodplain Restoration design and implementation begins
- **Early 2026**: Jackson Dam feasibility results available
- **Beyond 2026**: Coordinated implementation across projects as pieces align

The key takeaway: these projects are moving on different timelines by design, but they work best as a system.