Jeff Whittingham
In-State Candidate

MRG 2019 Candidate Statement, Bio & Photo

Name: Jeff Whittingham, Age 43.
Residence (town/state): Waitsfield, VT

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Born and mostly raised in Niskayuna, NY. As a child I grew a strong affinity for the Adirondacks, paddling and hiking from my grandparent’s cabin in Newcomb, NY. My parents were not outdoor enthusiasts and it wasn’t until I had transportation of my own that I discovered winter sports. That discovery has had a profound impact on my life and was a factor that eventually led my wife (Jennifer) and I to raise our family in Waitsfield, VT. Speaking of my family, I have two daughters, Seneca, age 12, and Clara, age 9, while the majority of my (and Jenn’s) extended family lives outside of New England. I mention this, as the Mad River Valley is not only our home, but has become a community we rely on as we would family.

In high school I was a competitive runner, with much greater interest in running in College than coursework. That eventually led me to start my professional career in the US Navy where I learned many key life and professional skills, such as IT infrastructure, which spring-boarded me into the professional realm upon discharge. At 23, I found myself living in Boston and working at a management consulting firm, but the dot-com boom was heating-up and far more interesting. I soon took a role as an interactive web developer at ZDNet and have primarily been in interactive marketing and software development for the past twenty years. As the dot-com boom fizzled, I went back to consulting, but at a boutique agricultural consulting firm on Boston’s North Shore where ran small and medium scale software and IT infrastructure projects for our clients.

During this time in Boston my competitive side re-emerged in force. My daily 12 mile bike commute to work became 20, then 30, then 40. I started racing mountain bikes and within a few years had a professional license. Jenn & I had already started looking for a small winter crash-pad, summer visits to the MRV had expanded our search to full-time residences. In the winter of 2006 our friends took us to the Ski & Skate sale at Waitsfield elementary. The school was exactly where we wanted our newborn daughter to eventually go to; we closed on our house in Waitsfield in late December of that year. Selfishly, I hoped the endless dirt climbs would take my bike racing to the next level, while equally excited to not drive for winter sports.

Then life hit. Changes made by the GW Bush administration dramatically changed the landscape that my consulting firm worked within and we closed the business. The Vermont job market is not terribly robust and not having a college degree was limiting my options. I started classes at UVM in economics while working full-time. I choose economics as I wanted a well-balanced education that would provide greater insights into the skills I’d developed in the professional sphere.
After that fairly bumpy period, the past 10 years have been truly amazing. There have been many ups and downs, but so many more positives. A knee injury and subsequent surgery taught me patience and helped re-center my energy on family and career. My current role is that of Director of Product Management at Dealer.com. I’ve spent the majority of my career in client facing roles, understanding their goals and objectives, and aligning them to solutions we can deliver within time and cost constraints, as well as limiting technical debt to maintain. Outside of my career, I enjoy spending time with my family skiing, camping, biking, hiking, playing games, and cheering them on from the sidelines. My competitive days are on hold as I continue to deal with a knee issue, but I still yearn to get back out there in force. I’ve noted some of my volunteer activity with the Mad River Valley Recreation District, however, I also enjoy spending time maintaining our mountain bike trail network with the Mad River Riders.

Thank you for taking the time to read my answers to the questions posed, as well as a short synopsis of my life & career to date. Best regards, Jeff.

Candidate Questions

What motivated you to run for the board?

If you want to preserve something of value, you must dedicate yourself to the task. When I moved to the Mad River Valley 12 years ago with my wife and new born daughter, I soon found myself wanted to give back to this amazing community. I took the opportunity to join the MRVRD (Mad River Valley Recreation District) board, which I’ve served on in the roles of member, Chair, and currently Secretary. After 8 years on that board, helping direct our limited funds to increasing the recreational opportunities for tax payers, as well as from an economic development perspective, I’m ready to dedicate my volunteer hours to something even closer to my heart. I believe I can bring a valley-wide recreation economy perspective to the Mad River Glen co-op board, while also assisting with specific projects that require additional attention. Separately, I truly love Mad River Glen, and if the professional and personal experiences I’ve gathered over the past 43 years can help, I’m happy to assist.

2. What brought you to Mad River Glen initially and what keeps you coming back today?
As any of the MRG faithful will acknowledge, it’s a very special place, not just for the skiing, but the people and community; the sense of safety, comfort, and congeniality that we all cherish. But, talk about the skiing! There is nothing quite like MRG. Natural snow, incredible terrain options, limited skier traffic, and a passion for the sport the emanates from so many.

My wife (Jennifer) and I ‘discovered’ the Mad River Valley about 15yrs ago on invite by some friends in Boston. We soon fell in love with the community as much as the opportunities for outdoor recreation - and realized that this would be a very special place to raise our children. We moved here full-time in December 2006.

Jenn soon found a job at Sugarbush, and as snowboarders, MRG wasn’t an option, but it was intriguing. I had never really considered skiing and snowboarding to be different sports, it’s simply the equipment on your feet. To me skis create more fluidity across the landscape, which in turn make them a better tool for backcountry and sidecountry adventure. Once on skis (about 10 years ago), I did the next logical thing and bought a day ticket at MRG – and was amazed by the warmth of the community as much as the challenge of the terrain. I soon bought a share to help ensure Mad River Glen continues, as there’s truly no place quite like it – and rarely ski anywhere else.

3. What is your opinion of the Preserve our Paradise Campaign and its goals?

It’s definitely time to make some infrastructure and equipment upgrades. While I enjoy the simplicity of the MRG and its ability to function on a fairly limited budget, I agree with all the projects that are outlined within the Campaign. With such a limited budget, a capital campaign of this nature is the only way to make progress beyond keeping the lights on, which I understand can also be a struggle.

4. If you had one agenda item you’d like to accomplish during your term what would it be?

Utilize my experience on the Mad River Valley Recreation District to assist in continued development of year-round activities on the mountain which in turn have a positive return on investment - and strengthen the mad river glen community as a whole. By the end of my term, I’d like to explore interest in bringing a summer event to the mountain, along with expanded opportunities for visitors to spend time on the mountain ‘off season.’

5. Over the history of the Co-op what are the things that stand out to you that have worked well and where do you think there is room for improvement?

I truly believe the ban on snowboards is a watershed moment for Mad River Glen, one that helps it stand-out from the crowd in an ever increasingly corporate mentality to resort skiing. The snow pack lasts longer on the steeps and it’s just better sliding downhill without boards on the same snowpack. My only item for improvement is ensuring skier guests have passes or tickets. That doesn’t appear to be an item of focus in the overall Campaign, but I also don’t have any statistics to bring to bear to prove or disprove ROI in this area.
6. What ideas or experience can you contribute to the ongoing efforts of Mad River to improve its environmental sustainability

Upgraded facilities via the Capital Campaign enable opportunities for more efficient equipment and buildings. Continued review/improvement of water run-off bringing material into waterways. Explore opportunities for greater guest composting.

7. With the inconsistent snowfall that we have been experiencing what ideas do you have on how to drive additional revenue to the Co-op?

A large portion of the past two years on the Mad River Valley Recreation District have been spent developing a Strategic Plan that outlines areas of focus to increase recreational opportunities and recreational based economic development in our community. When thinking of MRG as part of this initiative, Events jump-out as an opportunity area. Another opportunity area could be on premise camping – there is nowhere for folks to camp in the MRV – yet many mountain bike enthusiasts (and others), prefer parking their vans and spending the night under the stars for less money and hassle than a formal rental. And outside of small camping fees, what services could we provide to these campers that bring in some revenue Spring-Fall? When you look at the success the Kingdom Trails have had in Burke, much of that is hassle free sleeping in the main lot. These added visitors have increased restaurant, service, and soft good revenue for the entire area.