

Strafford Selectboard Informational Meeting on Infrastructure
October 21 at 1 pm at Barrett Memorial Hall

Selectboard members attending the meeting: Brian Johnson, Jeff Solsaa, John Freitag
40 members of the public, list of attendees attached.

Meeting Called to order at 1:05pm by Selectboard Chair John Freitag

Reading of Guidelines for Selectboard Conduct

Freitag then thanked people for coming. He noted that Strafford has 67 miles of Class 2 and Class 3 highways and over 50 bridges and major culverts. He also thanked our town employees and past Selectboard members like Steve Willbanks, Rod Maclay, Tori lloyd and Toni Pippy who provided the leadership and guided improvements during some difficult times. Freitag pointed out that we are now at an even more critical time as we try to adjust to changes to the climate and how the roads are used. He then introduced Selectboard liaison to the highway department Jeff Solsaa to talk about the situation with our bridge infrastructure.

Solsaa started by talking about how many of the bridges in Strafford were replaced after the Flood of 1927. These bridges have been in process of being replaced but many more are coming due as their roughly 100 year expected lifespan has arrived. This year, one of these bridges on the Justin Morrill Highway has been replaced. However the cost of bridge replacement has skyrocketed with the anticipated costs when first put out to bid increasing by almost \$100,000. The high cost of bridge replacement is the new norm. Solsaa mentioned that there is one and perhaps as many as two bridges and one very large culvert that will qualify for FEMA funds and will likely be put out to bid next year. Solsaa said Bridge 30 in Strafford village hopefully will receive new sides and a new deck next year as well. The Town is looking into grants that could cover half the cost of this project, now estimated at \$550,000. Solsaa said bridges in Strafford receive regular inspections by state engineers and they are a determining factor the priority of bridge replacements. He said the bridge after Taylor Valley Road on the Justin Morrill Highway needs replacement soon as well as the bridge before Huntington Farm. This one due to increased water flow will need to be much longer and estimated costs of replacement is over a million dollars. Another bridge needing replacement is the one on Rte. 132 near the school exit driveway. Andy Silovich, who grew up in Strafford, graduated from Newton School and is now the highway engineer for the NH Agency of Transportation in charge of the bridge project between E. Thetford and Lyme, added his expertise in comments on bridges and pavement during the question and answer time. Our State Representatives Rebecca Holcombe and Jim Masland also attended the meeting and provided helpful input.

Freitag then moved the discussion on to paved and gravel roads. He met with and discussed the upcoming meeting and passed on the thoughts of our Road Foreman P.D. Hardy on our paved roads. Hardy is getting estimates for skimming off the pavement on the Brook Road. He feels we can save the base which has fabric and good gravel. Then replace culverts with large ones, add gravel and pave. He is getting estimates to do the road in two sections or the whole thing in one year. At this time pavement grants can only be used on Class 2 Roads. In Strafford these are Rte. 132 (which over the past three years has been repaved from the Sharon line to South Strafford Village and from South Strafford village to the Thetford line), the Justin Morrill Highway and Miller Pond Road. Hardy feels that a preliminary priority list for when we get highway grants would be paving the first mile of Miller Pond Road, Rte. 132 in South Strafford village, a shim coat on the section of the Justin Morrill Highway between the villages, Strafford village, shim coat of the section of Justin Morrill Highway from Strafford to Tunbridge, paving the final gravel section of the Justin Morrill Highway to Tunbridge.

In regards to Class 3 pavement for which we do not receive paving grants, Hardy feels these are the priorities, after the Brook Road, that he sees at this time, shim coat on Mine and Tyson Road, repaving the gravel section of the Mine Road and repaving the section of Old City Falls Road that was ground up but never repaved.

Hardy feels, while progress has been made in recent years, we still need to increase the amount of gravel on our roads to keep up with multiple mudseasons we are now facing as well as increased use. He mentioned in particular the effects of UPS, FEDEX and other delivery services that come in the afternoons when the roads in mudseason are the softest and prone to damage. The increased use of GPS and how it directs people to the shortest routes also can cause problems.

Freitag then talked about how a critical part of our infrastructure is our town employees and how the Selectboard had to make adjustments to ensure in a very competitive marketplace that we can keep the skilled people we have. He mentioned that for the first time in a year and one half we have a full crew and it is already making a difference. Also making a difference are the people in Strafford who volunteer and help in so many ways making sure things get done. Freitag highlighted the efforts of the Town House Advisory Group, Recreation Board, Conservation Commission, Strafford Fire and Rescue and Lions Club as some examples.

While it would be wise to consider in light of the significant challenges we face, making some classification changes to our highway system, Freitag said this would be a long process with public involvement all along the way. The Town he said is in the process of applying for a Municipal Planning Grant to help in the effort to create a 10 year plan for our roads and bridges and a capital budget to go along with the plan. Whether or not we get this grant we will proceed as best we are able to do long term planning. This meeting is a first step.

Meeting adjourned at 2:35pm
Respectfully submitted,
John Freitag