

## Acworth Small Roads Initiative (SRI) Frequently Asked Questions

March 2, 2023

**NOTE: This artifact is being updated post-Jan Public Meeting; DRAFT status reinstated**

### FAQ Introduction

Acworth has more roads to maintain than any of our neighboring towns with the least amount of town budget to support those roads.

	Miles (1)	Population (2)	Persons per sq mile (2)	Municiple Budget (2021) (2)
Marlow	24	755	29.0	\$ 2.30 M
Goshen	14	808	36.0	\$ 2.30 M
Acworth	50	907	22.6	\$ 1.70 M
Lempster	36	1,143	35.4	\$ 1.74 M
Unity	45	1,482	40.1	\$ 1.85 M
Alstead	48	1,890	48.5	\$ 2.35 M

We can either continue to raise taxes to support maintaining our extensive road system or we can look for ways to reduce and reprioritize our road efforts.

To reprioritize and reduce the road maintenance effort, the SRI Committee (SRIC) was formed to identify a set of roads in town that had one or no residents on them and determine what the benefit would be to the town if these roads were reclassified from Class V to Class VI:

- 1 Breier Hill Road
- 2 Echo Valley Road
- 3 Hoagland Road
- 4 Langdon Road
- 5 McWethy Road
- 6 Meader Road
- 7 Nelson Road
- 8 Parson Road
- 9 Polly Hill Road
- 10 Russell Road
- 11 Coffin Hill Road

These roads were selected because they have special criteria including, but not limited to one or no residents, fewer than two parcel owners, or dead end at one residence.

It should be noted that the town receives a small amount of annual funding (\$3K) from the state for all these roads, but the amount spent maintaining these roads annually, (\$20K) exceeds the amount received.

These roads (and many of our roads) require additional improvement work to ensure a safe environment for our citizens and our highway crew. The estimated cost for that work for these roads would be anywhere from 6 hundred thousand to 1.2 million dollars.

The details for this initiative are included in the FAQ attachment. We hope you will take the time to carefully consider this opportunity to reduce our towns effort to maintain these roads and apply those efforts to more trafficked roads for the greater betterment our citizens.

Thank you for your consideration,

Board of Selectmen and Small Roads Initiative Committee.

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**1. Why are we doing this effort?**

- a. Highway resources and our town's budget has been challenged by the flood. Our ability to adequately maintain all state recognized 50 miles of Class V roads is at risk. We have more roads to maintain than all our neighboring towns with the least amount of municipal budget. We need to look for opportunities to reprioritize or reduce the road maintenance effort and focus our highway department on the most important roads. The Select Board asked to have 19 Class V roads assessed to see what the opportunity would be if the roads were reclassified to Class VI. Most of these have one (1) or no residents; some have less than two (2) parcel owners and several dead end at one residence.

**2. What criteria was used to assess each road?**

- a. 4 primary criteria include the following.
  - i. Adequate right-of-way (ROW) is maintained for emergency and highway vehicles
  - ii. More than 1 residence
  - iii. 2 or more parcel owners
  - iv. Public Use
  - v. ***For a road to be recommended for change it had to meet one of the two following scenarios:***
    - 1. *Road does not have an adequate right-of-way AND not meet one of the other 3 criteria.*
    - OR
    - 2. *Road does have an adequate right-of-way but failed to meet 2 of the remaining 3 criteria.*

**Note:** *These criteria are applied to the entire road when the entire road is being recommended or in the case of partial road recommendations only that portion being recommended.*

- b. The 4<sup>th</sup> criteria "Public Use" was further defined by the following 8 criteria. If a road had 3 or more of these 8 then it was considered "Public Use".
  - i. Authentic photos with testimony of lifelong resident OR references to the road as a public highway in documentation during the prescriptive period (1948-1968)
  - ii. Historical map evidence before or during the prescriptive period (1948-68)
  - iii. Being maintained by the town for at least 5 years
  - iv. Existence of cellar hole(s)
  - v. Existence of mill site(s) with access only through the road in question
  - vi. Existence of stone wall(s)
  - vii. Commercial Use – primary use/business critical
  - viii. Public Recreation – ATV, snowmobile, hiking, walking, snowshoeing, etc.

3. *The town receives state funding for the Class V roads that we maintain. How much annual revenue would be lost on these roads?*

Annual State Revenue per Road

Roads	Total
Breier Hill Road	\$833.46
Echo Valley Road	\$167.27
Hoagland Road	\$416.73
Langdon Road	\$89.24
McWethy Road	\$301.77
Meador Road	\$116.40
Nelson Road	\$201.18
Parson Road	\$445.47
Polly Hill Road	\$129.33
Russell Road	\$314.85
Coffin Hill Road	\$86.22

1. \$3,101.91

4. *What is the cost/effort that can be saved by changing these roads?*

a. There are 3 cost categories to be considered, (1) maintenance costs – include plowing, seasonal grading and ditch clearing, (2) annual vehicle cost – expense required to maintain the town trucks and equipment, (3) cost to bring the road up to minimal safety standards. Our town cannot afford to bring all our 50 miles of roads to minimal safety standards, so a range was developed to represent this cost in this table.

- i. **Maintenance Cost** was determined by dividing the highway department expenses (per the 2021 Town Budget Report) by the number of Class V state recognized miles of road according to the State Highway Grant Report. Maintenance cost per mile = Annual cost to maintain roads divided by the number of miles of roads. Cost per mile = ~\$10K (\$9,969)
- ii. **Annual Vehicle Cost** was determined by averaging 7 years of actual and budgeted costs from our 2021 Capital Improvement Plan, Highway Equipment Replace costs (years 2020-2026).
- iii. **Minimal Safety Standard Cost (range)** leveraged the most recent FEMA evaluations for 3 roads. An average per mile was established with consideration for the condition (poor, fair, good). Each road being evaluated was assessed for current condition (culverts, ditches, right-of-way, gravel, etc.). The average per mile was applied to the roads in question based on their condition. 50% less was established to illustrate the minimal amount based on a review of a couple of roads.

**NOTE:** Actual costs would be higher due to the material, labor and fuel cost increases since this 2021 data.

b. Annual cost savings of up to \$20K in maintenance and vehicle replacement cost can be realized now, and future savings anywhere from \$613K to \$1.2M in costs to bring the roads up to safety standards.

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Roads	1- Maintenance Cost	2- Vehicle Cost	3- Cost to Bring Road Up To Standard	
	Estimated Cost to Maintain Road (\$10K per mile)	Average Annual Vehicle Cost (est.)	Estimated Cost for Minimal Safety Standards	Est. Cost to Bring Road to DOT Standards
Breier Hill Road	\$5,782	\$938	\$199,129	\$398,258
Coffin Hill Road	\$598	\$97	\$13,304	\$26,608
Echo Valley Road	\$1,160	\$188	\$34,413	\$68,825
Hoagland Road	\$1,000	\$100	\$85,736	\$171,472
Langdon Road	\$619	\$100	\$18,359	\$36,719
McWethy Road	\$2,093	\$340	\$46,564	\$93,127
Meader Road	\$807	\$131	\$31,929	\$63,859
Nelson Road	\$1,396	\$226	\$31,042	\$62,085
Parson Road	\$3,090	\$501	\$68,737	\$137,474
Polly Hill Road	\$897	\$146	\$19,956	\$39,912
Russell Road	\$2,184	\$354	\$64,775	\$129,550
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$19,628</b>	<b>\$3,121</b>	<b>\$613,944</b>	<b>\$1,227,889</b>

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5. Is this effort trying to bring all roads up to DOT standards immediately?

- a. No. Most of our roads are not to DOT standards, however we do recommend that as work is required (culverts, ditches, etc.) on any of our Class V roads that work be completed to minimal safety standards. The DOT standards do ensure public safety. The above table illustrates an estimate range to bring these roads to minimal safety standards and DOT standards.

6. What impact will the change have to the tax value of my home and land? How will that impact our town revenue?

- a. Our tax accessor (Municipal Resources Inc.) state that the change would only impact land value and not the house value. The impact to the land value would depend on the condition of the road. A road in good condition would see a reduction of 5%, a road in fair condition 20% and a road in poor condition would see a reduction of 30%. Most of these roads are in fair condition currently.
- b. Over 50% of the land on these roads are in Current Use. Some are in conservation so the impact to the annual town revenue would be minimal.

7. What is the impact to the market value of my land will occur with the road changing from a Class V to a Class VI?

- a. If the road in question is the only Class V Road access to the land, then the value of the land could be impacted. The amount of change would depend on how accessible/inaccessible the land is via the road.
- b. Lands that have access to Class V roads other than the road in question would not be affected.
- c. Source: Sotheby Realty; Committee is still attempting to obtain input from Century21 and Better Homes and Garden Realty.

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- 8. Was each road or portion of road fairly evaluated against the same criteria?**
- Yes
- 9. If a road I live on is changed to a Class VI Road, will I have to maintain it? What will that cost?**
- Yes, you and any other abutters will want to maintain it. Class VI roads with residents on it need to be able to provide access for emergency vehicles.
  - The cost for the town to maintain roads is ~\$10K average per mile. The private cost to hire someone for cleaning the culverts, cleaning the ditches and snow plowing would be considerably less, especially if the cleaning is accomplished annually, and much cheaper if the landowner does some of this work themselves. Responsible landowner actions would be more cost effective and should also provide better and more timely results.
- 10. What implications would there be to subdivisions if the road was changed from a Class V to a Class VI.**
- The current Acworth Subdivision Regulations disallow subdivision on Class VI roads, but the same regulation also allows the Planning Board to waive provisions within the regulations.
  - Waivers are possible if the 4 conditions outlined in Subdivision Regulations Section 2.2 are met. "Upon written request of the subdivider, the Board may waive compliance with any part of the Regulations ..".
  - In the Acworth Zoning Ordinance XVI Definitions, it also references that frontage could be on an approved subdivision right-of-way. "Frontage means the length of a lot bordering on a Class V or better public right-of-way, or approved subdivision right-of-way."
  - There is no guarantee for waivers, permits, etc. each request must be assessed by the Board for approval.
  - If the property in question has adequate frontage on another Class V road, then subdivisions without waivers on that section of the land would be possible, as long as all the applicable subdivision requirements were met.
- 11. Will the town require me to sign a liability waiver if my road is changed to a Class VI Road?**
- The Select Board and Planning Board are reviewing the process to determine if they would require residents on newly formed Class VI roads to sign a waiver. Advice from NH Municipal Association and our town insurance company (Primex) indicates that with or without the waiver the town is not liable according to state statutes, 231:59a and RSA 231:93.
  - Additionally, RSA 154:1-d provides liability protection for fire fighters and RSA 21-P:41 provides protection for other emergency management activities.
- 12. What are the next steps and when would this take effect?**
- The SRI Committee and the Select Board will be considering adding a new step which will be a review with each of the abutters along with a short list of options to realize the goal of reducing the town maintenance effort on these 11 roads. This consideration is a direct result of the feedback that we have received to date.
  - There is no date planned for the implementation of any of the recommended actions.

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Thibodeau

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