

Small Roads Project Meeting Minutes – April 18,2023

7pm in the Town Hall

- **Attendees:** Gregg Thibodeau, Jennifer Bland, Ray LeClaire, Frank Emig
- **Public in attendance:** Carole Wallace, John Tuthill, Jim Jennison

Minutes approved from 21 March 2023 FE motion JB seconded; motion passed.

GB recused himself from the Small Roads Initiative to avoid a conflict of interest with his role in the privately operated Acworth Volunteer Fire & Rescue Company.

Public feedback documentation

- GT completed transcribing 2 of the 4 audio sessions. **Action:** GT will complete the 2 remaining. **JB** will complete the review of the Bascom and Green notes.
- Complete both actions no later than May 8th. GT to update final report.

The town attorney provided two responses.

1. The town has the right to reclassify the roads and the landowners/abutters can seek legal action and the town could have to pay damages. The response from the attorneys was a privileged communication to the Select Board and specified not for public distribution.
2. Our privately operated volunteer fire department is not protected by state statutes from liability. Liability is addressed in the contract that the town has with AVFR and it states “AVFR agrees to indemnify and hold harmless the Town from any judgement, damages or expense, including reasonable attorney’s fees arising directly or indirectly from any claim made by any person against the Town based on a claim of negligence or any other legal basis because of services rendered or not rendered by AVFR pursuant to this Agreement.”

Reviewed costs and benefits.

- GT completed many changes. Added in property value loss, tax revenue loss, homeowners’ insurance increase, landowner maintenance cost, subdivision revenue loss and incorporated two external maintenance road studies into our maintenance road cost.
- Property value loss has a range from 5% for homes on roads that are in good shape, to 30% for roads that are in poor condition. This same logic was applied to the tax revenue loss.
- Homeowners insurance – Still need confirmation from an actual insurance agency however GT was able to locate online calculated cost for the property values and applied the same 5%/30% range based off the condition of the road to estimate the impact to homeowners insurance.
- Most of the roads are in good condition therefore for the purposes of this study assumed a 10% value loss for property value, tax revenue and homeowners’ insurance.
- Breier Rd was taken off the reclassification list at our last meeting due to the 2nd residential driveway that was approved by the Select Board at the end of 2022.
- Maintenance costs
 - Leveraged two of the studies that were provided (1) ME 1992 Study and the (2) 2012 USDA Forestry Guidelines. Also completed some research to identify additional more current studies. Was not able to find any more studies with the level of detail and our type of roads.
 - BM provided inflation tables to show the increase in the cost of maintenance on the roads using the two external reports. JJ stated that we probably should not leverage these reports because

of the age especially the Maine report. GT stated that he took an average of the two reports and used that as the low end of a range and used our own assessment as the high value, and throughout the report referenced the range. GT also stated that when Mark Girard (MG) completes the maintenance assessment of Nelson and Meader Roads that we will factor those numbers in a well. This will give our maintenance cost range 4 different sources of data. GT recommends that we use the lower number for the maintenance.

- GT also provided a separate table to document the landowner maintenance costs. Utilized the USDA data because it broke the data down by type of effort and frequency. Not all efforts are completed every year. Some efforts are conducted every 3 years (e.g. mowing, ditching, etc.).
- Subdivision lost revenue – GT assumed that properties could subdivide 2 times. It was discussed that it is probably 3 times. **Action:** GT to update analysis with 3 roads instead of 2. **Action:** FE to confirm that it is 3 roads. GT leveraged Land Search data for the average value of an acre of land in Sullivan County, \$13,866. The data sampled 50 properties that were recently listed.
- Almost 14,000 in maintenance for the town / vehicle maintenance is?
- Landowners concerned about their maintenance cost to these roads do not all maintenance cost apply every year. Some occur every 3 years and some is once a year and it would cost 3800.00 as opposed to the 7/9K that it would cost the town for the maintenance.
- GT created a breakdown of all the above costs and benefits for landowners and the town.

Preliminary Net Impacts of Reclassification

- Town
 - Annually defer \$3.3K-\$5.4K to other roads (change from \$19K)
 - Avoid \$414K in improvement costs (reduced from \$614K)
- Landowners
 - Loss of revenue \$600K (property and subdivisions)
 - Increase in annual costs - \$1.6K
- Follow-up items to be completed before this is complete:
 - Update subdivision from 2 to 3 lots
 - Consider lower homeowner maintenance costs.

Other Topics & Public Feedback

- GT confirmed that Sarah Russell of Russell Rd will be reaching out to the Board of Selectmen this summer to request a change to make Russell Road a private road. **Action:** GT will be reaching out to Echo Valley Rd to see if there is anything that can be done to help for this reclassification.
- JT feels this is a fairness issue and that we should not reclassify any of these roads because of the impacts to land value, etc. It is not fair to the landowner.
- The Planning Board plans to review the subdivision and class VI policy, which in our documentation has conflicting statements (subdivision regulation vs. subdivision regulation addendum) and is not consistent with state RSA guidance.
- Project team agreed that with these numbers and the completion of the follow-on items along with the final public feedback comments that we should be able to create a new recommendation in May to the Board of Selectmen.

Next Meeting Agenda Items

- Review comments and feedback list status
- Review cost updates
- Review updated report

Members

Gregg Thibodeau
Jennifer Bland
Mark Girard
Brenda Melius
Ray LeClaire
Frank Emig

Meeting Schedule
16 May 2023