

# Road funding debate

## To the Editor:

Thank you for your recent coverage ("Board, commissioners spar over road money," Oct. 30) of the Oct. 28 Haverhill Selectboard meeting regarding the Haverhill/Woodsville highway funding situation. You got the story right but it needs some help to make the issues easier to understand.

For starters, people who are uninformed might wonder why there are two highway departments in the town. The Woodsville District developed much faster than the rest of Haverhill back in the 1800s due to the strong presence of the railroad.

The closely spaced housing created a need for underground services such as water and sewer. As the streets progressed, paving and an underground storm water drainage system became essential. Of course these paved streets, sewer collection system and storm water drainage system need to be maintained and this is the responsibility of the Woodsville highway department.

They also maintain other District properties including the Community Field. These "city" type streets are much more expensive to maintain and cannot be compared to the cost of maintaining simple gravel roads as the Town Manager is doing.

The Woodsville District boundaries were enlarged by the selectboard over 20 years ago because taxpayers from the areas just outside of the District desired better street maintenance and were willing to pay more taxes to get it. They noted that by the time the Haverhill Town plow made its way up to this area, we had all the in-District streets plowed a couple of times already. Additionally, we paved the trouble spots that the Town ignored for years. We are able to provide higher quality and more frequent street maintenance with only two full time employees and a part time extra.

Now for the issue of costs. The very knowledgeable selectmen in 2009 with Rick Ladd doing much of the work, came up with a formula such that Woodsville receives no highway money from the residents of Haverhill and vice versa. It's really that simple. The funding we do get is pegged at 23.6 percent of the total highway budget as that is the percentage of all Town taxes paid by Woodsville residents. This pays a portion of our highway budget and we raise the balance with Woodsville taxes and enterprise revenue as directed by our District taxpayers. According to the formula, if you live in Haverhill outside of Woodsville, you do not pay anything into Woodsville's highway costs.

As with the best of plans, there is one small flaw in the funding formula in that it is based on budgets instead of actual costs. Woodsville showed good faith and good will a couple of years ago when the Haverhill budget didn't go as planned and the Town asked Woodsville for an appropriate refund of its share.

The check for \$37,000 was sent the next week with a friendly smile typical of our cooperative history with the town that worked both ways back then. This cooperative nature still exists with us as we would do the same today if the current Haverhill highway budget is underspent. A simple memo of understanding can fix everything but this is not the way of the new Town Manager.

The shoe is on the other foot now as we noticed an error in the 2019 funding computation sheet sent to us. When we asked for copies of the same sheets for the previous three years, there was no response. The purpose of the request was to see when the error began. The bookkeeping error(s) represent a relatively minor dollar amount similar to what we sent to the town a couple of years ago.

Mind you, the NH Right to Know law requires the release of these existing public records within days but they are still being withheld. Instead, the TM has pretended that a recalculation was requested but email trails show this to be a deliberate deception. It seems that she is more inclined to decimate decades of cooperation and relative harmony without taking the time to understand the purpose and reasoning behind existing arrangements.

To escalate the problems even more, in some unprofessional posts to Facebook and public statements, Ms. Codling has branded Woodsville as uncooperative in the reconstruction of Route 302 by McDonald's. We declined to participate in the project for four basic reasons.

For starters, Ms. Codling as Haverhill Town Manager is taking on a construction project on a road that belongs to the state. She has permission from the state to do this but we have been advised not to get involved in this arrangement due to legal complications. We also feel it is poor precedence to have Town taxpayers pay for work that is the responsibility of NH DOT.

We were asked to commit funds to this project but we do not have this project in our budget. Finally, the project includes the closure of an exit access from McDonald's. We have not been advised that the owner of this restaurant has agreed to this. This access was legally granted to the restaurant as part of the building permit and there is no precedent for discontinuing a granted access. The Woodsville commission does not wish to participate in such unprofessional behavior. We very politely declined to participate.

A final note is that our records indicate that Woodsville has over 12 miles of streets compared to the TM's value of 8.36 miles. We are going to measure again for accuracy.

We have requested that our fine area legislators arrange a meeting to keep this bothersome situation from getting even more out of control. These gentlemen have the reasoning power and temperament that we appreciate and need so badly now.

Richard Guy

Paul Kidder

Steve Wheeler

Woodsville Commissioners