

Road funding debate...

To ensure true transparency and honesty, I offer some clarifications and corrections of information included in the editorial written by the Woodsville Precinct Commissioners and published in the November 6, 2019 Journal Opinion.

A Woodsville commissioner visited my office over the summer to tell me I should take notice of how the Woodsville Highway funding was calculated because he thought it had been calculated incorrectly in past years. I told him I would investigate it when I was able and get back to him. Since then this same commissioner and I have visited and emailed numerous times about a variety of things.

When this issue arose, my office began researching how the Town funds the Woodsville Highway Department. In 1887, legislation was passed that created the Woodsville Precinct including its Highway Department; since then there has been four amendments to the law, the last occurring in 2009 when the current highway funding formula was established.

Through our evaluation of the information, we found flaws with how the funds have been calculated. Flaws that appear to have resulted in an overpayment of funds to the Woodsville Precinct. We also determined that the current funding formula itself appears to be inequitable to all residents in the Town of Haverhill. The funding flaws need to be addressed, as do the apparent inequities in the law. That will take cooperation, maturity, honesty, and fairness for the benefit of all residents in the Town of Haverhill.

The Select Board discussed the Woodsville Highway Fund, and I provided a great deal of fact-based information about it, at the last Select Board meeting held on October 28th. This meeting was broadcast LIVE on Facebook and the video can be found on the Town's website under "Minutes". At that meeting the Haverhill Board of Selectman voted to send draft language to the Senate for consideration of a modification to the law; as the law must support any change that locally we wish to make to the funding formula as well as to the stipulations for how we fund the Woodsville Highway Department.

On November 1st I emailed the Woodsville Commissioners, Select Board, and others all the research myself and my staff had collected and presented at the meeting. The information included the breakdown of road mileage; Woodsville = 8.306 miles of Class V roadway; the rest of Haverhill = 72.38 miles of Class V roadway. It also included the cost per mile to maintain them based upon this year's budget numbers; Woodsville = \$50,592.11 per mile; the rest of Haverhill = \$9,640.45 per mile. Interestingly, the Haverhill Highway Department has historically graded Woodsville's .66 miles of dirt road twice a year, complimentary, no charge to the precinct. So, we could say Woodsville actually has 7.645 miles of Class V roadway to maintain. All this information can also be found on the Town's website under "Town Manager Reports".

The argument Woodsville Commissioners make regarding maintenance of Woodsville's roads, is fundamentally flawed. They may require their Highway Department to work on and in the sewers, they may have them re-grading and re-seeding ball fields, they may have them maintaining other assets owned by the precinct; but these are not "Highway" expenses and so can not be used when comparing roadways.

The bottom line is that Woodsville Commissioners are unhappy with the outcome of our evaluation and in turn have started to reject any and all opportunities to cooperate with the Town. They have rejected meeting invitations; resigned from Town commissions; pulled out of months long open negotiations to reconstruct Central & Forest Street; have engaged in smear tactics; and two commissioners have yet to

accept the invitation sent to them on October 30th for a meeting with myself, our Finance Officer, Select Board, Representative Ladd, and Senator Guida to discuss modifications to the law.

With regards to the Central & Forest Street intersection, there were many meetings, phone calls, and emails between Woodsville Commissioners, myself, the North Country Council, and State Officials. We collectively developed a three-phase approach on how to best improve the serious safety concerns at the intersection. Dick Guy's words during our final design meeting were "its a brilliant idea". I see it as a necessary action to ensure not one more Haverhill resident, not one more person, is injured or killed at that intersection. The people of Haverhill cannot wait 10 more years for the state to reconstruct the intersection; the people of Haverhill at-large deserve better.

One last item; in the editorial the author states, "This [*money from the Town*] pays a portion of our highway budget and we raise the balance with Woodville Taxes and enterprise revenue." However, the Woodsville Precinct has had a tax rate of \$0.00 for the past three years and enterprise revenue is only to be used for the purpose of which the revenues were collected and not to be co-mingled with other funds.

There is a lot that warrants further investigation and discussion, and as I stated at the Select Board meeting, as Town Manager it would be irresponsible of me to simply look the other way. I truly hope we can all come together and have a respectful and productive conversation about the issues. Hopefully, we can come to some mutual understandings, make some changes that are in the best interest of all Haverhill residents, and move forward.

Respectfully,

Brigitte Codling, Haverhill Town Manager