

REPORT

ORFORD ROAD COMMISSION

Introduction

The Orford Road commission was established by Article 16 at the May 2021 Orford Town Meeting. The purpose of the commission was to assist and suggest to both “the Selectboard and Road Agent on issues that pertain to town highway garage building, roads, bridges, road equipment and vehicles and any other items that fall under the Orford Road Department. And to explore the possibility of privatizing (contracting out) the care and maintenance of all town owned roads and submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Selectboard and to the Orford general public by December 1, 2021.”

The Commission members were appointed in June and its first meeting was on July 21, 2021. Members are Mike Wright Chair, Paul Goundrey Secretary, Alan Bean, John Berryman, and Herb Austic. Most of the first two meetings were organizational regarding structure, timeline, and topics to be covered. Due to Town Meeting taking place in May the Commission attempted to keep focused on a short list of issues including paving, trucks and equipment, general road conditions, highway garage and contracting of highway maintenance. The Selectboard also asked the Commission for help/ideas for the replacement of the Mousley Brook bridge in Quinttown. The Commission did not feel there was enough time for this.

There are many diverse elements to town road maintenance, too many to cover in the four months the commission had. Hopefully, this report supplies a path forward in dealing with the diverse needs that the roads require.

The purpose of the Commission was not to micromanage the Highway Department operations.

Trucks/Equipment

The maintenance of trucks and equipment was reviewed with the Road Agent. Currently the trucks go through a weekly routine inspection (DOT driver’s inspection report) on Monday. Any minor issues are addressed at this time. General repairs and maintenance are done and recorded either by work order or on timesheets. A copy of the of the work order is on file at the highway garage and Town office. Work orders and weekly inspection reports are kept in a file for each truck or piece of equipment at the highway garage.

The Commission recommends that record keeping of maintenance and repairs be streamlined and uniform with a record at the garage and Town office. This could be done by utilizing the current work orders, recording all work performed, parts, time etc. Electronic record keeping should also be re-examined, such the program purchased in 2018, PubWorks or a QuickBooks product.

Truck replacement discussion centered on what would best fit the needs of the Town. **The Commission recommends that the next dump truck replacement should be a 10-wheeler.** The added cost would be offset by overall benefits, stronger components, less wear and tear resulting in potentially lower maintenance costs. A lease option should also be explored. A truck this size will exasperate the cramped space issues of the current building.

The Commission does not recommend that a one-ton dump truck such as the Ford F550 be outfitted with a wing. There is too great a potential for damage from excess weight and resulting stress.

There was some discussion of the benefits of a smaller vehicle for everyday use such as traveling for parts, road checks, etc. Either a basic ½ ton pickup or keeping the police vehicle at the time of replacement.

The Commission recommends leasing, with maintenance contract, for new equipment. The new electronics, sensors etc. complicate repairs & maintenance, lease pricing can be a good value and the maintenance contract would be better when turning over the lease. The current loader that is used around the garage and in the pit should be kept as long as possible. It does not have the electronics, is not at DEF engine and repairs can be done at reasonable cost. As Alan recommends keep it “till lays its egg”.

The Commission does not recommend the purchase of an excavator at this time. There is some concern that it cannot be used to full advantage. Is it better to contract the work giving highway personnel more time for grading and other required work?

Highway Garage

Two members of the Commission visited the site with Road Agent Terry Straight. They reviewed the current garage, office space and proposed covered space for the grader. The current garage and office space due not currently meet the needs of the department, for example space is very tight when all vehicles are inside and there are also safety deficiencies. The Town currently has \$40,000 dollars for an addition and \$14,00 for a shed roof off the side of the garage for the grader. Herb Austic, experienced in building cost estimating and construction, did estimating for possible solutions. The costs outlined here are from prices gathered in October 2021. The 10'x40' addition to the office/garage space for secondary exit and added storage can be done for \$44,703. **For the grader the Commission recommends an extended third bay be added to the salt shed pole barn by extending the back 12 feet** with T111 partial siding and metal roofing at \$13,472.

Money has been appropriated for these two projects and the Commission is frustrated they have not been done or at least started. The Selectmen must move these forward and get them done.

The three following options **are not** recommendations, they were done as possibilities and just a point of reference for what costs would be like for different building scenarios: 1) An added option for increasing garage space mentioned by Terry is extending the west end of the garage 20 feet by removing the existing overhead doors adding an I-beam support and installing a new 26-foot overhead door at a cost of \$81,000. 2) A new 40'x100' garage with heated floor, 14' eaves @\$86/sqft approximately \$344,000. 3) There was also a brief discussion of what a new structure would cost. Herb again did an estimate for a multiuse/department building consisting of a 60'x100' steel frame building with four overhead doors, a connecting hall/structure of bathrooms/storage space to a 40'x40' building for offices at a cost of approximately \$1.1M.

Paving

The Commission reviewed the current paving plan which consists of reclaiming all town roads over a 11-year span and the Town Roads segment of the 2015 Orford Long Range Communities Facilities Plan, section 2.1 pages 6 and 7.

The Commission does not recommend the current paving plan. All the roads do not need reclaiming/reconstruction. In addition, the 11-year cycle for the plan is too long. It has been about 5 years since a road has been paved and all paved Town roads need pavement sooner than this current plan allows. Paving done this year, of the gravel road aprons to asphalt roads, will be beneficial in the long term for keeping these transition areas smoother and safer for maintenance work.

The Commission recommends that the next paving projects be to shim and overlay Brook Road, River Road, and possibly the first section of Archertown Road from Route 10 to Town Shed Road. Estimated asphalt cost for this work is \$154,160, 2" depth at \$80.00 per ton as of November 2021. Ditching and culvert replacement done by highway department. Grimes Hill Road could be substituted for Archertown at about the same cost.

In 2022 a plan for the Blackberry Hill section of Archertown must be developed and implemented the following year, if possible. The plan should be developed in consultation with local contractors for drainage improvements and all other aspects for returning the section of road to a satisfactory condition. Engineering work has already been done and will be beneficial for the planning process.

Bridges

There was not enough time available for the Commission to do a review of Town bridges. It is noted that of the top five priority bridges listed in the Orford Long Range Facilities Plan four have been accomplished or are in the planning process. Some were done on a planned schedule and some were done as a result of storm damage that involved state and federal funding according to their requirements/specifications.

The bridge over Jacobs Brook on Archertown Road is on the state's DOT 5-year plan and is scheduled for reconstruction in 2023.

High Bridge is a different matter. In 2016 money was appropriated to rehabilitate this bridge and it still has not been done. As a result, this will be a more expensive rehabilitation.

The bridge/culvert over Moseley Brook in Quinttown is in extremely poor condition, red listed, and a plan for replacement needed.

Contracted Highway Maintenance

There are very few New Hampshire towns that contract for highway maintenance, only four that were identified, Auburn, Albany, Sharon and Litchfield. These towns were identified to us through the University of New Hampshire Technology Transfer Center. There may be some that have some type of hybrid system, but they were not verified.

The town of Albany, population <800 and which is 86% White Mountain National Forest, has just over 20 miles of road 80% of which is paved. In 2020 \$265,000 was appropriated for maintenance and improvements. Their Road Agent is elected, and the town has no equipment. The work is done on an

hourly basis per state of NH Department of Transportation costs and rates. Materials and supplies are done in a similar fashion although not a set policy. The Road Agent is Curtis Coleman, and the contractor is Coleman and Son Construction Company. There is someone on call 24 hours, 7 days a week for emergency calls. Curtis Coleman is the third generation Coleman to be road agent and he does it more as a civic service. Interestingly up until about 35 years ago all town roads were maintained by the state New Hampshire. Wanting to rid itself of this obligation the state offered to pave all Albany's existing roads then turn them over to the town which Albany accepted.

The Town of Sharon, population <400, may also contract their highway work, although has not been verified, and has 11 miles of roads. The Road Agent is elected. Budget for maintenance and projects was \$149,000.

Auburn NH contracts their highway work, has an elected Road Agent and no equipment. It has a population of about 5,500 and is the next town east of Manchester. Auburn has 57 miles of road, approximately 7 unpaved with a 2020 budget of \$1,021,255. Auburn has been working with the same contractor for several years and is paid an hourly rate that is set by the Board of Selectmen. The town does not bid their jobs out nor do they use engineering firms, work is planned by the road agent with the contractor. Contractor is on call 24 hours, 7 days a week. The road agent feels that this system works very well and serves the town best.

The Town of Litchfield, south of Manchester was also identified. Litchfield may have some type of hybrid system for road maintenance. When reviewing the 2020 Expense Report there were expenditures of over \$147,000 in wages for highway employees, \$91,000 for contracted services and \$46,000 in vehicle repair/maintenance and total expenditures of \$785, 835.14

The town of Fairlee Vt also contracts their highway work. Mike Wright has been doing this work for about 15 years. Fortunately, Mike is on the Commission and his insight has been very beneficial. Fairlee has 17 miles of road, 2 miles of gravel and in 2020 had a budget of \$278,337.

Orford's budget for 2020 was \$430,315 and has 32 miles of road, about 7 paved.

Paul Goundrey had a roadside discussion with Piermont road agent Frank Rodiman regarding Piermont going from contracted work to a town highway department. His explanation was, over the years Piermont was fortunate to have good working relationships with local contractors. However, this was not always the case and the town decided it would be better to have their own department.

How town's account for road maintenance, equipment and projects varies considerably making comparisons difficult. The road budgets were based on information from each town's annual report and/or discussion with road agents. Some of the above budget figures also contained projects such as paving. Use of project expenses can significantly change yearly figures, for instance Orford's \$1.2M appropriation for Archertown Road bridge replacement in 2021 budget.

One thing apparent from this research was for contracted highway maintenance to work, the establishment of a long-term relationship with a trustworthy contractor be established and bids are not required for most of the work.

Overall Road Maintenance

Keeping gravel roads in good condition requires a well-maintained proper crown, shoulders, ditches and proper depth and type of gravel surface. It needs to be determined how much gravel is being used per year and how much gravel is needed to maintain a proper crown and travel surface on our town roads. The Road Agent has developed spreadsheets that track gravel and winter sand and salt usage by road and type which will be good information to have for determining road needs.

The shoulders of many Town roads need attention. Rain and water do not drain to the ditches because the road shoulders have not been properly maintained over the years. This condition is true for both paved and gravel roads. A comprehensive plan must be developed to address this work. The grader can and should be used whenever and wherever possible to accomplish this work. At present the grader is not being utilized to its' fullest.

Culverts are another integral part of road drainage. When runoff does get to the ditches, culverts keep the water moving away from the roads and through obstructions such as driveways. The 2015 Long Range Community Facilities Plan calls for replacement of at least 10 culverts per year (25-30 replacement cycle) and a comprehensive inventory of road culverts. In 2019 a culvert study, in part sponsored by the Conservation Commission, was conducted by the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Council. **The Commission recommends that a culvert replacement plan be developed and implemented to meet the needs as identified in the 2019 culvert study.** A reasonable yearly plan for culvert work and replacement needs to be set, accomplished, and tracked.

Driveway culverts are another issue of concern. Current Town policy is the landowner is responsible for installation and maintenance of driveway culverts. **The Commission recommends that this policy be changed to the landowner responsible for initial installation and town maintains them thereafter.** This generated a lot of discussion. How much would this cost? Is it practical? In the end the commission felt that the benefits of the change out way the costs. One bad driveway culvert could destroy a whole road.

General Comments and Further Recommendations

The Road Agent is an appointed and salaried position. The Commission feels this should be a working position not an administrative/supervisory one. The Selectboard needs to ensure that a significant portion of the road agent's time be spent on performing maintenance work on the roads along with the other two members of the highway crew. This may require a member of the Selectboard to do administrative work for the department.

Is equipment rental such as the excavator for ditching cost effective as being utilized? When ditching using two trucks is recommended and the work should be done continuously, stopped only for emergencies. Is this work being done at the expense of other road needs, i.e., culvert replacement or grading. In general, when would contracting work be more beneficial for completing more work and more efficiently?

At times the Town's purchasing policy seems detrimental to getting work accomplished. The Town does not have the technical knowledge and skills or time to write request for proposals for road and other (highway garage addition) projects. This is important, so bids received are based on specific plans and identical specifications. Establishing a good, long standing working relationship that does not require

bids with a local contractor as mentioned in the Contracted Highway Maintenance section is instrumental in maintaining our roads.

The Road Agent should be given greater leeway in making purchases of small equipment, supplies and repairs. The Selectboard meeting only 2 times a month for regular business and only once a month with the road agent limits the highway department's ability to address immediate needs. A system needs to be put in place to accomplish this and ensure funds are spent properly for designated purposes and amounts when necessary.

When town employees have different roles in other town departments it is imperative that accounting be done to charge the work and time to the proper department.

The Commission strongly recommends that specific yearly projects be developed with a timeline for road maintenance such as shoulders, ditching, culvert replacement, gravel road improvements and paving. The plan should be realistic and accomplishable. The Selectboard should be held accountable for completion of the work and projects.

The Commission recommends the Highway Block Grant received from the state be used for a specific yearly highway project

The Commission does not recommend contracting for highway maintenance and repair. A real concern would be the cost to re-establish a Highway Department if it became necessary in the future. Further research would need to be done if the Town felt it was warranted. In the future if hiring and retaining qualified employees becomes more difficult it may be a viable option to explore.

The Commission recommends that a permanent appointed committee be established to help the Selectboard and Road Agent implement the recommendations that are contained in this report and with future project planning and financing strategies. The committee should consist of 7 people: the road agent, a Selectboard member and five residents in the same manner as this commission. Its purpose should not be to oversee the Highway Department's daily operations.

In Conclusion

The Orford Highway Department has become a difficult place to work. Working with almost constant criticism, second guessing and negative scrutiny is an unhealthy work environment for the employees and Town. It makes a difficult job more so and also the Town's ability to attract, hire and retain, employees.

There is much work that needs to be done to Orford's roads and bridges. We, as a Town, have gotten behind on many road maintenances needs. The longer it takes to get our roads back into good condition the more expensive it will be. The infrastructure damage of 2017 and staffing issues have certainly had an impact. Now it is time to move forward and start making headway on past project delays and maintenance issues.

Respectfully Submitted

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