

PUBLIC MEETING CONCERNING RIVER ROAD CLOSURE-A SUMMARY

This meeting was held on October 20, 2015; attended by approximately 65 members of the public, three members of the Select Board, the Police Chief, 2 representatives from CLD Engineering, 1 member from Willis Engineering and one member from the Town's legal team.

Immediate concerns of emergency response were addressed by the Police Chief and Select Board. There should be no delay in residents receiving appropriate response from emergency responders.

Several people asked about the urgency of the road closure and why more time and effort was not taken to advise residents. The short answer is that this deficiency in the road has been identified for about a year. Since the identification of the problem, the Board had an obligation to the town to act on finding a solution. Remedial measures such as weight and lane restrictions were enforced while further analysis was done. Additional issues came into play with landowner access for more testing which has yet to be resolved. Meanwhile, the Select Board received notification from three independent engineering firms that the road is unstable and there is no way to determine at what point or under what circumstances it would fail. All three firms made the recommendation that motorized travel over the area be suspended immediately. Knowing this would be a most unpopular decision, the Board requested an opinion from the Town's Attorney, who concurred.

Following this advice, which came after a year of investigative efforts, the Select Board made the decision to act on the professional opinions provided. A letter was drafted to be mailed USPS to all residents living on that stretch of road. A public announcement was made on the local listserve's, notices were placed on the Town's website and in the Valley News. Information was provided as fast as possible, but the sense of the meeting was it wasn't fast enough.

Further heated discussion centered on the inconvenience the closure represents to residents, the assumed potential decrease in property values that the closure might cause, the anger residents feel toward this action and detailed explanations from the engineers who tried (when they weren't being rudely interrupted) to describe findings to date and why they represent such a concern to the welfare of the public.

The tone of the meeting in general was hostile and accusatory, with a few people acknowledging they understood this action was necessary and unpopular. Some wanted to soften the impact of the inconvenience factor by requesting that Shoestrap Rd (now Class VI) be opened up as an emergency and/or temporary travel way. This is not an option. The Town's attorney explained the issues with a Class VI roadway-which in this case was a vote taken in 2007 by the town. As a Class VI road, the town may not maintain or assume any liability for its use. Select Board may not and will not condone the travel on this roadway for any reason. It was designated as a Class VI road, because it too is unstable, too costly to repair and a liability to the town.

This meeting ended at approximately 8:30 pm.