

## Selectboard Special Meeting Minutes

*Monday, March 18, 2019 at 7pm at the Calais Town Office*

**Present:** Denise Wheeler (Chair), John Brabant (Vice Chair), Clif Emmons (Member), Jerome Lipani (ORCA), Katie Lane-Karnas (Recording Secretary), Toby Talbot (Highway Operations Manager), Peggy Bowing, Stu Johnson (VT Local Roads), Mack Gardner Morse, Margaret L. Bowen, Rick Kehne, Steven Sparrow, Chris Holcomb, Heidi Thomson, Carolyn Morton, Stuart Morton, Jim O'Reardon

**Absent:** Rose Pelchuck (Member), Sharon Winn Fannon (Member)

1. Call to Order: Denise Wheeler called the meeting to order at 7:02 pm.
2. Public Comment: None.
3. Review, Additions/Changes to Agenda: None.
4. Public Informational Meeting, Winter Roads Maintenance: The Chair opened the meeting by inviting each attendee to share brief comments. Each guest spoke. Carolyn Morton referenced the motion she proposed at Town Meeting to raise the budget approximately \$50,000 to be earmarked for the road maintenance use. Although the motion at Town Meeting failed, she appreciated the positive and respectful dialogue and viewpoints it generated. The Board agreed that all are present to identify what the problems are and to gather helpful suggestions.

Carolyn Morton discussed her concerns of back roads and the County Road (focused on the delineation between the condition of East Montpelier and Calais sides of County Road). She clarified that although climate change has been raised as part of the discussion, her experience predates recent changes to climate. Heidi Thomson agreed that surrounding towns' road conditions contrast favorably to Calais' and that the poor condition of Calais roads has been ongoing.

Chris Holcomb works evenings and travels home to Calais around midnight; he stated his opinion that the Town's operations plan of not going out during the nighttime hours is irresponsible. Steven Sparrow stated his opinion that there is a lack of appropriate sanding and the need for more frequent sanding on Lightening Ridge Road to avoid glare ice. Mack Gardener-Morse pointed out that road conditions will vary depending on timing of the observer. He commented the concern about excessive dirt and salt running from road ways into water ways and pointed out that the heavier traffic volume in East Montpelier and in more populated areas of Calais keep roads clearer than lightly travelled roads. Margaret Bowen discussed Bliss Road and the school bus's route. She stated her anger and that she believes some of the road crew members do not know how to correctly turn on the sanding apparatus. She described efforts her family has made with their own backhoe and sander to keep the town road clear, and detailed the timing of road maintenance and how it does not align with the bus

route on her road. Rick Kehne commented on the impact to roads from the increase in transition weather (causing melt-freeze patterns) that is hard for driving and road crews. He asked about the efforts of the road crew; the Chair reported 904 overtime hours for the road crew and 237 hours from part-time staff through the end of February.

The Operations Manager stated that there are four people driving trucks and four plow routes. They are on the road by 3:30-4 am. If they need to sand in both directions, it is 5-6 hours per route. There are 73.07 miles of roads in Calais (significantly more than surrounding towns). Each route driver returns to the shop for an hour or two and head back out again to get roads clear for the end of day school routes. By 5 or 6 pm, each of the four road crew members has worked upwards of 12 hours and need a six-hour break. The manpower is not available from the current road crew for additional road work in the middle of this night—that would require a second road crew. The Operations Manager spoke to the challenge of finding skilled operators to fill a paid position and finding extra people to be available for per diem work has proven extremely challenging. Most towns have a policy of not plowing between 9 pm-3 am. Jim O'Reardon commented that as a plumber he drives about a thousand miles a month and has a weighted truck. He has no problem with the roads but requested more sand.

Stu Johnson from VTRANS and VT Local Roads, former Road Commissioner in Cornwall, had been listening in and provided feedback. He stated that an average route would be closer to four hours; he noted 5-6 hour routes as “extreme” in terms of the length of time to expect a driver to plow and sand. John Brabant described the bus collision situation that happened as a result of the wrong tires for a bus in the winter in Vermont. The Selectboard is planning to meet with the local and SU school boards regarding the next contract with the bus company to set requirements for winter tires.

Discussion turned to potholes. Route 14 pothole conditions should be reported to the district office (State Route 14 is maintained by the state, not the Town). The Operations Manager explained how he initially traveled each truck route with each road crew member; the Chair agreed that it was informative when she rode routes with the road crew. The timing of storms and the timing of the route length is what impacts how much snow is on the road. For example, as soon as a route is clear, and the truck moves on to the subsequent 4-5 hours of its route, there may be a significant amount of additional snowfall or drifting.

The Operations Manager continued with explanation of maintenance of County Road (as described in detail at the February 11 meeting). There are less than five miles of paved (salted) roads in Calais. Discussion returned to the County Route boundary with East Montpelier. East Montpelier's routes are four hours, so East Montpelier returns to their section of County Road more frequently than Calais does. Their town garage is a half mile from County Road, allowing frequent eyes on the conditions there and making extra runs if needed (ease of proximity). Carolyn Morton inquired whether Calais is underserved by lack of staffing and equipment. The Operations Manager responded that Calais is understaffed *if* the goal is to plow and sand County Road more often; the current crew is working at maximum capacity on the current routes. Stu Johnson discussed the optimal treatment of paved roads: a light dose of salt that prevents the ice pack from bonding to the road every time you plow. The Operations Manager discussed the technique of leaving snow ahead of a storm that will be turning to rain, allow the snow to absorb the rain and plow after the rain stops. This avoids glare ice but

potentially could freeze up if the temperature drops unexpectedly. The Operations Manager reported that the Town uses washed sand with ½” stones (Stu Johnson agreed this is optimal).

The group discussed that with the current manpower and equipment, bus routes and time constraints are driving efforts. Changing the maintenance policy for the County Road would mean diverting care of another road. Stu Johnson confirmed that there are several towns that trade a few miles of road care in locations that benefit each town. He reiterated that Calais has a problem with a 5-6 hour route—it is too long and should be looked at. It was considered whether this would mean putting another person in the spare truck. The Operations Manager reported that the road crew has been doing this long enough to have already identified the efficiencies in the route. The group discussed details about the way sand is spread and the Chair invited anybody to go to the town garage and see the equipment and how it works.

Carolyn Morton inquired about details of road maintenance and different weather conditions. John Brabant commented on the potentially dangerous implications of overtaxing road crew members by asking them to shift their hours significantly in reaction to weather and road conditions. The Operations Manager explained that he provided the Board with at least several towns’ road policies, all of which have a policy of no plowing from 9 pm-3 am. He reiterated that the narrow cycles of freezing and thawing documented through this winter resulted in the reality of maintaining gravel roads that have been compacted with a thick layer of melted and refrozen ice.

Suggestions raised included:

- Stagger road crew to salt County Road further
- Someone going around to keep track of roads needing sand
- Add salt with sand on dirt roads to address specific ice conditions (a “hot load”)
- Use of a liquid brine to pretreat County Road (also reducing runoff and “bounce and scatter” action of solid salt; the equipment for application would need to have a dedicated truck that only does brine)
- Have a communication route for the public to use to express road concerns directly to the road crew in live time (and avoiding Front Porch Forum)
- Towns sharing sand pile locations or identifying a second location
- Add planning for timing in addition to the bus routes (for example, if most of Maple Corner is wanting to go to work at 8am, the routes could be reconfigured for this timing)
- Pay East Montpelier to cover Calais’ section of County Road, perhaps with a brine solution
- Increase the amount of salt on the County Road (acknowledging significant salt to the environment)
- Check the calibration of the truck dispenser to ensure that the volumes gauged are accurate
- Hire a subcontractor to plow and sand County Road
- Swap equal mileage with East Montpelier road crew (they do the three miles of County Road, Calais does three miles elsewhere)
- Have topics like this discussed at Road Foreman meetings to generate more ideas

- Ushahidi crowd-sourced data collection app
- UVM senior engineering projects as a potential resource (mathematical projections for different options)

The Board will schedule two more meetings (Adamant and East Calais) for continuing community forums for discussion winter road conditions. The group agreed that Stu Johnson's participation was very helpful and thanked him for attending and providing expertise.

5. Other Business/Old Business/New Business: None.
6. Adjournment: John Brabant made a motion to adjourn at 8:55 pm. The motion was seconded, voted on and passed 3-0.

Date: 3/19/2019 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas, Recording Secretary  
*Approved by the Selectboard at the 5/28/2019 meeting*

*Click on the link below to view documents associated with this agenda:*  
<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1JdXUU3oe9wcFQP-UL35LvFT-Q5YjeOQd>