

May 11, 2013

Dear Denise, John, Scott, Toby and Rose,

We are writing as a group of town residents regarding our concern over the proposed cutting of a large number(approximately 70) of trees along Adamant, Singleton and Bliss Pond Roads.

The prospect of losing the tree canopy has sparked our deep concern. However, we also feel this presents an excellent opportunity, a "test-case" if you would, for all of us, town government, citizens, road crew and outside advisors, to deal with what is an increasingly complex question here and everywhere in the world: how to balance the need and desire for ease, convenience and instant access, with equally important aspects of quality of life - environmental concerns, aesthetic values, preservation issues and sense of well being.

We do not know precisely what the aim was of the road resurfacing proposal which was voted on and approved, on April 22, 2013. We would guess that the intention was to make the roads more resilient to the rigors of weather, thereby meeting the Calais citizens' needs to travel safely on our roads. Also, it seems, to possibly deal with the road quality in a more long-lasting way. And perhaps to respond to some of the state recommendations (not requirements) around dealing with the run-off from dirt roads. These are all positive aims.

Now the question becomes how to best achieve those aims, with the least detrimental impact. And whether this plan actually serves those aims.

We urge the Selectboard to consider the environmental value that mature hardwood trees provide. During the spring, summer and fall, mature trees in full canopy shield the road from the full velocity of rainstorms, helping to prevent some of the erosive impacts of rainfall on unpaved roads. The foliage also diverts some of the water, helping to lessen polluted runoff from our roads.

Likewise, the dense root mass of such trees plays a very important role in stabilizing the down-slope banks of the roads. The cost of engineering our roads to prevent such erosion if these mature trees were removed needs to be carefully determined, before any trees are cut. Our admittedly inexpert understanding is that an engineered system, which would equal the protection offered by the trees, would be extremely expensive. The perverse result of causing road erosion should not follow from a town-directed road "improvement" project.

Furthermore, the amenity value of these mature trees, which have grown and developed as an integral part of the town's scenic character for scores of years, should not be underestimated. Preserved or conserved resources hold important economic

values – supporting property values and attracting visitors and potential new residents. The tree-lined dirt roads were an important factor for many of us in choosing to settle in Calais. Natural, tree-lined roads contribute importantly to the health and well being of residents and visitors alike.

It is our feeling that the maximal interpretation of this proposal, and the cutting of any significant number of trees along the road, does not best serve the desired aims.

Aside from the concern about the content of changes to the roads, we have some questions about what the process for adopting such major changes should be. The Town Plan speaks directly to this. We are curious, and would appreciate clarification, about how things would have unfolded, had some of us not become alarmed and contacted the Selectboard. Our understanding is that the Road Commissioner asked the Tree Warden to mark trees which might need to be cut down in order to implement the planned "resurfacing" project. If no one had said anything, would there have been any other checks and balances before the tree cutting and road project began?

It seems from the Town Plan, as well as the history of communal decision making and public discussion which is so much a part of Vermont's unique character and history, that any plan which would create such a major change in a community should be completely transparent, and allow for review, debate and discussion reflecting community sentiment, both pro and con, as well as allowing for a full impact study.

We therefore request that the proposal voted in on April 23, 2013 be re-opened for such a community process, and for a full impact study.

Please see the attached pages which contain sections from the Calais Town Plan pertinent to the issue at hand.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

Calais

Lucy Wollaeger	1155 Old West Church Road, Calais
Trey Martin	608 Adamant Rd, Adamant
Roberta Torren	608 Adamant Rd, Adamant
Suzanne Rexford-Winston	2220 Lightening Ridge Rd, Calais
Janet Pocarobba	4413 County Rd, Calais
Jim Hogue	492 Tucker Rd, Calais
Eva Gumprecht	517 Adamant Rd, Adamant
Barry Zimmer	517 Adamant Rd, Adamant
Jo MacKenzie	1573 Lightening Ridge Rd, Calais
Elisabeth Mandell-Seaver	2169 Lightening Ridge Road, Calais
Barbara Weedon	262 Adamant Rd, Adamant
Linda Schutz	833 Kent Hill Rd, Calais
David Schutz	833 Kent Hill Rd, Calais

Donna Smyers
Andrea Serota
Rick Winston
Kay Gibson
Sally Olmstead
Ginny Sassaman
Eliza Gardner-Morse
Cynthia Gardner-Morse
Jennifer Sassaman
Gail Elizabeth England
Elizabeth England
Judy Copa
Jane English
Allyson Evans
Alice Blachly
Craig Line
Ilona Lind
Warren Coleman
Scott Grzankowski
Pat Walters
Cindy Cook
Padma Meier

438 Quarry Rd, Adamant
Lightening Ridge Rd, Calais
Lightening Ridge Rd, Calais
24 Luce Rd, Calais
167 Fowler Rd, Calais
90 W. County Road, Calais
819 County Road, Calais
819 County Road, Calais
90 W. County Road, Calais
421 Bliss Pond Rd., Calais
421 Bliss Pond Rd, Calais
1777 W County Rd, Calais
56 - 10 Pond Road, East Calais
Kent Hill Rd, Calais
184 Fowler Road, Calais
Old West Church Rd, Calais
18 Going Rd., Calais
2556 Balentine Rd. E. Calais
1694 Balentine Rd. E. Calais
1476 W County Rd, Calais
991 Adamant Rd, Adamant
492 Tucker Rd, Calais

Other

Janet MacLeod
Patricia Balckom
Kathleen Moore
Leon & Mary Jane Harris

458 Templeton Rd, E. Montpelier
220 Taylor Road, Montpelier
Marshfield
4839 Center Rd, Adamant

Here is language in the Town Plan that supports our request that the decision to cut trees along Adamant and Fowler Roads not be made lightly or without input from residents and other stakeholders.

The Town Plan Aims to Preserve the Rural Character of Calais in all Land Use Decisions.

The Calais Town Plan, adopted in 2009 (“Town Plan”), envisions this municipality as a place that “will proactively adapt to global environmental and economic changes while preserving our rural characteristics.” Town Plan at 4.

Our collective sense of community, according to the Town Plan, is “created by more than solely geographic proximity.” And: “On the one hand we share the visible beauty of living in a very appealing natural setting. On the other hand there is a there is a sense of being in this together and doing what generations of Vermonters have done before us: weathering winter, enduring mud season, stacking wood, raising our kids, making a living, and finding meaning where we can.” Town Plan at 10.

A consistent goal in the Town Plan is to “guide growth in a manner that preserves this rural character and minimizes impacts on natural resources.” Town Plan at 27.

The Decision-Making Process Before a Decision to Remove Old Growth Trees Must be Robust and Inclusive.

In order to foster community, the Town Plan asserts the goals of ensuring that: “current and new residents are aware of opportunities to become involved in local government,” and sponsoring “face-to-face citizen study groups to examine food, energy, transportation, and economic issues of interest to the town.” Town Plan at 13.

This is consistent with the goal of legislature that municipalities “encourage citizen participation at all levels of the planning process, and to assure that decisions shall be made at the most local level possible commensurate with their impact.” 24 VSA 4302(b)(2).

The Town Plan Expresses a Preference for Maintenance of Mature Trees along our Roads.

The Town Plan expresses the following goal for decision-making regarding road improvements as follows:

What additional roads or sections of roads, if any, should be paved or otherwise improved? Some residents believe that paving, widening, regrading or rerouting certain roads is desirable; others do not. Some residents believe that such changes are inevitable; others think the town can, and should, decide which roads we want to “improve” and which roads we want to leave tree-lined, narrow, and unpaved -- essentially unchanged for the foreseeable future.

Town Plan at 16.

The Town Plan further states: “The Town should encourage tree canopies as a traffic-calming device where appropriate. Tree canopies slow traffic because of the perception of a narrower road.” Town Plan at 17.

The preference for tree-lined roads is further expressed:

“The Town should develop policies and programs for the preservation and enhancement of town roads such as programs to encourage the preservation of tree canopies and the planting of trees along appropriate stretches of town roads, private roads and pedestrian walkways, as well as zoning, development and historic preservation guidelines that preserve and enhance the scenic beauty of town roads.”

Town Plan at 18.

Rec'd
5/13/13

May 12, 2013

Calais Select Board

Re: Road resurfacing and tree removal

The road design standards adopted by the Town of Calais regarding road width appear in Table 6.2 in our Land Use and Development Regulations. This is a chart which determines lane and shoulder widths based on a correlation of allowed speed and volume of traffic and it should be noted that the Regulations further stipulate that these SHALL BE considered to be the maximum standards.

Adamant Road is posted at 35mph from Lightening Ridge Rd and then at 25mph as it approaches the village. With a volume of traffic at 50-100 cars the maximum allowable width of the road is 18 feet with 0 shoulder.

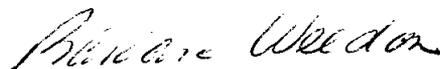
I have measured the road width at every red blazed tree from Adamant Village to Lightening Ridge Rd. None of them encroach upon that 18 foot maximum road width but most stand like sentinels on the edge of it to guard against further expansion.

It wasn't always like that. Our trees were once set back from the edge of the road. Over the years we have watched the road widen by small increments until the trees lining our property and providing the green canopy along the roadside have had their roots and trunks buried with soil pushed against them with each grading of the road. Now the mark of the graders blade comes close enough to graze the bark of the trees.

You will hear from others tonight about the detrimental environmental impacts to follow the removal of our tree canopy and I join in those concerns but I am also concerned about safety issues. As trees are removed from the side of the road the roads get wider. We have had first hand experience of this on Adamant Road when trees were clear cut along a stretch of the road several years ago to install new power lines. The road there has since widened from 18 feet to 20 feet. Further up the road towards the intersection with Lightening Ridge there has been a conspicuous widening of the road to as much as 22 feet along a section where there are no trees to mark the road's edge. Wider roads encourage faster speeds and the road into Adamant village becomes more dangerous for walkers, bikers, and other traffic.

Our trees may present constraints in the way the road resurfacing project is designed and implemented but they should not be allowed to be considered as mere obstacles to be dispensed with.

Barbara Weedon



262 Adamant Road
Adamant, Vt 05640

Sharon Fannon 5/11/13

I can't make Monday night's selectboard meeting. This is the time of year the kids go in a million directions.

I want to weigh in on the road and trees conversation. I don't object to cutting down trees for purposes of forestry management, health the of the tree, etc. but I'm not sure that's what's going on.

When Alfie's team grades the road it's much appreciated. But I'd live without grading -- the roads were dirt when we all moved here and we knew what we were getting into . . . if the road is bumpy you just drive slower.

I DO agree the roads are getting wider and that's a problem. I don't want my road to be a thoroughfare. I grew up in Vermont, as some of you did, and the dirt roads hold no promise of two cars passing comfortably. That's not the point of a dirt road -- never has been, and nothing's changed to require the roads to be wider.

I'd rather invest in signs reminding all of us and the passers through that dirt roads are narrow and require a slower speed.

The other observation I have is this has happened before, and yet every time the roads get graded they're wider -- why is that? Haven't we as a town and the selectboard already had this conversation? Why does it keep coming up?

Sharon

P.S. If we're all just imaging the roads getting wider, then let's do a test. Next time Alfie is going to grade, he could give me and my neighbors a couple of days notice. We could do our own measurement, Alfie should even join us -- before and after. That way, the facts themselves could arbitrate the issue. Without that shared step both before and after, the arguing on what's real will continue. But we shouldn't have to argue when we could take steps to have the facts.

The Vermont Statutes Online

Attachment
D

Title 24: Municipal and County Government

Chapter 67: PARKS AND SHADE TREES

24 V.S.A. § 2509. Hearing

§ 2509. Hearing

A public shade tree within the residential part of a municipality shall not be felled without a public hearing by the tree warden, except that when it is infested with or infected by a recognized tree pest, or when it constitutes a hazard to public safety, no hearing shall be required. In all cases the decision of the tree warden shall be final except that when the tree warden is an interested party or when a party in interest so requests in writing, such final decision shall be made by the legislative body of the municipality. (Amended 1969, No. 238 (Adj. Sess.), § 6.)

May 13, 2013

Calais Selectboard
c/o Town Clerk: Donna Fitch
3120 Pekin Brook Road
East Calais, Vermont, 05650

To the Calais Selectboard:

I am discouraged by the recent plans to cut large trees from the sides of Bliss Pond, Fowler, Singleton, and Adamant roads. Tree-lined back roads with low-speed traffic contribute importantly as community spaces and as the primary vantage point from which we experience the town's landscape. I spent my childhood on them walking to the store, learning to ride a bike, stopping to chat with neighbors, waiting for the school bus, and eventually learning to drive; I think we can all identify with this variety of uses. It is important that the design and maintenance of back roads continues to make them make them safe and attractive for more than just a speeding vehicle.

As a student of transportation planning and natural resource economics—I am a graduate student at UVM's Rubenstein School of Environment and Natural Resources and a researcher at the UVM Transportation Research Center—I urge you to consider the value of roadside trees that has been identified in a variety of fields. There is broad agreement within the planning field that mature trees standing close to the road edge slow vehicle traffic and encourage walking and bicycling. They do this by enclosing the roadway, giving drivers the perception of a narrower corridor. This effect has been demonstrated by empirical research that correlates reduced speed and traffic accidents with roadside trees and other edge-defining landscape features. Walkers and bicyclists are also attracted to intimacy of slow-speed and highly vegetated roadways. A substantial body of public health literature demonstrates the importance of landscape aesthetics in promoting active lifestyles that include walking and bicycling.

If you intend to maintain town roads as quiet corridors shared by drivers, walkers, and bicyclists, I encourage you to maintain the roadside trees with which Calais has been well endowed by former generations. If these trees are cut today, their value cannot be practically restored within our lifetimes.

Sincerely,

Chester Harvey

Monday, May 13, 2013

My thoughts on the planned road work, including widening, ditching, and cutting of trees.

Involvement - For decades both Calais boards and the public have been frustrated by the lack of meaningful involvement in governing ourselves. This is a clear opportunity for the public to have meaningful positive involvement in our local governing process that will create a long lasting impact on the lives of all Calais residents, whichever way it turns out.

Public Spaces – our roads are more than just a transportation utility for cars and trucks. When we rewrote the Design Review Guidelines for the Historic District (I was the chair of that Committee) we discussed the importance of the roads as Calais’s dominant shared public space, our most valued public asset. This shared public space is so important because it ties our community together.

Legal Boundaries - Our Town Road right-of-way boundaries are ill-defined. Calais never set out land for roads when it was originally laid out. Instead right-of-ways were granted over private property. Boundaries have traditionally been defined by stone walls and rows of trees. With this much controversy and interest, I believe it is time for the town to hire a surveyor to determine accurate right-of-way boundaries preceding the widening of roads or cutting of trees that may be beyond the legal right-of-way.

Peter Harvey
1155 Old West Church Rd
Calais, VT