

Review of the Road Commission Gravel Road Survey for 2013 report by the Selectboard

The Road Commission is a committee that was formed at Town Meeting “composed of five members of the community, the Selectboard, and the Highway Department Supervisor” to “establish priorities for road reconstruction and repair” for roads in town. On July 18th, 2013 the Board of Selectboard met with the Roads Commission members and discussed the work of the commission. In the meeting the Selectboard outlined the information the Board was interested in receiving from the commission. This included specific information about each road; including the number of culverts, the length and width, and other non-perishable “data sets” that could be compiled by the committee. Information of this type could also include researching each road and finding the original recording of the road in State records. This was acknowledged as potentially a significant amount of work as the names of many roads have changed over the course of time. Having specific information from the original records is important to understanding the length and width of the road when it was originally formed. Today all gravel roads in town are designated Scenic Roads and preservation of their scenic nature is important to residents and the Selectboard. Preservation requires having adequate records that cover the origination of the right-of-ways.

The Selectboard were clear in their discussion with the Roads Commission that this type of information would be very helpful for both the DPW and Selectboard to use as a reference in their discussions about road maintenance, reconstruction and budgeting. The Selectboard were also clear that DPW was responsible for evaluating the condition of the roads, because the condition changes throughout the year; an evaluation by the Roads Commission was redundant to the DPW's ongoing assessment of the roads. As background to the Board's request, weather is a constant aggressor against the quality of the roads; while work that is done by DPW on a day to day basis can improve the quality of a road in a very short time. This is true especially when considering that DPW is grading gravel roads on a regular basis starting in spring of each year.

It's important to understand that the Selectboard's request for information that would support their discussions with the DPW Supervisor and help establish budget priorities was clearly communicated after two years of not receiving any information from the commission. Additionally, non-perishable information was requested that would be useful as a reference in budget discussions. Evaluations of the roads in town on a graded basis (p=poor, f=fair, g=good) was not the information that was requested. In fact, the Board expressly requested the Roads Commission not spend their time on this approach because this type of data forms a snapshot that perishes after a very short time. As a result of these issues and acknowledged difficulties in working with the Commission the Selectboard feel the report does not meet the needs that were originally outlined at Town Meeting by the town.

DPW Supervisor Tim Murray provided his thoughts on the evaluation here:

Dear Selectboard

First I would like to thank the Roads Commission for their hard work to produce the 2014 Gravel Road Study. This study is a very detailed and well written layman's snapshot of the gravel roads in Greenfield. DPW appreciates the hard work and effort of the people involved with this project, and also the town's interest in understanding more about its infrastructure. In the following paragraphs I will outline some of the DPW's thoughts on the study for the benefit of the Selectboard.

DPW's approach to the roads is similar to the approach taken by the Roads Commission but we use an informed priority list that is constructed based on our budget, year-to-year, and our understanding of the roads and how they respond to weather conditions over the course of a year, or, over several years. Our relationship with each road is built up over a longer period of time. Gravel roads can change rapidly on a day to day, week to week, or month to month basis. Having an understanding of how roads react to torrential rain, snow, freezing & thawing, and how they retain or shed water during mud season helps us to prioritize our Road Maintenance and Road Reconstruction funds. In particular we have to prioritize based on the relationships of the roads as a whole and as they relate to one another. DPW activities are entirely weather dependent.

Gravel roads in Greenfield are all considered Scenic Roads. The laws protecting the residents are spelled out within the RSA governing scenic roads. These laws prohibit the DPW from intruding on residential land to achieve proper sloping and ditching in many areas in town. Permission is needed from property owners in order to change the slope of roads or to effect changes on the edge of the right of way. While DPW would enjoy nothing more than to have the ability to create perfect gravel roads, this would put a significant financial strain on the residents and taxpayers. Material is expensive and must be purchased and trucked into town. The Selectboard are aware that DPW does not return very much money at the end of the year and has always overspent its road maintenance funds.

With respect to the question of funding, I agree with the Commission's concern about not enough money being spent but disagree that a bond is the best way to achieve a better road system. A bond is likely to produce a onetime quick fix of all roads at the same time, but that is not in concert with seasonal impacts and the fact that roads may degrade at different time depending on different factors (amount of sun and shade, substrata, and fill, etc). The road system needs to be an ongoing year by year project. The commission feels that there is significant amount of work to be done to have acceptable roads. I feel that the Town of Greenfield has very well maintained roads; the team at DPW takes pride in their work.

For your reference while you review the report, please note some of my observations about the report itself and how our work may differ from the report's conclusions:

- Page 3 discusses State Road construction guidelines; we are not constructing but yet maintaining existing scenic roads. Many have been simply carved into the ground many years ago and don't allow for proper ditching, which we at DPW realize.
- After reviewing their findings I note their frequent observation that the roads are too low. I agree in many areas the roads could use help, and, as stated above, material is very costly and as the current board knows I don't give much back at the end of our year.
- On page 5, DPW would never apply a one-pass grade of gravel roads as the commission suggests we do.
 - Now they feel we should purchase a smaller grader for smaller roads? Money ?
- DPW would never push dirt onto any property and each individual under the current administration understands the importance and penalties for such damage.
- During grading we uncover unidentified stone/objects. They are painted with fluorescent orange paint and then we attempt to remove them with the appropriate equipment. We have found 95% of these objects are ledge outcrops and would need to be removed with blasting.
- New material again comes with a heavy expense to a small budget
- Grading occurs as needed, the DPW received less than 6 calls last year for this 'service'.
- Scenic roads do not allow the DPW to enter private property to cut trees on resident's land. All gravel roads in Greenfield are considered scenic.

Here are some examples of significant differences from the report:

1. Example #1, Page #8 Cavendar Rd.
 - Traffic volume is high
 - DPW elevated 700' of road by 2' after this report.
 - After the elevation project extensive ditching occurred .
2. Example #2, Page #12 County Rd
 - There is not one section of road that water passes over; we cannot dump water onto private property without easements from residents. These are hard to obtain and for this road are not needed.
 - DPW cleared the Forest Rd intersection in August.
3. Page #23 DPW has never experienced mud on Miner Rd .
4. Page #24 Muzzey Hill Rd. the Commission used the word " sloppy ". We received feedback that people are actually are quite happy with the way Muzzey and County Rds are looking.
5. Page #28 Old Bennington Rd: DPW has never widened a road. These roads were established prior to the new dept.

6. Page #29 Old Lyndborough Mtn Rd . The Selectboard's office actually received a letter signed by ALL residents on that road indicating their appreciation. If there are no low areas why would we raise it?
7. Page #31 Riverbend Rd The road actually measures 26' not 15'
8. Page #32 Schoolhouse Rd. No culvert found ? The town receives a bridge report yearly .
9. Page #37 Thomas Rd has a 36" culvert running under it .
10. Page #36 Swamp Rd. the town would need to purchase private property to resolve this situation; it's actually located on the paved section of Bennington rd .

I do appreciate the time and effort put in by these gentlemen that are trying to help. Gravel roads are a constant ongoing program that your current DPW is covering quite well. I truly have the upmost confidence in my team and feel we are the best around.

We see, we go, we fix. We are gaining on this town by leaps and bounds; we adopted some work but are very happy taking on that challenge.

The [current] DPW has been together for only a few years, but has achieved a very good grasp of the roads system in Greenfield. We know how each and every road in Greenfield reacts to different weather scenarios. The Commission did a snapshot consisting of a very short study span during the summer months. While this is a laudable effort it's not entirely connected to the reality of our infrastructure, especially after such a hard winter, as we have just experienced. DPW is with these roads daily thru all four seasons. Every weather event has a very different reaction on different roads depending on the material they are made from. We know where to focus our energy after torrential rains and where to respond during mud season. We do have quite a few low lying areas in town that ultimately would be very beneficial to elevate but simply can't fund them all. If the Roads Commission were to make an appeal for additional funding as a result of their efforts this would be helpful to us.

In closing I would like to first thank my team; they work extremely hard at their jobs. They truly enjoy where they are as I also do. We mesh very well and are extremely multi functional as the town is observing. I have reviewed this report at length, sheet by sheet. I would be very happy to sit with the Board if asked and would be happy to explain my understanding of the roads to the Road Commission if asked. Thank you for your trust in us.

Greenfield DPW 2014