

**Minutes
Town of Skowhegan
Second Bridge Committee Meeting
3:30 P.M.
Tuesday, March 19, 2019
Municipal Building – Council Room**

Committee Members:

Christine Almand
Betty Austin
Greg Dore
Jason Gayne
Sam Hight
Christian Savage
Roger Staples
Mark Wilson
Rod Whittemore

Executive Secretary:

Cara Mason

Call Meeting to order.

Organizational Meeting:

1. Appoint a Chairman.

Greg Dore and Rodney Whittemore nominated Christine Almand as Chairman.

Vote: 9/0

2. Appoint a Vice Chairman

Roger Staples and Greg Dore nominated Betty Austin as Vice Chairman.

Vote: 9/0

3. Appoint a Secretary

Greg Dore and Roger Staples nominated Cara Mason as Secretary.

Vote: 9/0

Regular Agenda:

Marty Rooney said he was involved in the last two or three years of the last study.

Marty Rooney said that the DOT had met with the Selectmen regarding a second bridge study. We have submitted a request for proposals. DOT is currently in the process of consultant selection.

Christine Almand said that the RFPs were reviewed by her and Greg Dore as well as DOT.

Nate Howard said that the contract has been awarded to T.Y. LIN. Their strong point is downtown traffic studies. All of the information from the last study is available to them. Everybody working on the project is based in Maine. The contract should be finalized in about three weeks.

Christine Almand asked when the study would start.

Nate Howard said that the study would likely start in early April. DOT would expect to have the first public meeting in June. The process started before was a 15 year project. This study is much smaller in scope. It is a focused study area, based on the Commissioner's guidance.

Marty Rooney said that this study is less than 5% of what the prior study was. This is a second bridge study, not a feasibility study. The last study was about \$8 million.

The consultants are going to gather a lot of information. Where there are safety issues, where there are delays...they will then ask for feedback on that. At the first meeting they will be looking at what should be included in the purpose and need and idea for alternatives.

Greg Dore asked if accidents would include breakdowns. When a truck breaks down on the bridge...it's not an accident but it still causes the same issues.

Nate Howard said that it would not be defined as a crash, but any incident that there is record of will be in the study.

They also look at if we don't do it, what will traffic look like in 20 years. They will be looking at other alternatives such as adding additional lanes to the existing bridge.

Right now we are finishing up a study in Madawaska for a new bridge and border crossing. That is a similar size town. We used the same consultant that we used for the Saco study.

On this study, some of the data collected before can be used. The traffic information is ten years old...so is really of no use in this study.

Roger Staples said that the geography of Skowhegan is unique. Is that going to dictate where this would go?

Nate Howard said that the study will come up with alternatives. If there are current safety issues, and we do nothing and add more traffic...this will all be factored in. Cost will also be a factor.

There were three alternatives in the Saco study. The first alternative would have created a bigger impact on several properties. We are going with the middle alternative, because of impact and costs. It does meet the purpose and need, although not as well as the first alternative.

This study does not include the environmental review. Once we have some alternatives that come out on top...then that process will have to happen. This study should be complete in a year or a year and a half.

Greg Dore asked...once this study is done...does the engineer design just one site or multiple sites.

Marty Rooney said that we will have a map of the study area with potential locations. They will be evaluated based on specific criteria, and public input. It depends on how the alternatives come out.

Greg Dore asked if the decision would be made on cost/benefit factors or the input of the Committee.

Marty Rooney said that it would be based on many factors...including the committee and input from the public. Ultimately we need to satisfy permitting agencies.

Greg Dore asked if we get down to one alternative, what could cause this to fail.

Nate Howard said that sometimes through the environmental process or there is something there that we have to avoid. Eagles nests or geological sites. Then we have to change our decision. The good news is that this is a much smaller study area and we know a lot about the area.

Marty Rooney said that this will impact traffic in certain areas. People may be in favor of a bridge until it impacts their neighborhood and then their opinion may change. That is where the Town is needed to inform the public about the purpose and need.

Nate Howard said that there will be three public meetings. The second one will show options and ask for input. The third one will be laying out the top alternative. There is controversy at these meetings. There will always be people who do not support it.

Greg Dore asked about the timeframe after the study is complete and a location is determined.

Marty Rooney said that can depend on available funds. This will be funded by grant funds. If we don't get that federal infra-grant it is up in the air. Eight to ten years at best.

Christine Almand said that we have had discussions about how this committee fits into the study and when would be appropriate times for us to meet. It is important to get that decided right up front.

Marty Rooney said that in the Saco study the study team is a consultant, city professional staff and DOT professional staff. If members of the public want to sit in and listen, that is typically allowed...that is typically traffic engineers. Those meetings are strategizing for the public process.

We want to make the most efficient use of this committee's time and the public's time. We could come back and meet with this group before the public meetings. The way this study was set up...there are three decision making points.

Christian Savage said that he assumes that this information will be filtered to us so that we don't have to be a statistician to understand it.

Marty Rooney agreed and said that those other meetings are not filtered. Christine and Greg will be invited to those meetings. Once we have a map and data about where traffic is slow...where there are safety issues, etc...that information will be shared.

Christine Almand asked about having committee meetings right before public meetings.

Marty Rooney said that is an option...or we can determine when there is enough information to have a meeting. If we schedule a meeting and they are still gathering data...there isn't anything to report. Maybe this group can meet two weeks before the public meetings.

Adding Joel Greenwood to the committee was discussed, and will be brought to the Selectmen.

Christine Almand said that future meetings would be held at 4:00 p.m.

Mark Wilson said that he would like to be involved in the actual field work. You can get more information that way than you can looking at the data on a computer screen.

Nate Howard said that the consultant probably will not be doing that. The traffic engineers will be out here observing intersections and that type of thing. We are not doing environmental field work.

Christine Almand said to email her with any questions. She will try to get the answers.

An indiscernible question was asked about the Commissioner.

Marty Rooney said that the Commissioner approved for this agreement to be signed. He is aware of it and we are moving forward. We wouldn't be here spending \$350,000.00 after the last process if it wasn't recommended by the Commissioner.

It was asked if the consultant has an incentive for something to happen. Are they unbiased?

Marty Rooney said that they are doing this work for the DOT. They are professionals. Most people believe there is a need here. Our previous Commissioner said that there is a need here. If you look at the length of the detour if the bridge is closed...the detour length is at or near high. We have used this consultant before. They will be objective.

