

**Minutes
Town of Skowhegan
Second Bridge Committee Meeting
10:00 A.M.
Tuesday, August 20, 2019
Municipal Building – Council Room**

Committee Members:

Christine Almand - Chairman
Betty Austin – Vice Chairman - **Absent**
Greg Dore
Jason Gayne
Steve Govoni
Joel Greenwood
Sam Hight - **Absent**
Christian Savage
Roger Staples
Mark Wilson
Rod Whittmore – **Arrived at 10:15 a.m.**

Executive Secretary:

Cara Mason

Call Meeting to order.

Christine Almand called the meeting to order.

Regular Agenda:

1. Discussion and decision to approve the Minutes from the March 19, 2019 meeting.

A motion was made by Jason Gayne and seconded by Greg Dore to approve the Minutes from the March 19, 2019 meeting.

Vote: 8/0

2. Status update regarding the feasibility study.

Nate Howard said that since the last meeting three major things have been happening. Through the RFP process we contracted with T.Y. LIN. We have done a lot of data collection. We did traffic counts in June, while school was still in session. We are now starting to prepare for the first public meeting.

Tom Errico said that a study team has been formed. It is comprised on the consultants, the Town and the DOT. Tom Errico works for T.Y. LIN and is a traffic engineer. T.Y. Lin is well known for their bridge expertise. Craig Freshley is the public outreach consultant. There are a couple other sub-consultants that are not here today. We are doing some modeling to show how traffic will change depending on what is done. We also have an environmental consultant that will be looking at any environmental issues. The study tem has met twice.

There is a lot of data out there, so it wasn't difficult to collect data. Some of it is old and probably not useful. Nate has sent a tone of information about what has gone on historically. Traffic counts and traffic turning counts were done in June. That data came in last week. The average annual traffic on the existing bridge is about 21,000 per day. During data collection there was one day that was 25,000. The main bridge between Lewiston and Auburn has 30,000 per day, for comparison. The other information that was collected was crash information. High crash location have eight crashes over a three year period. We will be looking at that in terms of the safety evaluation. The environmental consultants are not out in the field. They are collecting mapping data about possible environmental issues in the area. T.Y. Lin has been up here getting an existing inventory. Taking measurements of roadways, looking at intersection configuration, lanes, traffic control.

Now we are moving into the data analysis phase.

Steve Govoni asked if at this point it goes back and forth between tasks three and four.

Tom Errico said typically not. But if we had the public meeting and citizens were concerned about something that we had not thought of or looked at...we could go back. We feel that our coverage is good, based on what we know from last time. However, it is possible to go back.

At some point we are going to look at future conditions. We are going to look forward twenty and forty years out and project what the traffic will be like at that time. If there is investment you want to make sure that it is going to work for a few years. If it works tomorrow, but not in five years it is a wasted investment.

Jason Gayne asked if there is really much difference in traffic compared to the previous study.

Nate Howard and Tom Errico said that traffic had changed some in that timeframe. It had dropped off some and now we are back up to about where it was before 2008.

Christine Almand said that they are also aware of the Run of River project, proposed trails etc. We are trying to take all of the future information that we have access to into consideration.

Tom Errico said that we will take a baseline with no changes and then with proposed changes to see what effect these changes may have on traffic flow.

Joel Greenwood asked if this was a regional analysis...and what the scope. You could have things happen outside of Skowhegan that would affect the way people move around the state.

Tom Errico said he did not bring a map of the study area. The study area is pretty well in the downtown, but he thinks we will be talking about all kinds of patterns. There will be some discussion on the implications. Then we will start evaluating alternatives.

Recording Time: 16:38

We will be looking at impacts, mobility and safety...volumes on streets, economic development, impacts on the downtown, truck traffic. Certainly there will be a lot of public feedback.

Tom Errico handed out the Study Purpose and Needs Statement. This is...why are we doing this and what are we trying to accomplish.

Joel Greenwood asked if there would be a ranking system based on the criteria.

Tom Errico said that they would develop a matrix to help flush out the good from the bad. Some alternatives could have fatal flaws.

Joel Greenwood asked if the matrix would be weighted.

Tom Errico said there are some things that you just can't do because of the law. But there are some things like safety...should that be weighted higher in the matrix? Often there is one clear choice...but if there are three top choices, how do you decide which one is better?

Nate Howard said you have to go through the exercise to in the hopes that one alternative will become the clear choice.

3. Discussion regarding the timeline.

Tom Errico handed out the schedule. The first public meeting is scheduled for September 10th.

Christine Almand said that the meeting will be after the Selectmen's Meeting on September 10th at 7:00 p.m. at the Community Center.

Tom Errico said that we will be looking at alternatives through the end of the year. Beginning of next year we will be getting into more of the details. There are three public meetings scheduled. We are trying to get as much public feedback as possible.

The first public meeting we will not be presenting a lot of information. It is more of a listening session. The second public meeting is not until February of next year. There isn't another meeting with the committee until February. He said he feels that is maybe too long of a time. We are looking at final public meeting and final report in the summer of next year.

Jason Gayne said the next meeting in February is too long.

Steve Govoni said that once the study information has been digested, that is when the committee should be involved.

Christine Almand said this should be discussed with the next agenda item. The study team does not intend to go to this first public meeting with a map of where the bridge should go.

4. Discussion regarding the public meeting.

Craig Feshley said that at the first public meeting you give the public some basic information, not over whelm them with this data. It is premature for that. In fact, we want to hear public perceptions without all of this data. We are thinking about asking three questions at the public meeting.

What concerns do you have that you think a second bridge might address?

What additional concerns or problems might a second bridge create?

What are your initial ideas about location?

Before going too far with proposing alternatives, we should get public opinion of those three questions. Public opinion is another piece of the pie.

Joel Greenwood said he thinks we should establish that there has not been any kind of decision made. People are saying that they have heard where it is going to go.

Mark Wilson said asking where it should go, you are going to get people saying it should go through their neighbor's yard. It is a crummy question, because you don't get the truth. We should put this where it should go based on traffic and data.

Rod Whittmore said he has been involved in this before. It should be based on the data.

Joel Greenwood said that people are going to tell you what they think whether you ask or not.

Tom Errico said that with a lot of studies he has done, having some sense of what the community is thinking is helpful. Hear what the public has to say before you present them with an answer.

Roger Staples said he would try to stay away from location. This is about the need and why.

Christian Savage said that the majority of people attending will have an opinion on where it should go.

Christine Almand said that the committee needs to be telling people that this needs to be driven by the data.

Craig Feshley said that asking for solutions instead of locations might be better. There are also some good reason to ask about location. If we ask we can't be accused later of not asking. We do not want to be the people who are not interested in public opinion on where to put this bridge. We also want to understand the constraints and opportunities for certain areas. There may be things that we are not aware of.

Greg Dore said he has been going through this for 27 years. If you don't give people the opportunity to offer up locations, we then cannot discount that location if there are reasons that it cannot go there. It gives us the opportunity to look at locations we may not have thought about. We can't just say that we don't want to hear it because it is not going to work.

Steve Govoni said that there is a big distance between that September public meeting and the next time we meet in February. This committee should be the guidance going into the second public meeting. We need to meet after that September meeting...maybe in October.

Recording Time: 40:31

Christine Almand said that the committee could meet in October and send what was discussed to the study team.

Joel Greenwood said that we need to frame and explain the actual problem that we are trying to solve.

Tom Errico said that there are congestion problems at the south side of the existing bridge. We have not modeled it yet. We are going to use a traffic model that will tell us how bad it is...then we will use that model as we come up with alternatives. We haven't modeled it yet, because we just got the data. His guess is that the modeling will confirm what he saw in the field. We will be able to say which intersections don't work well, which ones have safety problems. The environmental people will have maps of constraints as well.

Christine Almand asked if the slideshow he was working on would be ready for the public meeting.

Tom Errico said that it would be ready for the meeting. It will be the basics...volume and high crash locations.

Joel Greenwood asked if it was safe to say that 21,000 vehicles going over a bridge of that current layout is too many.

Tom Errico said it is an unusual bridge...two southbound lanes and one northbound lane. Was it a two lane bridge and they restriped it as three lanes? Probably. The intersections are the constraints to capacity. What will drive capacity is how well the intersection works. There is no more width for more lanes.

Mark Wilson asked if the committee could have the raw or less refined data to look at before it goes to the public.

Tom Errico said that they would typically develop a draft presentation. We will not be summarizing all of it before the public meeting. Some of it will be summarized. He said he would email all of the data to Christine Almand...she can forward it.

Rod Whittemore asked about getting information out to the public and for people that maybe cannot attend the meeting a way for them to give input. A survey or a comment card.

Steve Govoni said that the loudest people will be the ones that did not show up to the meeting. You need to have everyone sign in so that when they are walking the streets being loudmouths you can ask them why they did not attend the meeting.

Christine Almand said that it doesn't matter if you call them out about why they didn't attend the meeting. No matter how well we publicize the meeting, it is going to be our fault why they didn't attend.

Christine Almand said that we have a subscription to Survey Monkey. If we do a survey we need to know what questions we are asking. These three questions are not good for a survey...they are too open ended.

Joel Greenwood said that the collection of information at these meeting is also important.

Craig Freshley said that he would be taking down information as people speak at the meeting as bullet points. That way people know that you have heard and understood what they have said.

We should put these questions out in advance of the public meeting online. At the public meeting we hand out paper copies of the questions. Have a deadline for survey answers. Then we take all of those answers and put them in a document for everybody to see. That way everybody can see that all of the comments have been recorded and that they have been heard. The more feedback and the more details the better.

Christine Almand said that we would get the survey results all printed out and give the committee a chance to review them before the committee meets in October. We can include notice of the survey in the tax bills.

Cara Mason will set up the survey.

Craig Freshley said the public meeting is expected to go from 7:00 p.m. until 8:30 p.m.

Christine Almand said she didn't feel that we had settled whether or not to ask about location at the meeting. If we don't ask...we will be accused of not asking. That could have been one of the problems with the Public Safety Building. We are still trying to work that out. Ultimately that is what failed us. We didn't get any public input on locations.

Tom Errico said that people will have opinions about where it should go. Then there will be the reality of where it can actually go. Try to limit individuals...we don't want one person talking for a half hour. Let them know that if they don't get to express everything, they can put it in the survey.

Joel Greenwood said it will be interesting to see what people's preconceptions about this are. Then you have an idea of how to target how present information to them.

Tom Errico said we should have somebody from the Town kick it off. People remember when the DOT was here before. We need to let them know that this is a partnership. We are not back with the same bypass.

Christine Almand said that she would open the meeting and say a few sentences about how this got started and that we are working together on this.

There was talk about setup for the meeting and about how many people might show up.

Steve Govoni asked if this committee was going to be the messengers once we have digested some of this information.

Christine Almand said that the committee can let people know where we are at in the process. Get the word out about the process and the public meeting.

The committee's role at the public meeting is to listen to what people have to say. They should not be giving their opinions at that meeting.

We will not be using the work bypass.

We recently put a bypass lane on route 2 out to bid. It is essentially a turning lane for the Community Center. Cara Mason received quite a few calls from angry people that we were putting in a bypass. They hear that word and immediately get angry.

Craig Freshley said that he would caution about telling people that we are not planning a bypass.

Christine Almand said that the Selectmen have been very vocal about this not being a bypass. In our conversations with the DOT we were very clear that we are not talking about a bypass.

Tom Errico said that the study area says that. We are not looking at anything that big. The bypass was a loop around Skowhegan. It was a highway to connect 201 to 201.

Christine Almand said that bypass is a dirty word.

Tom Errico said this is about a second bridge to help with traffic and connectivity.

Joel Greenwood said these meeting need to make it clear that this is not something that it is not.

Craig Freshley said he still thinks that it will be perceived as a bypass...not bypassing the town but bypassing the congestion of the current bridge.

5. Other Business

There was no other business.

Adjourn Meeting.