



TOWN OF THORNTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes September 24, 2019

2:00 P.M. Chairman Benton opened the Thornton Board of Selectmen meeting on site at the beginning of the dirt section of Mill Brook Road.

PRESENT: Chairman Benton, Vice-Chairman Roy Sabourn, Joseph Monti, Selectman John Gaites, Selectman, Brooke Brown, District Ranger, Jason Walker, Timber Sales Administrator, Johanna Nugent, WMNF, John & Valeria Gray, Marilyn and Mike Pomerantz, Jerry & Barb Sobolewski, Tom Cowie

ABSENT: Marianne Peabody

STAFF PRESENT: TA Debra Shepard, Town Administrator, John Kubik, RA

2:00 PM Mill Brook Road Site Visit with White Mountain National Forest in regards to the Wanosha Integrated Project.

The Board of Selectmen, Road Agent Kubik and TA Debra Shepard, will meet with White Mountain National Forest personnel on Mill Brook Road to conduct a site visit to discuss safety concerns and road improvements as it relates to the Wanosha Integrated Logging Project slated to begin in 2020.

Discussion relative to the purpose of this on site visit. Selectman Monti shared his opinion that while there are safety concerns on the dirt portion of the road, a lot of the residents in attendance today went to the public meetings because they are concerned about the safety of this road on the paved section as well due to the logging operation. He stated that their concerns are on the whole road, not just the dirt section.

Jerry Soboleski asked if the White Mountain National Forest has to be allowed to use the town road. R. Sabourn stated that the road is a public way and has always been an access in and out of the valley.

J. Soboleski asked who would have the credentials to deem the road safe for logging trucks and citizens. R. Sabourn suggested that the Board hold a public forum at another time so that the Board of Selectman, Road Agent, and Forest Service Personnel can complete a walk-through of Mill Brook Road to see what the possibilities are for improvements as that was the purpose of today's meeting. Discussion followed. Chairman Benton agreed to allow public comments and discussions throughout the meeting as requested.

Selectman Monti felt it would be helpful if the Board complete the tour for the purposes of the meeting and then at the end of the site visit, allow the public an opportunity to ask questions. J. Monti stated that he does not feel the WMNF adequately addressed the concerns of the Town or its residents in relation to this project.

R. Sabourn stated that the Road Agent and Assistant Road Agent were asked by the Board to look at Mill Brook Road and submit their review and present areas that they feel could have possible improvements. R. Sabourn stated that the Board asked during the previous board meeting that the Road Agent band trees that should be removed to make the needed improvements. A decision was made to not band the trees due to a death in the family of those that own a lot of the land being discussed this afternoon. R. Sabourn stated that the Highway Department can show the WMNF which areas will need to have trees removed.

RA Kubik shared a list of four areas he feel need improvements. He also had on hand a survey plan showing where the town's right of way is on this road. John shared that some of the areas in need of improvement were noted as a result of winter maintenance situations when a plow truck meets an oncoming vehicle.

RA Kubik stated that these areas in discussion labeled site 1 through site 4 are the areas that he noted as concerns during plowing with oncoming vehicles.

RA Kubik discussed site #1 as the first hill immediately after roadway changes to dirt. He feels that this section is obviously one of the more difficult sites due to how narrow the travel surface is in addition the steep slopes on either side of the road. This site is increasingly difficult during the winter as it only gets narrower as there is nowhere to plow the snow. This site is also probably the most difficult section of the roadway to improve as the extent of the right of way is extremely narrow when compared to the rest of the road. It is his estimation that the right of way extends only from top of bank to top of bank according to the Mill Brook Right of Way Plan Pg. 1. This section would require the removal of trees, the acquisition of some land, or at least a slope easement of some sort to be allowed to soften the steep banks.

RA Kubik reviewed Site 2: North and East of telephone pole 43/45: This area appears to be an easy spot to widen the travel surface and improve drainage as there are few trees in the way that would require to be removed. If a few trees were removed, the roadside bank could be excavated back as there is plenty of right of way to work with on the north side of the road. This would create more visibility and a wider area for passing. This area could be improved by the Town with additional road surface within the right of way and would not require obtaining additional land from abutters.

Discussion followed regarding Mill Brook being a scenic road. RA Kubik said it was his intention to be as least disruptive as possible to Mill Brook Road based on that scenic designation. He also stated that he understands the process involved to remove the trees

to make the improvement if there is enough agreement that this would be a viable improvement.

R. Sabourn asked if the road plans made any notation as to the layout or the width of the road. RA Kubik stated that on his reduced size copy it was hard to determine that but it is pretty clear to him what the plan considers the right of way.

All in attendance traveled to Site 3: discussed as the Hill prior to the first 90 degree turn: RA Kubik explained that this section of roadway is probably the most difficult section of the entire roadway due to its steep grade combined with its overall entire length. Another factor that makes this section difficult is that it is not a straight section of road therefore it has limited visibility at times. When encountering oncoming traffic in this section, particularly in trucks while plowing, one vehicle has to back down to the closest driveway across from the sap collection tank. This section could be made easier to navigate with little effort near the top portion as there are few trees that would need to be removed and it appears the town has a relatively wide right of way. The department believes this section would benefit from a drainage improvement by ditching and stabilizing the ditch lines with 6" minus erosion stone.

RA Kubik stated that when he is ditching, he needs to have a place to put the dirt. The Department does have the ability to haul the dirt off site.

RA Kubik explained that this area is more difficult for passing large vehicles due to a narrow road as well as limited visibility. This often creates a situation where a vehicle will need to back down the road to allow another vehicle to pass.

A resident asked if the existing electrical pole would be an issue when widening the road. RA Kubik stated that the NH Electric Co-op has worked with the Town in the past to move telephone poles if the Town is making an improvement. He feels that the road could be widened and that NH Coop would be amenable to moving poles.

A question was asked if the plan being referenced includes designated wetlands. RA Kubik explained that any designated wetlands is not referenced on his copy of the plan. RA Sabourn commented that if there were wetlands, the Town would have to hire someone to delineate the wetlands before any work is completed. R. Sabourn stated that the wetlands may be delineated on the road plan already.

RA Kubik was asked to also review to share another site, which was a very sharp corner with ledge on one side. Discussion followed. RA Kubik felt he would need to move another utility pole and perhaps blast some ledge at this site in order to widen the corner. For clarification, this site will be designated site 4 ½ as it was not on the original Road Agent list.

R. Sabourn stated that this may be an area where the Town would need to approach an abutting land owner to acquire some land in order to make some improvements and widen the area. He stated that site #1 may need to an acquisition of land as well to provide additional daylight and turning radius.

A resident in attendance made the statement that lesser improvements could be made to make the road safer for residential travel but for logging trucks, they feel the improvements would need to much more significant.

Roy Sabourn explained to everyone present that he felt the purpose of this site walk was to point out the areas that need to be addressed for safety reasons and to ask the WMNF to consider assisting with these improvements. He reminded everyone that no decision would be made today as the WMNF folks will need to bring this information and request back to their leadership for discussion. Brooke Brown explained that the purpose of this site visit for the WMNF is to gain a better understanding as to what needs to be done to improve Mill Brook Road. She also stated that it was not financially feasible for the WMNF to build roads for the logging project from another direction.

R. Sabourn thanked the WMNF for meeting with the Board this afternoon and encouraged them to review the concerns and suggested improvements as discussed today. He went on to say that he felt the town is just looking for some reasonable help to complete the improvements necessary to make the travel way easier for all using the road. He also thanked RA Kubik and Bruce Rodgers for spending the time to review this and for providing suggestions for moving forward.

The meeting moved to site 4: North side of roadway before old white school house: RA Kubik explained that this section of roadway is narrow and continuously plagued with drainage issues of standing water due to groundwater from uphill sloughing into ditch line. Although many trees, if a section of trees were removed here it appears the right of way could be wide enough to create an area to allow a passing zone. In the creation of this passing zone, the drainage issues could also be addressed to better promote flow.

RA Kubik explained that the disadvantage of this section is the amount of trees. The town right of way was discussed. RA Kubik believes that the right of way is narrow and varies again in this area. There has also been water drainage issues in this area.

Discussion was had on possible extension around the jersey barriers on the paved section. RA Kubik believes that the Town did acquire some land in this area from Gloria Kimball in the past and is unsure of further improvements besides removing some brush. R. Sabourn stated that the barriers were installed to keep the large trucks off the edge of the material that was put in place to stabilize the banking. A resident asked the Board to please consider widening this area.

At the conclusion of the site visit, R. Sabourn stated that he expects the WMNF to consider the comments and concerns raised today and looks forward to their suggestions and input to help alleviate some of the safety concerns as presented today.

Brooke Brown thanked everyone for attending and walking the site with the WMNF. She thanked the Board and RA Kubik for taking the time to show them the areas that are in need of improvements. She agreed to attend another public board meeting to provide additional information. She explained that there is no final decision received on the project yet, and until there is, they are not sure if this project will even be moving forward. Once they have a clear understanding that the project will proceed, at that point, the WMNF can talk more confidently about their future plans.

J. Monti asked if there was a schedule of events the WMNF could share with everyone. B. Brooke explained that if this project goes forward, the timber sales contract would begin in the winter of 2022 and would be a five year contract. The final decision will not be made until after the objection period and this is an unknown time frame, but may be approximately 6 months.

Tom Cowie stated that in 1998 the Hazeltine Brook project was proposed and would use Mill Brook Road. Part of the objection included a proposal to construct 11 turnouts to make their project work. Mr. Cowie said that only about 20% of the timber for the current project would be removed via Mill Brook Road.

3:16 p.m. MOTION: "To adjourn."

Motion: R. Sabourn

Seconded: J. Gaites

Discussion: None.

Motion Passes: 4-0

Respectfully submitted,

Jessi Fleury
Board Secretary