**Minutes**

**Special Selectboard Meeting April 14, 2021**

**@ Town Hall upstairs at 4:00 PM**

Via Microsoft Teams. Selectboard and Town Administrator present in person.

Selectboard present: Joe Pollio, Chair, Cathy Siano-Goodwin, John Gregory, Suzanne Welch, and Sue Allen. Also. present Bill Kearns, Town Administrator. All present have been vaccinated.

Present on Microsoft Teams: Charles Bonin, Hardy Merrill, Nancy Merrill, Eric Stevens, Amber Stevens, and Carolyn Cota of VTrans.

1. Call to order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:02 PM
2. Adopt Agenda. Motion by Cathy Siano-Goodwin, second Suzanne Welch to adopt the agenda as presented. Motion passed unanimously. Gary Laroche shall
3. Discussion with VTrans Walker Bridge Project Team Leaders: Carolyn Cota and Gary Laroche – Selectboard concerns re project. Gary Laroche was not able to attend this meeting. VTrans was represented by Carolyn Cota.

The Chair asked John Gregory, of the Highway Committee, if he wanted to begin the discussion. John Gregory asked Carolyn Cota to make a presentation and stated that he and Suzanne may wish to ask questions afterward.

Ms. Cota made her remarks, the main points of which were:

* Where we stand now. The plans which were sent to the Town by Gary Laroche, the new Project manager for the Walker bridge on March 29, 2021 (Preliminary Plan dated March 16, 2021) are the plans which will be used for the construction, though there may be minor changes to the plans before they are sent out to bid. The Bid requests will be sent out in the Fall of 2022 with construction to begin in the spring of 2023.
* The next steps will be sent out in an email (Received after the meeting). Those steps, per that email: These are the current next steps:
* Update the Preliminary Plans based on comments received from reviewers and the town by mid-June.
* We will be setting up Property Owner meetings starting around Mid-May. (ROW negotiations)
* We will send our latest plans to our ROW team for them to develop ROW plans and titles starting approximately July 1, 2021 or earlier.
* Plans will be sent to our permitting staff In August of 21.
* Final Plans to the town are due approximately June of 22
* Advertise the project: 11/9/22
* Construction starting around 4/15/23.
* The ROW costs are estimated to be $40,000.
* Todd Sumner’s email of June 30, 2020 included the Conceptual Plans to that date. Those plans showed a change, which he characterized as “a slight change in the proposed maintenance of traffic for this project.” Instead of a temporary bridge, the new plans called for the destruction of the northern (downstream side) lane of the bridge, leaving the other lane for the bypass traffic. The new bridge itself would be moved northerly so that the entire new bridge would be built northerly (downstream) from the current site. Mr. Sumner’s letter also stated the “conceptual estimate to engineer, acquire right of way and construct this project is currently $4,370,000.” From Mr. Sumner’s estimate to the one in the Preliminary Plan received by the Town Administrator from Gary Laroche, March 29, 2021, the cost estimate increased 15% to $5,051,000. Selectboard members expressed concern to Ms. Cota that no communication had taken place between the Selectboard and Mr. Sumner or VTrans or the subsequent VTrans Team during those intervening months. As a result, the Selectboard was not made aware of the significant cost increase. Ms. Cota stated the lack of communication was a “failure” on VTrans part. When asked what drove the cost increase, Ms. Cota stated the road would have to be re-aligned and the new re-aligned roadbed would cost some $900,000.
* With regard to the above lack of communication by Mr. Sumner, which also left the town surprised by the rise in construction as well as engineering costs with no warning from VTrans, Ms. Cota assured the Selectboard that this will not occur in the future and additionally that she would be providing regular quarterly updates – June and September and so on for the rest of the project time.
* As to the higher cost of the engineering: The cost of the engineering was high due in part to the need, due to COVID, to have a private engineering firm do a portion of the work and to an additional $85,000 in cost for more time needed by state engineers, due to COVID working restraints within the agency.
	+ Ms. Cota promised to send the Selectboard a breakdown of the cost detail (which we received after the meeting, and it is attached to the minutes of this meeting.)
	+ Ms. Cota proposed a summer Town Meeting with VTrans – live not virtual – and the Selectboard welcomed that. It would be held when we can meet in person which currently appears to be after the 4th of July per the Governor’s directives. In any case such a town meeting will occur live when that is allowed.
	+ The Selectboard will meet on Monday April 19th and will discuss and come up with comments on the current plans at that meeting and forward them to Carolyn Cota afterward.
	+ Carolyn Cota thanked the Selectboard for the meeting and for the critique on the lack of communications and promised to communicate regularly. The Selectboard thanked her for attending and discussing the project with them.
	+ Carolyn Cota left the meeting at 4:55 PM.
1. Staff and public Points to be discussed: The Chairs asked if there was any person desiring to ask a question. No one stepped forward.
2. Public Comment: None
3. Other Business: None
4. Date of Next Regular Meeting – April 19, 2021 @ 6:00 PM.
5. Adjourn. Motion by John Gregory, Second Cathy Siano-Goodwin to adjourn @ 5:00 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

William G. Kearns

