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Tioga Bridge repair options to be discussed at next selectmen's meeting

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THE TIOGA Bridge in Belmont has been closed due to safety issues. BENJAMIN C. KLEIN/CITIZEN

BELMONT — The Tioga Bridge in Belmont was unexpectedly closed last week after the state Department of Transportation, while performing a routine inspection, determined the bridge to be dangerous and recommended it to be closed.

Belmont Town Administrator Jeanne Beaudin said that the inspection was performed on Aug. 23, when it was determined that the steel culvert had severe corrosion due to rust.

“There was pitting and holes in the section that sits in the stream bed,” Beaudin explained.

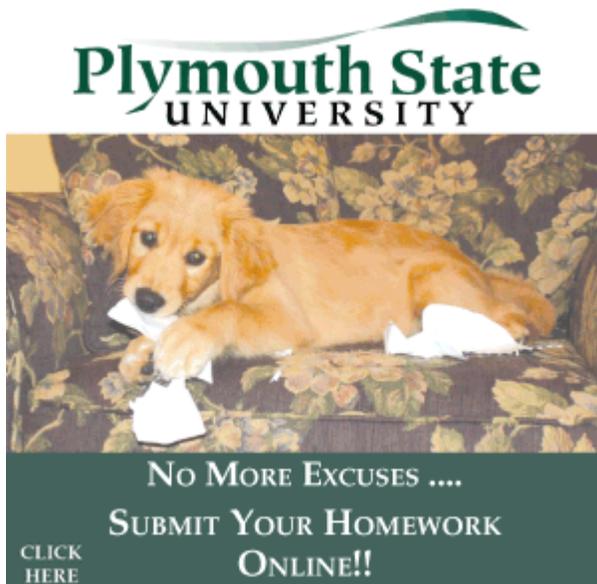
DOT spokesman Bill Boynton said that the bridge is actually a large pipe, and that water was flowing through the holes in the pipe, weakening the surrounding area. He said if a flood were to occur, or even if the status quo was maintained, the bridge was in danger of washing out.

Town Public Works Director Jim Fortin is currently working with the engineers and the DOT to plan a course of action on how to fix the bridge and to determine what work is needed to make it safe again.

Beaudin said that after following the DOT's advice, the town hired the engineering firm Hoyle, Tanner and Associates, with offices in Manchester and Portsmouth, to assess the damage. At the next selectmen's meeting, which is on Sept. 4, Beaudin said discussions will be had on how to move forward.

Busby Construction, located in Atkinson, might be awarded the contract to fix the bridge without going through a bidding process, Beaudin said, due to the fact that they are already working on multiple town projects such as the village rehabilitation project, water line replacement and downtown road work. She said Busby already has the equipment and man power in town and ready to go should they decide to hire them.

Despite the fact that the bridge was scheduled for state-funded maintenance by the DOT, Beaudin said that since the work was scheduled for 2020, the state will not be helping with the cost for repairing the bridge.



"It's a municipal bridge," Boynton said, adding that of the 1,685 municipal bridges in the state, 1 in 5 are on red list, which means they have deficiencies and should be inspected more often.

Boynton added that the recommendation to shut the Tioga Bridge down was due to the danger it posed, but that it was not an order and a municipality could ignore such a request.

"They usually listen to us though," he added.

Maria Dyer, superintendent of the Shaker Regional School District, said that the unexpected closure resulted in the district's contracted bus company, First Student, to reroute certain bus

routes, causing two or three busses going to the high school to be delayed on the first day of school.

Police Chief Vincent Baiocchetti said that the bridge would remain open as a pedestrian bridge, so students who walk to the high school will be unaffected. He said the closure has affected traffic patterns, but was unsure of how severely yet.

Baiocchetti said that applicable detours for going around the bridge include Dearborn Street and Seavey Road, which both can be used as detours by trucks as well; however, trucks cannot use the detour of Johnson Street off of Route 140 to Hurricane Road.

Boynton said that Tioga Bridge was constructed in 1975 and has been on the red list since 2010.

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