

Belmont selectmen upset at decision of DOT not to widen shoulders along a part of Route 106

By GAIL OBER, LACONIA DAILY SUN

BELMONT — Selectmen expressed their anger Monday night at the state Department of Transportation's decision not to widen the shoulders along the section of Route 106 between Farraville Road and Wildlife Boulevard.

The decision to redo the long-planned intersection at Seavey Road and to only widen the shoulders in the immediate area around Brown Hill Road went against what selectmen, police and fire officials understood would be done.

"This is a complete obliteration of what (Assistant DOT Commissioner William Cass) said," said Selectman Jon Pike. "This is not at all what was explained (to us) would happen."

Pike was referring to a site visit and meeting held at the intersection in the autumn of 2015 where Cass and other members of the DOT met with selectmen, local public safety officials and District 7 Sen. Andrew Hosmer (D-Laconia).

The meeting was triggered when selectmen opposed a DOT plan to use state property at the corner of Brown Hill Road and Route 106 for a fuel depot. After selectmen told the DOT that its proposed plan was unwieldy, in part because of the road safety hazard and in part because the area was too wet, board members approached Hosmer with a request that he approach the DOT on Belmont's behalf to address the safety issues on that section of highway.

Selectmen, as did others, left the meeting with the understanding that the shoulders along the section would be widened for safety reasons.

According to a letter sent to Hosmer on June 3, Cass said the "discussion and concern then focused on should and safety improvements at the intersection with Brown Hill Road and we included shoulder widening to bypass turning traffic at this limited area."

Cass went on to explain that the primary project for the 5 miles from Belmont Village to the Laconia Bypass is pavement rehabilitation and the widening of the shoulders at Brown Hill Road was added to this project. The improvement of the Seavey Road intersection has been planned for about three years and is being funded through the Highway Safety Improvement Safety Program.

"While we, too, would like to see these shoulders widened for consistency, such work would entail several additional impacts (right of way, utilities, environmental) that are beyond the scope and intent of this pavement project," wrote Cass.

He added that he knows the shoulders in the controversial area are in poor condition but said that repaving them should help a great deal.

Pike said Monday that he would like to send a letter to the state explaining how angry and let down the board is, but Selectman Ron Cormier said he is concerned about how hard the town should push back. He said he feared that if they object too strongly, any Belmont project would end up on the state's 40-year plan as opposed to the 10-year plan.

"There's just going to be more people in the ditch," said Pike. "I just don't get it."

"We all feel it's not what we expected," said selectmen's Chairman Ruth Mooney. "I feel like we're barking up a tree."

Selectmen agreed to notify the police and fire department to chronicle any incidents within that stretch of road and report periodically to the board.

"If our concerns come to fruition we can say 'I told you so,'" said Cormier.

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