

Village Roads Assessment Update

As voters approved at the Annual Meeting, the trustees engaged local experts to assess the condition of village roads with the objective of developing a long-term repair and maintenance plan. MSK Engineering and Design, Inc. of Bennington and Milone & MacBroom, Inc. of Waterbury performed the assessment over the summer and recently issued their final report. In short, several roads need major reconstruction and most other roads require a higher level of annual maintenance. Based on estimates, the village will need to spend about \$1.4 million to complete the work.

The full report is available on the village website (<https://oldbennington.org/>), but here are some key findings:

- In order of priority, Bank Street, Fairview Street, Elm Street, Catamount Lane, and Seminary Lane all need major reconstruction. Once we complete this work, Walloomsac Road and Church Lane will also need major reconstruction. Major reconstruction typically includes some combination of coring, reclamation, drainage repairs, grading, and curbing.
- Monument Avenue, Monument Circle, and Church Lane all require a higher level of annual maintenance. Annual maintenance typically includes some combination of crack sealing, pavement patching, roadside gradings, and drainage repairs.
- The firms based their estimates on visual inspection of our roads. In planning specific projects, we will need to perform additional tests to confirm actual road conditions. Test results could significantly change cost estimates.
- The estimates reflect the firms' recommended course of action. We could save money in the near term by adopting other options, but this could substantially increase costs in the future.
- The estimates include construction costs plus an additional 40% for project management, engineering, surveying, inspection, and other minor items. The estimates do not include any increases in future construction costs, which the firms estimate will be 3% to 5% per year.
- For budgeting and financing purposes, the firms recommend that we perform the major reconstruction work over a 20-year period, the typical useful life of roadways.
- Tables 2.1 and 2.2 on pages 29 and 30 of the report, respectively, provide useful summaries of the findings.

Now that we have the report, the trustees are developing a long-term plan for repair and maintenance of village roads as well as identifying state and federal highway grant programs and financing options. We will discuss and further develop the plan at our regular trustees meetings over the next few months.

Here are some preliminary thoughts about the plan:

- We can spread out major reconstruction over time. For example, we could address Bank Street in 2020, Fairview Street in 2023, and Elm Street in 2026. We could tackle less travelled roads at later dates.
- For Class 2 highways, we can apply for state grants, typically 80% of project costs. Unfortunately, only Monument Avenue and Elm Street are Class 2 highways. There is no state aid currently available for our Class 3 roads. Any state aid requires us to comply with state and federal standards covering construction and maintenance of roads.
- We can apply to the state to reclassify Bank Street and Fairview Street as Class 2 highways. The rules are complex, but both roads may qualify. We have already started the process of applying to reclassify Bank Street.
- The Vermont State Infrastructure Bank provides financing for road projects in conjunction with VTrans and the federal government. The bank provides financing for 80% to 90% of project costs for terms up to 30 years at a 1% interest rate.
- State grants and financing could allow us to accelerate some projects.
- VTrans assists local communities to help manage the process of road construction and financing. We have already met with our District Supervisor and others to begin the process.

Clearly, the projected costs – even with state grants for some projects – would require a significant increase in spending on our roads. Given our current level of reserves, it seems unlikely that we could meet these costs without increasing tax revenues.

In assessing the need for additional tax revenues, it is important to note that a substantial part of the projected costs results from deferred maintenance, one reason village residents have benefited from a lower overall tax property tax rates than town residents. Until this year's tax rate increase – the first in more than a decade – the lower rates resulted in about \$50,000 less tax revenue per year. In fact, even with this year's increase, Old Bennington's actual tax rates are lower than they were in 2004.

We encourage residents to attend our monthly trustees meetings and provide input as we work to develop the plan and address related financing matters, including any proposed tax increases.