

**A LETTER TO THE MIDDLESEX COMMUNITY
FROM ROAD COMMISSIONER STEVE MARTIN AND THE HIGHWAY
DEPARTMENT**

Below are my answers to the questions raised at a Select Board Meeting concerning why the Middlesex Highway Department hasn't used the \$40,000 Special Services line item approved by the Town voters at the March 2020 Town Meeting.

After the Roads Forum held at the Old Fire Station behind the Town Clerk's Office last spring, Road Foreman Paul and I took away from the attending audience that our Highway Department should be specifically focusing on road maintenance. In that vein, Paul and I decided to amend the specifics of the plan presented at and voted on by residents at the March 2020 Town Meeting. That meant temporarily putting on hold the use of the Special Services line item and focusing solely on specific road maintenance, as opposed to larger projects that would include mud mitigation and hired services. To reiterate, this was all a direct correlation stemming from the requests of the citizens who attended the Roads Forum. That being said, we have until June 30, 2021 to use all or part of this line item for ditching, trucking, and labor.

In addition to these items, we'd like to acknowledge it was pre-pandemic when we put together the 2020-2021 budget. Due to the unknown ramifications of tax revenue, which directly correlates to actual available Town Funds, we were hesitant to go ahead and spend the \$40,000 immediately after the fiscal year began on July 1, 2020. In addition to maintaining our roads to the highest level we can, we more importantly are tasked with being conscious of the fiduciary duty entrusted in us by the taxpayers to be good stewards of the Town's money. It is our belief that to err on the side of caution would prove a more transparent and ethical method of handling the unknown than to simply spend the money because "it had been voted on and approved." We take this decision very seriously and truly feel that by postponing the immediate use of that line item, we helped ensure we weren't putting financial strain on our hardworking taxpayers.

Another question concerned what projects we were unable to complete in 2020 because we didn't use that line item.

We were unable to complete our planned mud season mitigation projects that were scheduled to happen on Center Road and East Hill Road. This was also due in part to the overwhelming response from the Roads Forum that in general, residents would like to see us focusing on maintenance as opposed to larger projects.

I did want to take this opportunity to mention that because of time and money invested in the Notch Road Pit, we were able to locate several years of viable sand for winter maintenance. We have already screened and hauled all of this year's winter sand from our own pit. We also used a substantial amount of material from the newly exposed gravel for other road projects in addition to getting a large quantity of stone that will be used for other valued aggregate. This will afford us not only convenience and use of a Town owned resource, but will also enable us to see substantial savings that can and

should be used for much needed gravel resurfacing on our roads in addition to mud mitigation projects that have proven to be highly effective.

In closing, I'd also like to mention that unscheduled events such as storms caused road damage directly linked to projects that we have completed this year. We had a substantial bank failure on Brook Road early this spring which resulted in the Great Brook beginning to compromise the road. This was a large, unscheduled project that unfortunately posed a great threat to both the road and the traveling public and was considered an essential priority. By working with our Stream Alteration Engineer in conjunction with a contractor with a much larger excavator than the Town owns, we were able to complete this project using much of our equipment and a large portion of the material used came directly from our Notch Road Pit. All these factors enabled us to complete this project for a fraction of the cost it would have been had it gone out to bid completely through a contract. We feel that our investment of time and some funds in the Notch Road Pit have already proven to be a substantial benefit in regards to available material and money saved for the long-term interest of the Town.

Should you have further questions, I would ask that you submit them to the Select Board in writing so that I may give you a conscientious and factual answer, especially related to planning and budgeting

Sincerely,
Steve Martin - Road Commissioner
October 19, 2020