

Creating a Vision for Blackstrap Road

Public Forum 2 - Meeting Notes

September 11, 2019
Falmouth Town Hall

Attendance:

- 38 guests
- Councilors: Ted Asherman, Craig Hemphill, Janice De Lima, and Hope Cahan
- Staff: Nathan Poore, Theo Holtwijk, Jay Reynolds, Justin Early, Lieutenant Frank Soule and Marguerite Fleming
- Tom Errico, T.Y. Lin International Group
- Chris Mann, MaineDOT

Theo Holtwijk provided the group with a presentation which summarized the previous public forum and updated the attendees on work to date. The presentation also provided cost and design scenarios and a potential recommendation. Nathan Poore facilitated the audience feedback.

Attendee Feedback:

- Nancy Eastman-542 Blackstrap Road
 - What method of paving was used for the lower part of Blackstrap Road in 2014?
 - *Jay Reynolds-It was a combination of reclamation and full depth reconstruction. There were certain areas where both were done; reclamation was done where soil areas were good, full depth reconstruction was used where soil areas were bad.*
- Alan Davis-5 Summit Terrace
 - The Town should keep Senator Cathy Breen and Representative Teresa Pierce abreast of the project. They are not currently aware of the Town's plans.
 - *Theo Holtwijk -The Town understands that in dealing with a State road it is important to keep our State legislators informed. The Town has been keeping Senator Breen and Representative Pierce informed. The Town has very good relationships with MaineDOT.*
 - He is very disappointed that the Town is planning on making it even more difficult to get around Falmouth. It is difficult to get around right now with the road construction on Route 100, the Depot Road bridge, and the library construction. He learned that the Town plans to close Blackstrap Road. He wishes that the Town would reconsider having so many projects going on at once.
 - *Jay Reynolds-The Blackstrap Road paving which will begin on September 16 is not going to be a full closure. There will be one lane of alternating traffic.*
 - *Nathan Poore-Road construction will continue over the next 3 or 4 years. There are several projects scheduled between MaineDOT, the Maine Turnpike Authority, and the Town. There are both big and smaller projects. There was just an ad about the ongoing projects in the Northern Forecaster. A newsletter will be mailed in the next few weeks with more information on future road projects. The Town is coordinating with MaineDOT; there is a meeting scheduled next week. Jay Reynolds will be presenting to the Town Council at its September 23 meeting. The Town will try to keep the public up to speed. The Town is working to ramp up its communications system.*

- Jeff Campbell-348 Blackstrap Road
 - His assumes his driveway is half and half. A new culvert has been installed in front of his house and his driveway is now covered in dirt. He assumes it will be fixed when the paving is done?
 - *Jay Reynolds-That will all be fixed when the project is completed.*
 - Is it correct that the Town plans to increase the shoulder from 3 to 3 ½ feet with a 1-foot gravel?
 - *Jay Reynolds –Correct. Currently, the Town is looking at 11-foot lanes for travel and 3-foot paved shoulders. MaineDOT stated that it is ok with 10 ½ foot lanes on the remaining portions of Blackstrap Road so the Town might change the striping to make it 10 ½ foot vehicular and 3 ½ foot paved shoulders.*
 - How will that effect and help with the bicycle traffic?
 - *Nathan Poore-The delta is not on the two sections that the Town has repaired or is currently repairing. The major change will be where there is absolutely no paved shoulder or gravel shoulder which is the 2.2. miles that MaineDOT manages.*
 - So, there will not be any big difference in the bicycle lane where he lives?
 - *Jay Reynolds-The section that the Town is rebuilding has about 22 to 23 feet of pavement width. The Town are taking that out to 28 feet total. Currently there really is no paved shoulder at all in that section.*
 - *Justin Early-The work that the Town did earlier this summer was doing that shoulder work to allow for the paved shoulder to be installed.*
 - Will the shoulder be extended up to Mountain Road?
 - *Nathan Poore-Are we all on the same page about where we are talking about?*
 - *Jay Reynolds- The section he is referring to is Blackstrap Road between Mountain Road and where the transition line crosses north of Mast Road. The is the section that the Town is currently rebuilding.*
 - *Theo Holtwijk-This may be an example of a very specific case where it may be helpful for Town staff to schedule a separate meeting to plan or do a site visit.*
- Anyone who travels on Blackstrap Road has encountered bicycles taking two, three, four spaces across, blocking the whole lane and not traveling at the speed limit. Where he lives right at the corner, he hears a lot of angry conversation between bikers and cars. When bikers stop to make a turn, they will stop in the middle of Blackstrap Road to go down Mountain Road. The traffic will be backed up which causes a lot of frustration. He wondered what the Town is suggesting will help that at all. He does not see that it will.
 - *Nathan Poore-It will go from zero pavement and zero gravel shoulder on a good part of the road to 3 ½ feet so it should help. It will give room for the cyclists to move over a bit more. When they choose to ride double or triple across, hopefully they go in single file and let the vehicles pass.*
 - *Lieutenant Soule-The bicycle laws are difficult to understand. People are supposed to ride on the base level single file on the right-hand side of the road. The law also allows cyclists to come out around the other bicycles, if there is broken pavement, not enough room on the shoulder to ride, or if they are passing. It is a difficult enforcement piece because there are a lot of reasons that cyclists do not necessarily have to be as far as practical to the right. Laws have changed for their safety. Unfortunately, on a road like Blackstrap Road it creates a lot of congestion. Cyclists are permitted to come out in front of traffic to turn off Blackstrap on to Mountain Road. It is a share the road issue and it is difficult.*

- Bob Shafto-451 Blackstrap Road
 - Asked if the overall width of the paved portion of the road will be 28 feet?
 - Jay Reynolds-Correct.
 - It is 23 feet now?
 - Jay Reynolds-22/23; it varies.
 - The Town is adding 5 or 6 feet more pavement?
 - Jay Reynolds-5 feet.
 - What are the traffic calming portions of this project? Reducing lane size?
 - Jay Reynolds- That is correct. Currently, there is not a paved shoulder. There is no place for cyclists to use that edge. Going to 28 feet will allow the Town to put in the paved shoulder which will allow for the white edge line to provide an area for the vehicles and bicycles.
 - What is the width of the shoulder at Mountain Road?
 - Jay Reynolds-I am not sure. I will have to verify that. As one approaches the intersection it does vary.
 - On the upper portion it looks to be 18 to 24 inches. I bicycle all the time on the road and that is very safe; riding on Mountain Road as compared to Blackstrap. I wonder why we need 7 feet of shoulder combined. That will make that road very wide and very attractive for people to speed on. I wonder if the shoulders might be reduced. Where did that number come from?
 - Nathan Poore- This is one of those areas where there is competing policy interest. The Town is trying to provide safe travel for the cyclists but at the same time the road will be wider so there will potentially be speeding issues.
 - Tom Errico-This is one of those elements of road work design where we try to think about providing for all; complete streets 101. How do we fit all the competing needs within in a cross section and how do we ensure that it is safe for all the users and calms traffic appropriately? That was one of the challenges that we have been trying to figure out for this stretch of roadway. We think the narrowing of the travel lanes to 10 ½ feet is one way to get people to slow down. The research is clear that narrowing lanes will slow traffic down. We also need to think about pedestrians. The current plan is not going to provide some sort of walking space and the 3 ½ feet shoulder is not going to be a formal bike lane. It is not wide enough. The 3 ½ feet will serve multiple purposes for multiple users. We are trying to find that balance. Additionally, we are trying to keep the width as narrow as possible. They think that 3 ½ feet is probably the right width. They are trying to maintain as much tree and other landscaping on the side because another factor in calming vehicles is visual perspective. A lot of that will be played out in the design of the roadway. There could be additional landscaping that gets put in place. We will be considering how to ensure that speeds will be in check.
- I am a resident of a 200-year-old house that is 25 feet from the edge of the roadway. This could end up looking more like Route 100 than Mountain Road. That bothers him. Most of the traffic is already commuters from other towns.
 - Tom Errico-When we design facilities, we try to design facilities for all types of users and all types of skill levels. The advanced skill riders are skilled enough to ride in a narrow space or with no shoulder or bike lane at all but we, as part of the complete streets movement, encourage everyone to bike. We are trying to give them space so that are safe and feel safe.

- Jerry Davis-Hamlin Road
 - What is the Town going to do to ensure the safety of children on Hamlin Road? When Tuscan Way gets built people will turn right to come up Hamlin Road.
 - *Nathan Poore- Can you be more specific about where you see the safety point there?*
 - We have heard that you cannot take a left turn out of the Tuscan Way condominium. The right turn goes on to Hamlin Road. That will put a lot more traffic on Hamlin Road and there are a lot of children running around.
 - *Nathan Poore-Is that a general concern or is it associated with the Blackstrap Road project?*
 - General Concern
 - *Nathan Poore-Tonight we are talking about Blackstrap Road and we haven't looked at any other roads or side roads. We can certainly talk with you about that. We are happy to set up a separate meeting.*
- Will the wider shoulders be built to the same standards as the main roadbed? If it takes longer for the pavement to crack, cyclists will not be moving into the center of the road as quickly after construction.
 - *Justin Early-That is what the Town did earlier this year. When the contractor was digging on the edge of the road and the pavement, they were installing the same road base that is in the road so they can pave over that. It was installed 15 inches thick; is called type D gravel; and has a four inches minus gravel size.*
- Erica Blair-413 Blackstrap Road
 - It looks like the Town is paving an extra 2 feet on Blackstrap Road. Will there be 3 ½ more shoulder in addition to that 2 feet that is currently being paved?
 - *Jay Reynolds-Currently, the section of Blackstrap the Town is working on has about 22 feet of pavement width. It will be expanded to 28 feet total for a net 6-foot difference. 3 feet on each side of the travel lane.*
 - So, this 2 feet is the beginning of it; there will be more?
 - *Jay Reynolds-No, this will be it. It will not get any wider than what the Town is doing right now.*
- Richard Craven-Intersection of Blackstrap Road and Babbidge Road, off Babbidge Road
 - Has the Town taken the vehicular weight of the traffic into account? During the spring, when mud season comes, certain State roads get shut down to heavy traffic and that traffic uses Blackstrap Road as a detour.
 - *Jay Reynolds- The Town has taken that into consideration in the case of the shoulders that are being rebuilt. The gravel that Mr. Early mentioned is a standard specification that MaineDOT and the Federal Highway Administration issue for gravel depths. There is more gravel that goes on top of that first layer along with the pavement width which is also a big factor. We take all of that into consideration. We build the shoulders the same way that we build road. It is not a lesser standard.*
 - The present contractor on Blackstrap Road shut down the road completely for fifteen minutes during the evening commute. Could the contractor be asked not to shut down the road during these high travel times?
 - *Jay Reynolds-Absolutely, the contractor is working for the Town so the Town is the customer and can control and dictate to the contractor to provide better accommodations for peak travel to minimize the commuting time issues.*
- Gerald Griffin-319 Blackstrap Road

- When he comes from North Deering in the direction of Falmouth on Auburn Street (becomes Gray Road), in the Portland section there is an electric speed sign on the right that tell motorists their exact speed. This is an excellent sign that should be installed on Blackstrap Road before any construction is done.
- He lives a block from Mountain Road, so he uses it a lot. Mountain Road is one of the best roads that he has ever driven. It is like driving on a table top it is so smooth. He would appreciate if that could be duplicated on Blackstrap Road.
 - *Nathan Poore-Town staff have talked about those signs. He agrees; they are a great idea and he would like to get them install around Falmouth.*
- Doug Cooper-Babbidge Road
 - He runs and bicycle commutes. The road is very treacherous right now. He would not want to see the lanes shortened to less than 3 feet. He agrees with the previous comments about Mountain Road. How do the proposed 10 ½ lanes and 3 ½ foot shoulders compare to Mountain Road or the Cumberland portion of Blackstrap Road?
 - *Jay Reynolds-Visually speaking, Mountain Road is 11 foot vehicular and 3-foot paved shoulder. That is close to what the Town has done on the lower section of Blackstrap Road. Those two sections are almost identical in terms of lane width and overall payment width.*
 - *Theo Holtwijk-The shoulder width of Blackstrap Road in Cumberland is five feet. That adds cost and more abutter impact to the project.*
- Patrick Shoot-403 Blackstrap Road
 - He likes the idea of bicycles and feels that there is a consensus that Mountain Road is a great example. A lot of people who bike are coming up there and then turning and going down towards Mast Road near where he lives. He is concerned about speeding on Blackstrap Road. He has small children. The wider the shoulder, the faster people go. If Blackstrap is the same width on Mountain, it would be ok, but he is not sure it would help if it is wider.
 - *Nathan Poore-I have had conversations with the Police Department. One of the ways to combat speeding on Blackstrap Road will be to continue to have a police presence there. That is one of the Department's priority areas.*
 - *Lieutenant Soule-Speeding is a concern everywhere. It is the Police Department's number one complaint all over town. He agrees that a nicer road with better pavement and wider shoulders will be more user friendly. The Police Department spends a lot of time on Blackstrap Road. In 2017, there were about 850 stops, in 2018 there were about 700. As of this afternoon, there have been 420 contacts in 2019. There is a sign board there. The Department has written grants for speed with the Maine Bureau of Highway Safety. He has monitored the traffic on the morning commute, and it is busy but there are police officers monitoring the road. They also watch out for tailgaters.*
- Amy and Marcus-394 Blackstrap Road
 - How do staggered projects work if MaineDOT does not have funding but the Town does? What is the guarantee that there will be enough funding to complete the projects? How does that work? I work at UNUM and use Exit 8. Traffic there is horrific. I understand that the third lane of the Turnpike could not be pushed further. Can you talk about that?
 - *Nathan Poore-He is not able to provide solid answers tonight. He can speak to the processes and conversations that Town staff have. Old Exit 8 was a Maine Turnpike Authority project. They went through an elaborate process with a lot of*

public input. At the end of the project they decided that the traffic volumes did not warrant it beyond the Westbrook exit for right now. Cost was likely part of the decision.

MaineDOT does not have a pot of money for dedicating to certain projects. They have priority systems and corridors. This is not considered a priority corridor. There is a municipal partnership initiative which is a \$500,000 matching program. Falmouth took advantage of that program for segments of Middle and Falmouth Road. Town staff have not yet decided whether Blackstrap Road should be done in segments. Town staff have had a few meetings with MaineDOT about the funding. The Town's main concern is how to guarantee the funding. The Town had the same concern with the Route 100 project and met several times with the then MaineDOT Commissioner. There were verbal commitments sort of. The Commissioner wrote a letter stating MaineDOT's funding commitment in writing. A similar process will likely occur for this project. Town staff hope that the money that the Town is hoping to put in and the connection between the complete streets model and DOT's goals might help ensure a commitment.

- *Chris Mann-MaineDOT cannot make a solid commitment. This is about dealing with each other in good faith. We have done it on Route 1 and Route 100, and are trying to do that here. MaineDOT has limited resources, so it must get creative. One of the ways they get creative is the municipal partnerships initiative, but it is limited to \$500,000 a year 50/50 match. MaineDOT is looking for about twice that amount over four years. He is not sure what the answer is at this point but MaineDOT and the Town are still talking and will need time to figure that out.*
- *Nathan Poore-The fact that Chris is here is a good sign. The Town and MaineDOT have had successful partnerships over the past several years. He is not guaranteeing that it will work out, but it is a good sign. He is optimistic.*
- David Armor-6 Amethyst Way
 - Will the Town work on the part of Blackstrap Road from Hurricane to Cumberland?
 - *Jay Reynolds-It will be included.*
- What will the width of road be once paved next week?
 - *Jay Reynolds-Once paved it will be 28 feet.*
- India Broyles -451 Blackstrap Road
 - She said that the police stop a lot of cars in front of their house. When the road gets widened people will be driving into their house. Do the Town ever create a curve or put more of the increase in width on the other side of the road where there are no houses?
 - *Jay Reynolds-The Town has realigned roadways in other areas based on existing features. In the case of Blackstrap, the road profile as well as the gravel underneath the pavement is already in place. The Town is not proposing any kinks or curvatures in that section of roadway; basically, following the existing middle line as it stands today. Town staff could certainly look at her property.*
 - *Lieutenant Soule-Agreed that the police do pull a lot of cars over near her property.*
 - *Tom Errico-He clarified that there is the paving project happening next week and the longer-term project. Certainly, during the preliminary engineering of the bigger project, looking at vertical or horizontal alignment could be a component. There are right-a-way limitations and side features that would have to be*

considered but certainly how the road is designed, and curvature is a feature that plays into traffic calming. He is not sure it will be attainable, but it is something that can be considered.

- Anne Sheer-63 Mountain Road
 - Mountain Road is great for biking, but Blackstrap Road is a nightmare. When she is biking, she is forced to go way into the road to avoid potholes. Is there a way to create more separation between the shoulder and the lane? Like plastic polls?
 - *Nathan Poore-That is a design consideration that does exist in other places.*
 - *Tom Errico-We use plastic bollards. They are used to highlight things like tuning lanes and cross walks. It might not apply here and would not be a year around thing. We can look at special treatment. One idea is edge striping.*
- Blackstrap is so awful that cars have difficulty pulling over to let safety vehicles go by.
- John Woodby-Corner of Mast Road and Blackstrap Road
 - Mast Road is awful as far as speeders. Are there any cyclists on the committee?
 - *Tom Errico- He is a cyclist. He does a lot of bike/ped design work.*
 - *Nathan Poore-Mr. Errico mentioned right-a-way limits so at some point there is going to be a project out here. Blackstrap Road residents need to be prepared to have right-a-ways created on their property during the project. It is unavoidable for a project this big. When we get to that stage, people will be meeting with residents one-on-one to explain what will have to happen on their property. We really want to make sure that the drainage is improved. Water is the enemy of anything structural. That usually involves more infrastructure beyond the outside edge of the pavement.*
- Marcus Therion-394 Blackstrap Road
 - Is there a set date as to when the section of the road that is currently under construction will be finished?
 - *Jay Reynolds-It will be done this year. We have already started some of the construction. We have done most of the drainage work, culvert work, ditch line work. We have also hired a contractor who has done the gravel portion of the widening for the paved shoulders. Next week, the week of September 16, we will start the road paving work. We are ahead of schedule. He sent a mailer explaining the schedule in June. It should be completed by mid-October.*
- Summary of Feedback
 - *Nathan Poore - Traffic calming, speed, character of the roadway, width, the balance between leaving enough room for safe passage of people walking, running, cycling, but not going too wide so that it changes the character of the road*
 - *Not hearing anyone saying do not waste taxpayer money, do not do this project.*
 - *Hearing concerns about financing, but Town is confident and will figure out a plan to make this happen. It could go to a Town-wide vote.*
 - *Construction is everywhere. It is a pain in the neck. It is not going to get any better any time soon, but it depends on where residents live in Town.*
 - *Pay attention to the Town's communications including newsletters and weekly ads in the Forecaster. The Town recently sent out a survey regarding communications. Tax bills will include inserts with communications related information.*
 - *The Town is trying to ramp up our communications including social media. Subscribe to e-alerts and follow the Town on Facebook/Twitter. Call Town staff if have questions or need more information.*

- *Theo Holtwijk is the Town contact for the Blackstrap Road Project. He can be reached at 699-5340, tholtwijk@falmouthme.org.*