

Engineers Selected To Fix Highland Lake Dam

By Roger Godwin
Andover Board of Selectmen

The Mother's Day 2006 heavy rains produced sinkholes in Highland Lake Dam from water eroding new passageways through the dam itself. Townspeople and Proctor Academy students sandbagged the problems and stopped them, but only for the time being.

Examination of the dam also showed that the six-foot flow pipe under Maple Street is rusting away and close to collapse. With total failure of the dam a possibility from future heavy rains, an engi-

neering firm was promptly hired to assess the problem, suggest fixes, and estimate costs of repairs. Delays in that process precluded getting the work done in 2006, and the 2007 Town Meeting authorized repair costs based on the engineers' estimates.

Engineering firm Dubois and King, Inc., has been selected from a field of four candidates for construction engineering. That will include preparation of a hydraulic analysis of the lake and the outlet structure to properly size the outlet pipe; necessary plans for the whole project and bidding on it by construction firms; and permit applications to the New Hampshire Dam Bureau and the New Hampshire Wetlands Board; followed by oversight of construction. All these steps are required by state law.

The Selectmen intend to have the project completed by Thanksgiving, based on assumptions concerning permitting time and construction schedules. That schedule includes selecting a contractor in July.

Lake lowering is now scheduled to begin August 31 and any change will be advised to Andover residents by mid-August. Work will start as soon as the lake reaches its lowest possible level.

Any changes in this intended schedule will be reported through *The Andover Beacon* and Channel 8.

DOT Airs Potter Place Bridge Options

The project to rehabilitate or replace the bridge at the intersection of Routes 4 and 11 in Potter Place took a small step forward with a public information meeting on April 5. Kate Davidson's April 3 story in the Concord Monitor, below, provides valuable background information on the project. Following Kate's article is the Beacon's own coverage of the meeting itself.

By Kate Davidson
Concord Monitor staff

The Department of Transportation is seeking public input for a project on Route 11 in Andover, where state officials hope to repair, replace, or get rid of the bridge that passes over Route 4 near Potter Place.

Representatives from the department's Bridge Design Bureau will hold a public meeting at 7 PM Thursday [April 5] in the town office meeting room. They will display sketches of the proposed plans beginning at 6:30 PM and will explain the options the state is exploring, said David Scott, the bureau's in-house design chief.

Some groups, including the Andover conservation commission and the Friends of the Northern Rail Trail of Merrimack County, have questioned how the project would affect the environment and the newly improved recreational trail parallel to Route 11.

Scott said the bureau is exploring three options and may also present a fourth proposal Thursday night.

The first is to rehabilitate the structure by replacing the concrete foundation, or deck, underneath the bridge's pavement. The plan would cost about \$1 million, but it is a short-term fix that will require further maintenance in the future.

The second option would replace the deck and steel girders that support the structure. Scott said the bureau did not yet have a cost estimate for that option.

The third, which has raised questions among recreation and conservation groups, is to create an at-grade intersection that would get rid of the bridge, level off the ground where the two roads meet and put in stop signs.

The present interchange allows cars to enter and exit Route 11 from Route 4 via off- and on-ramps. (Route 11 passes over Route 4.) But Scott said the traffic volume is not so heavy that it requires the separate interchange.

The project would cost about \$2.25 million.

"Advantages to that would be that we would get rid of a bridge from our inventory, and it would be less maintenance cost for us moving forward," Scott said.

The Department of Transportation has completed similar projects before, such as the intersection of Routes 28 and 3 in Pembroke, where an at-grade intersection replaced an old bridge

about a decade ago, Scott said.

The cost, however, is a bit higher than department officials expected because of recent improvements to the rail bed, which is used as a recreational trail for hikers, snowmobilers, and mountain bikers year-round. The intersection would have to be built high enough so that a tunnel could keep the rail crossing open, he said.

Representatives from Friends of the Northern Rail Trail of Merrimack County have met with department officials to express their concerns, and Scott said the department is addressing their questions and suggestions.

Creating the new intersection while maintaining the rail would not be a first. The department has completed projects with several rail crossings in the past, Scott said. It does mean, however, that the project would be more expensive.

Bob Ward, the president of the Friends of the Northern Rail Trail, said the group favors rehabilitating or replacing the bridge. If an at-grade intersection were built, the trail would have to continue in a tunnel underneath the intersection that could be more than 60 feet long, Ward said.

"The rail trail is used in the winter-time for snowmobiling and cross-country skiing," he said. "When you have a tunnel, you don't have snow in there, so this is going to be a disruption of use of the trail for winter sports activities. That is probably our major concern."

When spring arrives, temperatures will remain cold in the tunnel and melted snow that seeps in from the outside will freeze, creating a dangerous walking surface for people who use the trail, Ward said. In addition, people and animals, especially horses, will be apprehensive about walking down a long, dark tunnel, he added.

Maintaining the intersection and the existing trail could also allow for further development in the future, including the possibility of a revitalized passenger rail service.

Ward, who is also a conservation commission member, said the commission is concerned about adjacent wetlands and about the annual drainage that comes off the south face of Ragged Mountain and across the interchange each spring.

"We feel that, from an environmental impact standpoint, replacing the bridge or the upgrade of the bridge will have virtually zero environmental impact, whereas the at-grade intersection would have environmental impacts that are not exactly fully known at this point," Ward said. "But there's no question there are going to be environmental impacts."

Town administrator Mark Stetson said he has heard comments from residents supporting each option but said he did not have a clear sense of what the town might support.

Stetson said he was eager to see the
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