

Road Agent Reacts To Selectmen's Research Into Efficiency

By Jon Champagne
Andover Road Agent

On page 10 of the September issue of the *Beacon*, the Board of Selectmen had an article on some of the ways they are looking at to use our tax dollars more efficiently. Like every Andover taxpayer, I'm all in favor of that! But the article left out some key points that I think we should all keep in mind as this discussion moves forward.

Rent vs Buy

The article points out that the Town rents all the equipment it uses (except the road grader, which it owns) on an hourly basis. "But what if we purchased or leased one piece of equipment that we use the most," the article asks. "Would this be more efficient in spending our money?"

There are several reasons why I think it wouldn't be. Using a backhoe as an example, the Selectmen have set the rental rate at \$70 an hour, which includes the operator in the summer. This is \$25 to \$50 an hour below the going rate in the area, and a great deal for the Town.

With three contractors in town willing to rent their backhoe to the Town at that rate, we've never had an issue with getting a backhoe when we need one, so buying a backhoe isn't going to improve the availability of equipment when we need it.

Owning a backhoe comes with a lot of extra expense that at \$70 per hour we're not currently faced with. First, we'd need a place to store it out of the weather. That means building some kind of garage or shed, and we all know that ain't cheap!

Second, there's a long list of routine maintenance we'd have to pay for, including parts and labor: greasing it every 8 to 10 hours; oil and filter every 250 hours; new tires every 2,500 hours or so; repair or replace cutting edges and teeth as needed; the list goes on and on. And don't forget the travel time and expense to get the needed parts.

All things considered, I think we're doing better renting equipment locally.

Elected vs Appointed, Full-Time vs Part-Time

The article points to Andover's Highway Department budget of \$424,700 and asks, "Would it be more efficient for the Town to have an appointed full-time Road Agent than an elected part-time Road Agent?" Again, I think there are several reasons why it wouldn't.

Andover has about 60 miles of Town roads. Salisbury has about 30 miles, and

their Road Agent's budget is \$380,000. I did the math and got about \$7,100 per mile of road for Andover, versus about \$12,700 per mile for Salisbury. So clearly Andover is getting great value from an elected part-time Road Agent.

To justify a full-time Road Agent, the current job description would have to get bigger. The article mentions the possibility of the Road Agent taking on parts of the Transfer Station and maintenance of Town property. I think this makes perfect sense, but I don't think it's an argument for a full-time Road Agent. A part-time Road Agent could pick up those duties just as well and still not cost the Town a full-time salary and benefits.

And I'm particularly concerned about the impact of a full-time Road Agent's full-time salary and benefits on our taxes. All told, I bet a full-time salary and benefits would come in around \$40,000 per year. As your part-time Road Agent, I got paid about \$9,700 in 2009 – that's a huge difference! And even if the Selectmen were to shift some new duties to the Road Agent, I don't think those new responsibilities would even double the amount we'd have to pay a part-time Road Agent.

Finally, I just think it would be a bad idea to let the Selectmen appoint the Road Agent. As an elected Road Agent I may report to the Selectmen, but my ultimate responsibility is to the townspeople. I think Andover voters deserve a direct voice in who runs the largest single line item in the Town budget.

Four Different Opinions

Finally, the article talks about how the Selectmen debate each of these issues, "with three different opinions [there are three Selectmen] and ideas as to how we go about fixing or not fixing an issue."

As your elected Road Agent, I'd like to be included in those debates. I think having that fourth different opinion – from an experienced Road Agent, a Roads Scholar, and a life-long town resident who has attended Town Meeting since I was old enough to sit on my daddy's knee – would add a valuable new perspective. I think that's one of the things I was elected to do.

I've been your elected part-time Road Agent for the past three years, with virtually no complaints, and I can't see re-inventing the wheel with some of these changes the Selectmen are considering. With things getting done, why change it now?

By Jake Johnson
Andover Board of Selectmen

Last month, our Fire Warden had to temporarily shut down the burn pile at the Transfer Station after discovering hazardous material on the pile. The Board is working with the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (DES), the State Fire Ranger, and our local Fire Warden to reopen the burn pile as soon as possible.

We take this time to remind everyone that only brush with limbs five inches in diameter or less, and untreated lumber may be put on the burn pile. *Strictly prohibited* are:

- plywood
- particle board
- painted, stained, or pressure-treated lumber
- any hazardous waste

Please check with the attendant if you have any questions.

In order to reopen the burn pile, the Town will have to build a gravel berm to make two separate areas to receive the material. One area will be open to receive materials and then, once full, will be closed for burning. The second area will then be open to accept new materials. This will allow us to burn smaller piles and will make it easier (we hope) to inspect each pile before burning.

Reggie Roy is the new Supervisor of the Transfer Station. Reggie has brought some concerns and ideas to the Board to help run the Transfer Station better.

Covering Costs With Fees

One concern is that the Town is not charging enough for items brought to the Transfer Station. Our fees need to reflect the cost of getting rid of these items, so the following changes are being proposed:

1) Vinyl siding is now put into Construction Debris and will be charged according to volume. This change will take effect December 1, 2010.

There is a job opening on Saturdays at the Transfer Station.

2) Large tires, tractor tires, and grader tires cost the town more than the \$2 fee for disposal. We are getting a rate from the tire company for these larger tires.

3) All electronics are currently charged a fee of \$5, regardless of size or weight. We are discussing changing the rate to 25 cents per pound.

These proposals will be discussed at our meetings throughout November.

When it comes to fees at the Transfer Station, the Board is only looking at the cost it takes to dispose of the item and the estimated cost of any labor involved. For example, if the cost for disposal of an oversized tire is \$30, the fee would be \$30.50. The \$30 goes to the tire disposal company, and it's estimated that the labor to deal with the tire would be 50 cents. We are only looking to pass on the cost of disposal to the individual.

Help Wanted

There is currently a job opening at the Transfer Station. We are looking for an individual to work on Saturdays. It would be great to have two or three people interested, as this way we could have a backup. This summer we had help from Highway Department personnel and it worked out great! If you are interested, please stop by the Town Hall and fill out an application.



TOWN of ANDOVER

Transfer Station Attendant

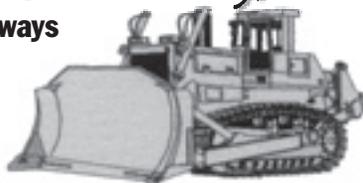
The Town of Andover is accepting applications for a permanent part time position for a Transfer Station Attendant. Hours are Saturday, 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. during standard time and 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during day light savings time. The attendant will work under the direction of the Transfer Station Supervisor. Responsibilities include providing assistance to patrons; working on managing the processing of recycled materials and solid waste materials. This position is ideally suited for a self starter who will be a team player. Additional hours may be assigned as needed. Attendants will be expected to obtain certification as a Solid Waste Facility Operator through training provided. The starting salary for this position is \$10 per hour. Applications may be obtained and submitted at the Andover Town Office during its normal business hours or resumes may be sent to Dana Hadley, Town Administrator. Applications will be accepted until a suitable candidate is located. The Town of Andover is an equal opportunity employer.

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