

Swing Bridge Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes - March 16, 2022 4:00 PM
Hybrid Meeting held at the Chamber and on Zoom

Meeting Attendees: Allen Alonzo – East Haddam Emergency Management, Sam Baber – Haddam Fire, Louis Bacho – DOT, Mike Bennett – Bennet & Smilas Engineering, Tracey Brais – DOT, James Bucko – The Riverhouse @ Goodspeed Station, David Byrd – Goodspeed Opera House, Tim Danaher – Haddam Fire, Joseph DeAngelo – State Trooper - Troop F, Eileen Ego – DOT, Irene Haines – East Haddam First Selectwoman, Jenn Hayn – Julia Balfour and Chair of East Haddam/Haddam Division, Charlene Janecek – Chester First Selectwoman, Derick Lessard – DOT, Matthew MacMurray – DOT, Craig Mansfield – Haddam Emergency Management, Robert McGarry – Haddam First Selectman, Kevin McGinty – Environment of Care Director, Larry McHugh – Chamber President, Kevin McManus – Haddam Emergency Management, Sara Mendillo – Chamber, Jennifer Mikulski – Mikes' Auto, Andrew Millovitsch – DOT, Tim Myjak – Chair Environment & Infrastructure, Sen. Norm Needleman – State Senator, David Papallo – Andrews Marina, James Parson – DOT, Jeffrey Pugliese – Chamber, Michael Robidoux – Legal Shield Business Solutions, Jess Stone – President East Haddam Business Association, Donald Wurst – CHA Consulting

Welcome and Introductions

Larry McHugh opened with remarks on past bridge projects and reiterated the chamber's great working relationship with DOT and emphasized the necessity of this bridge work.

Remarks from Attending Municipal Leaders

Bob McGarry, Haddam First Selectman, expressed his concerns with impacts on local businesses, especially those on Bridge Road, given what they've had to deal with for the past two years with the water project and now three years of bridge work. Irene Haines, East Haddam's First Selectwoman, echoed Bob's concerns and stated she had business owners in her office at 8am that morning talking about issues at hand.

Jeff Pugliese started us off with self-introductions.

Open discussion

Jeff asked Derick Lessard from DOT to review bid timeline. Derick said they have been actively advertising the project since November 1st, 2021, and that they have been fielding lots of bidder questions. Plan is for bid to go out next week, March 23, 2022 with a Notice to Proceed expected by the end of June, 2022. Project will be three construction seasons with start of construction beginning this summer (2022) and completion at end of 2024. He expressed that DOT understands that this project will impact many local businesses and that they are happy a

committee has been established to discuss all concerns and that they plan to be open and transparent.

Jeff asked Derick to comment on the two different compromise options with regard bridge closures.

Derick explained that currently in the contract right now are 25 63-hour closures that run from Sunday at 10pm and run through Wednesday at 1pm. He explained that this amount of time is necessary for the contractors to complete work. First Selectwoman Haines asked DOT to reassess this timing and see what they can do to adjust as impact to business during week.

- First compromise established would be 12 63-hour closures running from Friday at 11pm through Monday at 2pm and the remaining 13 would be Sunday at 10pm through Wednesday at 1pm.
- Second compromise proposed is all 63-hour closures stay Sunday at 10pm through Wednesday at 1pm except those that fall from mid-January through March 31st timeframe. This would be working around Goodspeed's dark time and the boating community. DOT putting it back to First Selectman to help them determine what best option is.

He added they've included two incentives in contract – first is to eliminate up to 5 63-hour closures with each elimination (of a 63-hour closure) the contractor will receive \$250,000. The second incentive is the contractor will receive \$40,000 for each closure between November 1st and April 30th. He explained they're trying to hone in on winter months when boating season is over and less shows for Goodspeed.

Larry asked Derick if DOT plans on holding any public meetings and he explained that the plan is for both selectmen to discuss and then meet with DOT individually to make final determination and then they will come back to public to give update.

Derick mentioned another closure that will be happening is alternating one-way traffic. There will be 23 weeks of continuous alternating one-way traffic operations with 6 of those weeks happening in 2023 season with remaining 17 weeks at end of 2023 into 2024. These timeframes are set in contract.

Derick touched on constraints in contract, such as environmental. Restrictions for time of year, large barges in river at times, installing new submarine cable. All of these restrictions have contractors asking a lot of questions.

Larry brought up signage and Derick explained they will be using existing Variable Message Signs (VMS) on interstates, as well as adding additional VMS signs. Larry expressed need to get signs on smaller roads as well. Irene asked that real time messaging is used as opposed to future messaging. She doesn't want people to avoid the area completely, and she fears if given too much notice that is exactly what will happen. Eileen Ego from DOT stated they will try to give people enough heads-up so that they can avoid area, but she understands what Irene is saying. Eileen said maybe they can do a hybrid with a day or two notice of closures. Derick mentioned they will also be utilizing Facebook and Twitter and maybe that's where the two-week notices can go. Someone asked about text message alerts and Derick said they have links on website to sign up for Twitter notifications. They also will notify Google Maps and Waze so that they will all have real time information. Larry asked that Derick to look into text message alerts.

Craig Mansfield with East Haddam Emergency Management expressed the communication part of this project is going to be key. Explained they see issues now during the summer when bridge is shut down for 15–20-minute closures. He stated both Haddam and East Haddam have own emergency notification system through Everbridge and that they can schedule communications to send to residents. Wants to make sure consistent communication. Craig asked about extending ferry hours. Tracey from DOT explained this has been discussed. Ferry services operate April to October and they may be able to add a month or so but once there's ice they can no longer operate. Craig explained that extending ferry hours into evening would help local residents when the bridge is down to one lane. Larry asked that DOT follow up on this and ask that they at least look at adding on hours during summer months. Larry reiterated we're going to have to do certain things with this project as there is going to be a very large economic impact to these communities. Larry expressed that it is critical that DOT work closely with Emergency Management from both towns. Larry asked about police presence and expressed it is vital that police be on both sides of bridge to help monitor when there are one-way closures. He said that this is very important and needs to be baked into construction contract. Derick mentioned one-way traffic will be signalized but Larry reiterated that police on both sides is a must. Derick jumped back to Craig's question on the ferry and said they are going to look into extending ferry hours, but one concern is local roads and how they are not designed to hold large amounts of traffic.

Tim Myjack asked if a second ferry has been discussed however Derick explained docking is specific to this ferry and to add another ferry would require construction for a new ramp.

Jennifer Mikulski from Mikes' Auto asked Derick to clarify the two options on weekend closures. Jen asked if they are open to feedback on this and Larry reiterated that all feedback should be directed to First Selectmen.

David Byrd from Goodspeed explained that Goodspeed is willing to cancel Sunday evening performances to buy back some of that time on Wednesday's to assist colleagues in area who need that weekday time. So instead of closure being Sunday at 10pm through Wednesday at 1pm, he is proposing closure be Sunday at 6pm through Wednesday at 9pm which would give other local businesses 4 hours back. Derick asked that this suggestion go to the First Selectmen. Jennifer said that if she remembers correctly many local businesses were in agreement regarding this time change. Derick emphasized they just need their 63 hours.

Larry reinforced all feedback is to go through First Selectmen and that the Chamber is here to monitor and make sure the construction project is on time.

Jeff asked if there was anything we can do to facilitate conversation between DOT and Emergency Management and Derick mentioned he hasn't met Emergency Management folks yet but is happy to sit down with them. Derick said they will be load posting bridge and therefore imposing weight restriction on bridge before the end of March – weight limit will be 21 tons for single unit and 34 tons for semi. Larry stressed DOT needs to meet with Emergency Management and Middlesex Health. Craig mentioned this heavily impacts mutual aid so he will coordinate on the Haddam side to get meeting scheduled with DOT.

Craig asked about sensing for traffic lights and if they can be set to phase to the traffic load on each side of bridge. Craig also asked if emergency services will have preemption. DOT said they would look into this further.

Larry closed with letting everyone know that this group will reconvene once construction company has been chosen.

Jenn Hayn jumped in to invite anyone interested to next week's East Haddam/Haddam Division meeting.