

Submitted by: TOWN OF PHIPPSBURG Approved by Selectmen:
SELECTMEN'S MEETING
John M. Young MINUTES
Administrator August 12, 2009

Meeting convened at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Hall with Selectmen Douglass, Perkins and Pye in attendance.

I. Meetings and Hearings:

1. Meet with various individuals concerning parking issues on Route 209 in Popham.

Meeting was held with the following officials present: John Skroski (Police Chief), Doug Alexander (Patrol Officer), Derek Cummings (Parking Enforcement), Jim Totman (Fire Chief), Gary Morong (EMA Director), Jerry Maddon (State Police Lt.), Joel Merry (Sheriff, Sagadahoc County), Seth Goodall (State Senator), Leila Percy (State Representative), Brian Keezer (Regional Engineer – Dept. of Transportation), Ron Hunt (Regional Manager, Parks and Recreation - Dept. of Conservation), Brian Murray (Popham Park Manager). The following citizens were present: Bob and Gail Butler, Pat Percy, Dave Percy, Ethan Debery, Bob Pring, and Paul Shiebler.

Selectman Douglass explained that this meeting was the result of a discussion held at a prior Selectmen's meeting concerning parking and traffic issues in Popham. Gary Morong played a 5 minute video he had put together which captured a lot of the parking and traffic problems.

Selectman Douglass asked Mr. Murray how many cars would fit in the turnout lane. Mr. Murray replied 60 to 80 cars.

Chief Skroski explained that he gets calls from resident along Route 209 to slow traffic down on busy days but he can't because he is tied up at Popham.

Bob Butler stated that the parking lot at Fort Baldwin gets filled up and then traffic blocks the road. Sometimes traffic is trying to flow both ways on Fort Baldwin Road which is very narrow.

Pat Percy stated that historically some businesses in Popham have allowed cars to park on their property (for a fee) and now the Stonehouse Manor is allowing it, which creates a problem because people are walking on both sides of Route 209 with cars traveling along it trying to get to the park (Stonehouse Manor does not have beach access). She added that sometimes she can't even get out of her driveway. She asked who can legally allow parking and charge for it. She added that the Popham Beach Club was limited on their parking spaces.

Selectman Douglass stated that the road would not be made wider right away. He asked Mr. Murray if he can train the Rangers to direct traffic. Mr. Murray replied that they have done that.

Selectman Pye asked if the State Police and County Sheriff's could help direct traffic. Chief Skroski replied that there is a difference in the respect that the Park Rangers get compared to the police. He added that any help received from the other police departments would free up his department to allow for response to other parts of town and some night shifts

Selectman Douglass asked Sheriff Merry of his department could help. Sheriff Merry replied that if it was an immediate request it could be an issue of availability. However if it was a planned detail he could allocate some resources. Chief Skroski added that sometimes the traffic can be unpredictable.

Lt. Maddon stated that Sagadahoc County has not had a dedicated Trooper assigned in 8 or 9 years and is the only county in this situation. Troopers from Kennebec or Lincoln Counties respond to emergency calls from Sagadahoc County. He added that the State Police have been unable to get any personnel increases though the State Legislature.

Mr. Percy stated that although parking is an issue, his major concern is the backup of vehicles along Route 209 which shuts down the road. This should not be allowed – traffic is backing up 1 ½ miles to Parker Head intersection.

Selectman Douglass replied that even when directing the traffic through it causes a bottleneck somewhere else down the road. He added that we need to address the entire road. He recommends a sign that explains that there is no stopping or standing at the break off point because if you have to explain it to every driver it slows things down.

Lt. Maddon stated that if the State Police know ahead of time that traffic control will be needed they might be able to help. He asked if a sign that says "Parking Lot Full" or "Beach Full" would help.

Chief Skroski stated that one of the problems is that once you wave traffic through they come back angry and complaining. Parking Officer Cummings added that a lot of times the drivers try to turn around in the road blocking the southbound lanes.

Selectman Douglass asked if the Rangers had considered having people pay the parking fee on the way out of the Park vs. on the way in. Mr. Hunt replied that the State Legislature had asked the Dept. of Conservation for their opinion and because of the cost of rebuilding the booths to allow the fees to be taken from the opposite side it was not recommended. He added that even if they did take the fees on the way out it probably would not solve the problem. They do open the gates at 8:00 a.m. vs. 9:00 a.m. and two cash registers are used. The turning lane has been added and they have illuminated the median strip and added more parking slots. The Park is maxed out and they have to balance the number of visitors with the beach resource, staff, parking, and toilet facilities. They know there is a bottle neck at the entry and have diligently tried to make the facility as responsive with the resources they have, including bringing in staff from Reid State Park if needed.

Selectman Douglass asked if the Rangers take passes separately. Mr. Murray answered that if a vehicle has a pass they take them out of line. He added that on "Maine Day" the lot filled very quickly and they had more traffic waiting to get in. Lt. Maddon asked if they ever considered using a transpass system which would charge per vehicle vs. per person.

Mr. Percy mentioned that Ocean View Campgrounds takes their fees on Route 209 prior to the vehicles entering the parking area and it ties up traffic on the road.

Senator Goodall recommended that a working group of stakeholders including business owners, local law enforcement, fire and rescue, DOT and Dept. of Conservation meet after the summer and work on a long term solution to include parking and notification. He added that the question to ask is "what can we do today and what can we do tomorrow".

Mr. Debery asked what the State could do for the future since additional parking would cost money. Selectman Douglass reminded everyone that the parking was at its maximum and Mr. Hunt said that the staffing and toilet facilities are designed around the available parking. Mr. Percy stated that the Rangers have always allowed visitors to walk in. Mr. Hunt replied that it was not so much of an issue with the pit toilets because they could always be pumped, but now they are restricted by the flush toilets.

Ms. Percy stated that she is disturbed that the Park bureaucrats seem to be only thinking of Popham Beach and not the rest of their other Popham properties (i.e. the forts). She worries about getting an ambulance in and out of Popham for her husband. She added that the State is tinkering with our community and our lives.

Selectman Douglass stated that we were maxed out on solutions except managing the traffic. He thought the transpass was a good idea. He added that there has been some discussion about raising the parking ticket fee from \$15.00 to deter those parking alongside the road, however that had meet some resistance from some of the local businesses. He added that it may be time to raise the ticket prices or do something with the road to allow more parking.

Representative Percy asked about the possibility of having a flashing notification sign that would reflect the Park status so that visitors don't get to Popham and find out there is no available parking on a hot day. This might relieve the traffic jams. She understands that the businesses don't want a sign, but maybe officials could work with the business owners to come up with a creative sign. Also, officials could work with Mr. Harris to come up with a different method to enter the Park.

Chief Skroski asked if there could be a looping status message on a dedicated radio channel.

Selectman Douglass asked how many times the Park had been full this year. Mr. Percy replied only a couple of times. Representative Percy stated that Popham Beach State Park is the most popular park in the State and the number of visitors will only continue to increase. She asked about having status notifications by phone link or website (traffic network hotline).

Selectman Douglass asked if we have the ability to find out from business owners when their parking lots are full.

Selectman Douglass stated that despite our meetings the traffic issues will continue and we need to figure out how to reduce the impact. Chief Skroski replied that we need to look for side lot parking and Mr. Shiebler recommended offsite parking, maybe before the crossover. He added that he has seen more people parking on Riverview this year than ever. Mr. Percy reminded everyone that the Park is being overrun now. Selectman Douglass asked how much the Park can handle and if off site parking will increase the load.

Mr. Debery recommended sidewalks to connect the Park and the Fort for the safety of the pedestrians and Selectman Perkins agreed. Selectman Pye replied that DOT funding of bike paths are low on their list of priorities. He added that the process would be to fill out a DOT application package and there would probably be a funding match required. Selectman Douglass recommended that perhaps breakdown lanes should be added to Route 209 to make it wider.

Administrator Young reminded those attending that at the 2002 Popham Parking meeting the representative from DEP was against any further widening of the road due to environmental concerns. Brian Keezer, DOT, agreed that DEP would not be in favor of any widening.

Representative Percy recommended that the Town partner up with the Conservation Dept. and apply for some sort of widening of Route 209 from the Park to Fort Baldwin.

Chief Skroski asked if DOT could collect data for the number of cars and pedestrians using the road to Popham. Mr. Keezer replied that he was not sure what this would achieve. They normally do counts at intersections. Selectman Douglass added that data on the number of cars traveling on Route 209 would be helpful.

Fire Chief Totman stated that one problem with trying to widen Route 209 will be trying to obtain the land from private landowners. Administrator Young added that the same issue occurred when DOT rebuilt the section of road from the Parker Head/Popham Road intersection to Tom Percy's and had to purchase property through the eminent domain process.

Selectman Douglass stated that at least a wider shoulder would allow more people to get out of the way. He also asked Chief Skroski to inform the owners of the parking businesses that they can't stop vehicles in the road to collect fees.

Ms. Percy stated that everyone needs to think about the cars leaving Popham because she hears a lot of break slamming from her house. Gail Butler added that if the road shoulders were mowed it would cut down on the number of people walking in road.

Selectman Pye stated that we could raise ticket prices and work on traffic lanes etc. but there will still be days when traffic will be an issue – no matter what the police try to do. This will always be a problem and we just need to learn to live with it.

Mr. Butler said that after the big backup on "Maine Day" there hasn't been much of a problem as long as there has been traffic control.

Selectman Pye stated that there have been some good planning sessions that have resulted in changes and he is not saying that they are giving up on solutions – but that no matter what is done there will still be days that traffic will be a problem.

Selectman Douglass stated that the Town should not have to pay the police for being at Popham all day long - the County and State should assist. With the budget season starting soon the police department might get less funding and the traffic issue is not just Phippsburg's problem.

Mr. Hunt mentioned that the Dept. of Conservation has been paying an offset fee for parking enforcement and is attempting to fund its fair share. Selectman Perkins replied that we are a small town and expenses are going up and these traffic problems are not going away. We can keep talking but we can't solve the problem on our own.

Selectman Douglass conducted a recap as follows:

- Chief Skroski will give prior notice to the Sheriff's Department and State Police if he needs assistance with traffic control. He will also inform the Parking Business owners that they are not to stop traffic on Route 209 to collect fees prior to entering the parking areas.
- Lee Rainey, Code Enforcement Officer, will contact owners of the Parking Businesses who aren't permitted and require that they go through the process.
- The Town Administrator will get information from DOT on the process to get paved shoulders or a bike lane on their transportation plan.
- The Selectmen will consider raising the cost of parking tickets and creating a "No Parking" zone along Fort Baldwin Road. Chief Skroski added that several years ago a straw pole vote was taken at Town Meeting and it was evident that those in attendance were in favor of raising the Parking Ticket Fee.

Dave Percy asked if the speed limit could be reduced on Route 209, especially in the village where it is now 30 mph. Administrator Young replied that the problem is that whatever is set for a speed limit will be year round – DOT will not allow a "seasonal speed limit". Mr. Keezer agreed this was the case.

Mr. Percy stated that the park beach is finite and would not oblige more people. Selectman Douglass replied that this is the reason that remote parking is not feasible.

Representative Percy asked who would request the speed limit change to which Administrator Young replied the Town would request it from State DOT after a public hearing. He added that they could conduct one hearing to include Fort Baldwin parking, parking fines and the speed limit.

Representative Percy asked if there could be a "Popham Status" notification sign at Winnegance. Selectman Douglass replied that there

were concerns among business owners that it would have a detrimental affect on their businesses. Selectman Pye replied that maybe a sign that the park was full and to seek alternative parking sites would work. Selectman Douglass stated that he still recommends a sign at the end of the standing lane which says "Emergency stopping only prior to this sign" or something to that affect. Mr. Keezer said that this would not be regulatory sign and he would check on it. Selectman Douglass added that perhaps people will take notice if a few cars were towed.

II. Unfinished Business

1. Review the Comprehensive Plan resubmission package for the State Planning Office.

Selectman Pye stated that Stocco MacGregor from the State Planning Office felt that the Town had done a good job on the plan and would usher it through the process. He added that it would be reviewed under the new guidelines which are less stringent than the prior ones. Selectman Pye read the list of submission enclosures and explained each one. He added that the submission package is available on the Town's website and that it may get State approval without any amendments (a town meeting vote would be needed if there were any required amendments). He thanked Administrator Young for putting the submission package together and mentioned that the Implementation Committee has been meeting constantly to see this process through. Selectmen voted (3-0) to approve the submission package.

III. New Business

1. Consider the resignation of Bill Perkins from the CATV Committee.

Selectmen reviewed Mr. Perkins resignation letters and thanked him for his years of service. Selectman Perkins added that Bill Perkins had been instrumental in bringing Channel 3 Community Access TV to the Town.

IV. Correspondence

1. Review the Workers Compensation dividend press release from MMA.

The Town has received a Workers Comp dividend check for \$701.00. Selectman Douglass read parts of the press release prepared by MMA.

V. Courses and seminars

1. Crisis Leadership Training

Selectman Douglass reviewed the scope of training.

VI. Selectmen/Administrator Comments and Announcements

1. Administrator Young

Administrator Young announced upcoming meetings and events.

2. Selectman Pye

Selectman Pye wanted to clarify a remark that he made during the Popham traffic discussion – he did not mean that the Town would do

nothing concerning the traffic issues, he meant that issues are going to continue to pop up no matters what is done.

V. Public Forum

1. Gary Morong

Mr. Morong mentioned that he had 3 hours of video tape showing the traffic problems in Popham but only used 5 minutes of highlights for his presentation.

VI. Review and Sign:

1. Accounts payable and payroll warrants.
2. Minutes

Selectmen voted (3-0) to approve and sign all items.

VII. Adjournment - Selectmen voted (3-0) to adjourn at 7:35 p.m.