

Drakes Island Road Bridge Replacement/Town of Wells
Public Informational Meeting #1
July 27, 2022
Wells Town Hall/Zoom

Staff and Consultants Attending: Carol Murray, Wells Public Works Director; John Ardini and Susan McConnell, Drakes Island community representatives; Jacob Aman, Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, Philip Corbett and Liam Kalloch, CMA Engineers; Carol Morris, Morris Communications

Public Attendees: Twelve members of the public and three members of the Board of Selectmen in person; seventeen members of the public via Zoom

The meeting began at 6:00 pm.

Carol Murray opened the meeting, thanking everyone for attending. She noted that three members of the select board are here: Chair John MacLeod, Bob Foley, and Scott DeFelice. Carol started by reassuring the audience that it is time to begin the planning process to replace the bridge but that it is *not* in danger of imminent failure. She emphasized that a successful project includes bringing in as many people as possible to hear as many ideas as possible and that is why there are multiple partners on this project, including island community representatives John Ardini and Susan McConnell. She closed by saying that there are no answers yet as to what the new bridge will look like because we are at the very beginning of the process.

She then turned the meeting over to Carol Morris, Morris Communications, to moderate. Morris provided information on meeting process and noted there were a dozen participants attending in person, and 17 online. She highlighted that the Town of Wells has created a study page that will include ongoing data and a place to comment via email at any time. It can be found at <http://www.wellstown.org/1024/Drakes-Island-Road-Bridge-Replacement-Pr>

She emphasized that the Town's goal is to build a long-term, safe, high-quality bridge, to preserve and enhance the salt marsh habitat, and to establish strong community participation and support. There will be two public informational meetings; tonight's purpose is to provide an overview of the study and the process and hear comments and ideas from the public. A second meeting will take place early in 2023 to show draft alternatives for a new bridge. Morris also noted that the draft schedule calls for construction to begin no earlier than fall of 2024. She then turned the meeting over to Liam Kalloch of CMA Engineers to talk about the study itself.

Liam provided an overview of previous similar projects that CMA had completed and gave the audience background on why this is a complex project: Deep foundations into the marsh, rigorous environmental permitting, tidal hydraulics, storm surge, sensitive environmental

setting, utilities above and below the roadway, access for construction, 24/7 island access for residents, and close adjacent structures.

He also reiterated the project emphasis on limiting environmental impacts and described a few ways this could be done, as well as the ways in which construction of the bridge can be phased to allow resident access.

Liam also showed an estimated map of the effects of four feet of sea level rise for the area. As well as providing photos of the current condition of the bridge. He noted that the bridge needs to be replaced but is safe for the public to use and will be inspected on a regular basis.

Finally, Liam provided the audience with some understanding of the engineering process as it relates to this study, and how the next step is creating a series of potential alternatives for replacement. These will be brought out to the public for feedback on which is the best choice at the public meeting in the first part of next year. Once this decision is made, the actual design work for the bridge will begin.

All the slides for the presentation can be seen [here](#).

Liam then turned the meeting over to Carol Morris to lead the public discussion.

Comments/Questions from the Public

- A resident questioned who owns the road, the state or the town, since that would determine who pays for it. Carol Murray indicated that the town owns the road and would be paying for the new bridge. John Ardini provided some history of how that came about. The resident indicated that it would be better to do a definitive title examination at this time; Carol indicated that further research and a definite answer would be provided. Another resident noted that in his opinion, the bridge does belong to the town.
- A resident had three questions: Will an alternative be chosen first and then looked at for construction feasibility, or are they looked at together? Liam indicated that the feasibility of construction is built into the alternative evaluation. Second, the resident asked if the decision process in terms of bridge width is impacted based on the other, narrow bridge further east on the road? Liam said that will be a part of the alternative evaluation, but in the end, the decision will be based on the needs for this specific bridge. Third, the resident asked if it was possible that additional environmental studies would be requested by the state and federal environmental agencies? Liam said yes, that this has already occurred as additional review of the channel area had been requested. But he noted that within reason, this has generally been accounted for within the schedule that has been laid out.
- A resident asked if keeping construction within the approved area would reduce environmental issues. Liam said if existing footprint was used, it would definitely do so, and this is one of the options.

- A comment was made that the bridge is serving a limited population, with minimal opportunity for growth, and so the bridge should be kept small.
- A resident said he walks on the bridge daily and noted that to safely cross the bridge, vehicles have to stop to let him across. He also said the pavement is starting to give way and the road is getting narrower, harder to use for pedestrians and bikes. Phil responded to both these comments by saying that this bridge will have a 75-year life, and this is the community's one chance to make improvements, as adding a sidewalk or bike lane will not happen after construction is completed. If the community wants this, it should be considered now even if it connects to nothing.
- A person who lives on Drakes Island Road does not want a four-lane road in front of her house, but she does want to be able to walk her dog safely without jumping out of the way of traffic.
- A resident asked who makes the decision on how many feet to raise the bridge to prepare for sea level rise, given that the presentation had included the point that there are multiple models available to predict this. After some explanations of the models, Liam and Carol Murray indicated that after discussions with the town and project partners, CMA would provide a recommendation and the town/community would collectively make the final decision with project partners. He noted that the higher the bridge is raised, the more impacts there will be on the roadway approaches to the bridge and the more it will cost to construct. The resident noted that if the bridge is built for a four-foot sea level rise, it does not account for the fact that this puts much of the island roads underwater. Liam agreed but said that the purpose of this effort is focused on replacing the bridge in a way that will stand for 75 years. But there are many considerations that go into this.
- A resident of Drakes Island Road noted that the bridge is their front street, he walks it multiple times a day. When people are walking along the road, they can step off the road to get out of the way of cars. On the bridge, stepping off is not possible, so cars must stop. The bridge must be made wider than two cars side by side to accommodate this.
- John Ardini asked if a separate bridge could be built for bikes and pedestrians. Carol Murray said this would be considered as part of the alternatives analysis, and the Context Sensitive design approach they will be taking means that the bridge will be designed for this particular location.
- A resident said there should be a special lane for people/bicycles. There was supposed to be a sidewalk up to Route 1 years ago, but it did not get built. People drive very fast down the hill. He also asked how wide the area is that the town owns – he has been told it is typically 15 feet from the centerline. And there is plenty of room to do this behind the telephone poles. Liam said they do have that information, but he does not have it right now. (Update: *The research by the surveyor and resulting drafted survey plan indicate that this is a 3-rod wide road, which equates to a total right-of-way width of 49.5'. That would mean that the ROW extends approximately 24.75' from each side of the roadway centerline.*)

- A resident asked – if worst case scenario the town must pay for the bridge – what is the town’s plan for financing it? Carol Murray said there is the opportunity for this project to be an environmental showcase as it is in saltmarsh, which do not recover well from damage. With the help of partners, the town is looking into alternative funding such as grants. Wells Reserve will be assisting with the project, and they have access to grant funds the town does not. Carol Morris added that finding funding will be part of the upcoming process, so it is not yet known what or how much funding will be available.
- A resident asked how long the bridge will be out of use? He cannot see operating with a single lane in summer. Liam noted that construction windows vary widely based on technique and materials. As noted previously, once it is determined by the town what construction timeframe is desirable, that will affect the design chosen and construction method. This has not yet been decided, it is part of the alternatives evaluation. Carol Murray added that she sees this as a winter project, and there are environmental regulations requiring this. Phil added that accelerated construction will always cost more, and this will be part of the discussion as well.
- A resident requested that if you do add a path for pedestrians and bikes on the bridge, it would be nice to look at the rest of the road because it does narrow further down the road, and you cannot walk a dog or ride a bike there either.
- One resident indicated that he felt the road should be for cars and walking on the road in the summer is not a good idea.
- A resident added that he agreed with others that they should add a path on one side at least so people can walk without stopping traffic. A path that is separated from the road by some physical means would prevent cars from going onto the path.
- A resident also agreed that the road is used for bikes and pedestrians, he enjoys all of them and this is what we are signing up for. This use will not change, and we need to accommodate them.
- It was noted that the last thing anyone needs is for the bridge to fail – can anything be done to prevent a failure? Carol Murray noted that DOT inspects bridges every two years, if something wrong, this moves to 6 months. She asked Liam to inspect the bridge yesterday based on recent heavy equipment traffic on bridge, and it is fine. The town will inspect regularly; it is not in any danger yet, but she added that if we do not start the replacement process now, it will be. Liam added in response to a question that there are techniques for evaluating above and beyond DOT’s base inspection and steps can be taken for shoring it up, but they have not seen any imminent danger.

With no further questions or comments, the meeting was closed at 7:15 pm.