

Board of Selectmen Minutes
March 27, 2002

The Board of Selectmen met in a workshop session with the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission to discuss the Town developing a comprehensive and unified Town position on Impact and Mitigation items as a result of the NH DOT Route 111 and I 93 expansion projects in Windham. Meeting commenced at 7:30 pm in the Planning Department.

Members Present: Margaret Crisler, Roger Hohenberger, Galen Stearns, Christopher Doyle, Alan Carpenter, Cheri Howell, Gerald Capron, Pam Skinner, Lisa Linowes, Eileen Maloney, Ross MacLeod, Russ Wilder, James Finn, Wayne Morris and Nancy Prendergast.

The following items were discussed: Mitigations Issues (wetland and wildlife); Loss of Existing Commercial and Industrial Tax Base; Loss of Vacant Commercial and Industrial Land for Tax Base; Noise from Expanded Road Network; Neighborhood Segregation; Emergency and Rescue Services Increased Demand for Services During Interstate 93 Construction and Road Design Options.

It was agreed that a letters would be send by the Selectmen to the Governor and Department of Transportation detailing the Town's concerns with these projects. Said letter is attached.

Respectfully submitted,

David Sullivan

Town Administrator

NOTE: These minutes are prepared in draft form and have not been submitted to the Board for approval.

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April 1, 2002

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Governor of the State of New Hampshire
State House
Room 208-214
Concord, NH 03301-4990

RE: *Interstate 93 Expansion / Route 111 Bypass Project*

Dear Governor Shaheen:

The intent of this letter is to expound upon the multitude of concerns which the Town of Windham has regarding the tremendous impacts that the Interstate 93 Expansion project and construction of the Route 111 Bypass will cause to our community. We continue to expend every effort to make our voices heard given the significantly more severe consequences facing us as opposed to the other communities along the I-93 project corridor. The extensive worked planned for the interchange and its concurrence with the Route 111 reconstruction literally cuts through the heart of our community. As you are aware, these impacts involve not only the loss of residential and commercial properties, thus reducing our overall tax base, but also entail large-scale impacts to our natural resources through the loss of open space and wetlands. While we appreciate that some of the aforementioned may, in the long term, be offset by potential gains in new areas for development and some mitigation of the wetland impacts, the Town must insist that all levels of authority involved with these projects not only remain cognizant of our concerns, but work with our officials to resolve any issues to our mutual satisfaction.

In the past few months, letters have been submitted to the State and other governmental officials by our Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Board of Selectmen, in an effort to express some of the issues we have had with these two construction projects. Last evening, all three of these Boards, as well as appointed staff, held a joint meeting to discuss these projects in detail and to develop a comprehensive and unified Town position on the impact and mitigation items resulting from the NHDOT projects in question. Below, are detailed the areas of our discussion, and our consensus on each:

Road Design:

1. *Highway Alignment:* We support the “tight shift” alignment of Interstate 93, North and Southbound.
2. *Interchange Alignment:* The Town is still reviewing the Interstate 93 Northbound and Southbound on-ramp alternatives. The two main options, either a “diamond-type” interchange or a “free flow” loop interchange, have their advantages and disadvantages. The Town is continuing to weigh these options, and anticipates further discussions with representatives of the DOT on this issue.
3. *Route 111 Alignment:* We support the realignment of the existing Route 111, west of Exit 3 and running approximately 400’ northerly, however, we feel that this section of roadway should initially be constructed with only two lanes, thereby reducing the amount of added pavement and the impacts to this area of Town. We understand that the State will be acquiring the land necessary to construct four lanes, however, the additional two lanes need not be constructed until sometime in the future.
4. *Connection of “Old 111” to “New 111”:* We request that the State construct an access from the “old” Route 111, through or over the new section of Route 111 in the area of the Town’s recently rezoned, Technology and Office Park. This access is needed not only to allow emergency response vehicles access, but to prevent isolation of this prime area of commercial property as a result of the new road construction.
5. *Land Between North and South Rte 93:* Based on the “tight shift” alignment of Interstate 93, the State has shown a Park and Ride facility between the old and new northbound Interstate 93, adjacent to which there is the potential to create commuter-oriented retail businesses. We have concerns with the traffic movements in and out of this new parking area, and request that the State provide an access through the Route 111 median in order to allow westbound traffic on Route 111 to safely access the Park and Ride. An alternative to this would be provision of a second access to the parking area from another location. Either option would serve to greatly alleviate traffic congestion on Route 111A, and we would request that the State review and plan for traffic flow solutions in this area.
6. *Business Impacts:* Several local businesses will be either completely acquired or partially impacted as a result of these projects. Previously, the Town has provided letters requesting that the State expend every effort to limit these impacts and, when proved unavoidable, to work expeditiously with affected property owners to aid in their relocation. In keeping with our previous efforts, we again request that the State work with the property owners to relocate their establishments to new locations and, in particular with the owners of the Common Man Restaurant. The latter being a historic structure, we believe that efforts should be made to physically relocate the building as opposed to razing it.
7. *Wall Street to North Lowell Road Connection:* The Town maintains its insistence that the State build a connection from Wall Street to North Lowell Road as part of the Interstate 93 project. Such an improvement at the intersection of the new and old Route 111 roadbeds would divert traffic off of Route 111 sooner, and reduce traffic traveling down Route 111 and through the Historic Town Center. It is important to note that, while the area this route would span is currently undeveloped, the potential of imminent change in that status remains high barring a decision regarding this aspect of the project.

Wetland Impacts:

The Town is highly concerned with the resultant loss of wetlands due to these two projects. We understand that the State will be required to mitigate these losses by establishment or purchase of new areas, and our Conservation Commission has been working with the Department of Transportation to identify areas that the Town feels should be established or preserved as part of the mitigation phase of these projects. The Town supports the efforts of the Conservation Commission and urges the State to work in concert with them to acquire those parcels believed to be most critical to the Town of Windham for wetland mitigation.

Loss of Commercial and Industrial Tax Base:

Windham has been hit particularly hard with land acquisitions in our commercial and industrial areas surrounding Route 111 and I-93. The loss to the existing tax base will be difficult to replace, and the expanded Interstate 93 will encourage commuters to move here. As we have stated in previous correspondence, based on our conservative estimates close to \$8 million dollars in assessed property values will be lost or significantly reduced by the Interstate 93 Expansion alone. While we recognize that some of this loss will be offset by increased values in other properties as they open up for development, these offsets are, at best, long term in nature and do nothing for us presently or our current tax base. The State must acknowledge these impacts, and strive to offset them now through the preservation of open space lands by acquisition, which averts unnecessary, secondary impacts should these parcels be developed in the future. Not only does this provide the Town with desirable open space, it prevents these areas from developing into single family homes which impose a far greater demand on our operating budgets and, by extension, our tax rate. In turn, the Town is striving to encourage light industrial or technological park development, a lesser burden on our tax rate, rather than the standard commercial fare generally promoted by such an expansion. As is being done in regards to the wetland impacts, our Conservation Commission has developed a list of parcels which should be preserved, many of them in areas which are under high pressure for development. We strongly support the State working with the Commission to select appropriate properties.

Noise from Expanded Road Network:

The additional traffic and greater road speeds generated by these projects will only increase noise effects to residential houses along the Interstate 93 and 111 corridors and, in particular, to those surrounding our two (2) great ponds which will serve only to amplify those noise levels. As such, buffers, earth berms, and sound barriers should be considered, and the proper mitigating solution installed to avoid not only the devaluing of homes, but a heightened avoidance of Interstate 93 and increased sprawl. We are confident that the State will install those measures required in accordance with the DOT's Policy and Procedural Guidelines for the Assessment and Abatement of Highway Traffic Noise. These improvements may well address the increased noise as the highway improvements are completed, however there are no guarantees of adequacy as the traffic increases as expected. To insure that the appropriate measures are available if and when needed in the future, the Town requests that the State provide for a post-construction evaluation of the areas to determine if additional noise mitigation measures are needed, and if so determined, to install same in an expeditious manner.

Neighborhood Segregation:

The new road corridors will result in certain existing neighborhoods being separated from each other and expand the area over which the town is expected to provide services to its citizens. It is very important that the traffic flow and accessibility to all roads around the Interstate 93 and Route 111 area during and after construction be designed to provide the highest level of accessibility to not only residents but, most importantly, to our public safety and emergency response personnel in order

that they have access to the road network in that area of Windham. The Town is reviewing the current plans for any identifiable locations which we may find in need of improving access to or around. Any such location will be forward to the DOT for review and comments.

Emergency Services During Construction:

Information provided, and statements made at past meetings by officials from the DOT indicate that the demand for Windham Fire Department calls on Interstate 93 during construction are projected to increase from 160 a year to 680 per year. The increased burden and costs placed on our local department, and similarly on each local department along the construction corridor of Interstate 93, may prove overwhelming and ultimately unacceptable without either some fiscal or manpower assistance from the State during construction activities. In an effort to reduce the burden on the local communities, the State should appropriately staff ambulance services along the Interstate 93 corridor during the construction, particularly during peak traffic hours. Additionally, each local community should be reimbursed for their expenditures in covering the rise in call volume, ideally on a “cost per call” basis. Finally, the State should coordinate any available Intelligent Traffic Management (ITM) measures with the area towns.

In closing, we are confident that you can appreciate our position and insistence that any and all opportunities be taken to lessen the overall socio-economic impact that these projects will have on our community. We appreciate the continued opportunity to present our position to the State, and look forward to discussing our concerns and ideas with appropriate officials as this project move forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Crisler, Chairperson

Roger Hohenberger

Galen Stearns

Christopher Doyle

Alan Carpenter
Board of Selectmen, Windham, NH

cc: Carol A. Murray, DOT Commissioner
Jeff Brillhart, DOT
Windham Legislative Delegation

