

Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
August 25, 2025
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; T. Bourgoïn; E. Dill

Also Present: Public Works Director M. Velez; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance: First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. Discussion with Residents of Potential Town Policy for Winter Events: Snow Plowing and Treatment of Grandfathered Private Roads

Ms. Haines provided opening comments and called the participants' attention to an updated Town Snow Plowing/Road Treatment policy for grandfathered private roads. She noted that the Town's snow plowing and road treatment policy is posted on the Public Works website.

Ms. Haines stated that she had received an email earlier in the day advising that an attorney had been retained in relation to this matter and requesting that tonight's meeting be cancelled. Ms. Haines felt that, since she had just received the email that day, she did not think it was fair to residents to cancel the meeting because they may not see a cancellation notice.

Ms. Haines advised that it is the Board of Selectmen's goal to reach a mutual agreement between the Town and the residents living on private roads regarding the language in the proposed policy. She noted that, if that was not possible, Public Works would return to the previous process they had followed to do their best to remove snow and/or treat private roads during winter storms.

Public Works Director Velez called the participants attention to the draft policy that had been distributed prior to the meeting. She stated that she had read all the emails that had come in regarding this issue and had done her best to incorporate all of the comments she had heard.

Ms. Velez reviewed the draft policy and stated that, due to timing, the noted "Annual Inspection" of private roads will not occur this year but will be implemented in 2026. She reviewed the Public Works' best practices concerning the use of contractors for snow removal. She advised that contractors are only called in if necessary and, if they are called in, the policy is to clear Town roads first, then the schools, and then private roads. She noted that if there is significant snow fall, the order of the plowing could vary. She confirmed that, in the event of medical, fire, or police emergencies, plows are diverted from their normal routes to escort the emergency vehicles to their destination and clear the roads ahead of them.

Ms. Haines opened the meeting to public comments and the following citizens spoke:

Paul Riggio – stated that he plows for the town of Essex and recommended moving the inspection of private roads up to May or June to allow residents time to implement any necessary repairs before the winter season. He also suggested consulting with the Fire Marshal, Ambulance Association, and Police to get their input regarding what are acceptable road conditions for emergency vehicles.

Alicia Dargenio - expressed concern with the last two bullet points (#9 & #10) of the draft policy which related to what procedure would be followed if the Town cannot secure plowing contractors for the winter season and the fact that citizens must waive their option to legal recourse in the case of property damage or injury. Ms. Dargenio also pointed out that, while regular school buses do not use the private roads, but rather pick-up students on the Town roads at the end of the private roads, there could be situations where handicapped students living in the communities must be picked up at their house by a school transport mini-van.

Carole McCollum – expressed her concerns with items #9 and #10 in the draft policy and stated she would like to see them removed.

Paul Dapkus – stated he appreciates the revisions the Town has made to the proposed policy; however, he agrees with the objections to item #9.

Lizabeth Robida – requested clarification about how property owners that live on private roads will be billed for maintenance and repair of the road they live on. She specifically noted that the roads in her community where year-round residents live are generally better maintained than the roads where seasonal homes are located.

Ira McCollum – noted that his community had previously partnered with the Town whereby the Town dropped off appropriate materials to improve the private roads and the residents provided the labor to improve the roads. Ms. Velez confirmed that Public Works could still provide the private communities with road materials at the Town’s rate for materials.

Michael Moffatt – expressed concern about bullet point #9 and Ms. Velez confirmed the Town typically knows by the end of September if they are going to have a problem retaining plowing contractors.

Ward Hunt – agreed with the previously stated concerns regarding item #9.

Edward Smith – advised that he had previously been employed by the East Haddam Public Works Department. He noted that the Public Works staff already manages a significant amount of work on a regular basis and, consequently, he voiced his opinion that the Town should not be taking on any responsibility for private roads.

Steven Hollander – thanked the Board of Selectmen for the revisions they had made to the original policy draft and stated that he feels “*we are making progress*”. He noted the general objection to item #9 and there was a general discussion regarding alternative solutions if the Town was unable to secure subcontractor(s) for snow-plowing. In response to a question raised by Mr. Hollander, Ms. Haines advised that there is no Town policy or ordinance that is “durable”. She stated that municipal policies, ordinances, etc. can be updated, revised, and changed depending on the will of the people.

Xenia Coulter – In response to a request from Ms. Coulter, Ms. Haines confirmed that if the Board of Selectmen and the residents of the Town’s private communities cannot agree on the language for the proposed policy for snow plowing and treatment of grandfathered private roads, no written policy will be adopted and the Town will revert to the unwritten policy of the past. Ms. Coulter stated that item #9 is not acceptable as written.

Susan Hollander – thanked the Board of Selectmen for working with the residents of the private communities but stated that item #9 is a non-starter in her opinion and that the purpose of item #10 is covered in item #1 of the policy. She stated both items should be removed from the proposed policy.

Marybeth Mordecai – agreed that item #9 needs to be removed from the proposed policy.

Ms. Dargenio – In response to a question raised by Ms. Dargenio, there was a general discussion concerning the most effective way to communicate with private community residents about the draft policy discussions in general and, specifically, if the Town is not able to contract with additional snow plowers each winter.

Ms. Haines read an email that she had received from Dennis Jolly which included a list of recommended revisions to the draft policy. She closed the public comment portion of the meeting and asked the Selectmen for their input.

Ms. Bourgoin stated that she agrees that it is too late in the year to implement the annual inspection of private roads for this winter. She noted that if an agreement cannot be reached with residents of the Town’s private communities about the draft policy language in the next month or two, and the Town is going to revert to its unwritten policy of clearing & treating private roads for the upcoming winter season, she doesn’t feel it is necessary to rush to finalize the written policy and suggested that the Board of Selectmen can take some more time to work with the residents to develop policy language that will be acceptable to both sides.

Mr. Dill stated he felt that tonight’s discussion was a good one. Ms. Velez stated that she had heard all of the residents’ comments and taken notes so that appropriate revisions can be made to the draft policy. In response to a suggestion that the annual road inspections occur in April, Ms. Velez noted that April is in the rainy season and also a time of thaw and snow melt which is impactful on dirt roads. She confirmed that mid-May is a more reasonable time to have the inspections occur.

Ms. Haines thanks all the citizens for their participation.

3. Potential Board of Selectmen Recommendation Regarding Town Policy: Action on this agenda item was postponed.
4. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adjourn the meeting at 6:47 p.m. .

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary