

TOWN HALL MONTHLY: August

FEMA, summer road maintenance and ongoing compliance issues took up much of the Selectmen's time during July.

After we expressed our disappointment in June over lack of progress with FEMA disaster response the Town has had more constant contact and on July 20 we learned our first group of sites was submitted for reimbursement. In addition, on July 21, a FEMA/State Homeland Security (HSEM) team made their first site visit to Crane Brook Road which has consumed the highest amount of Town expense since the flood disaster last year.

We are now meeting twice weekly with FEMA/HSEM; online and in person. The level of detail required in order to have a site ready to submit for reimbursement is intense. For each wash out and culvert repair we need to provide GPS and ground dimensions of length and depth, the materials and equipment used and the paid invoices. "Submitting" to FEMA means they then compute whether our expenses match up with the dimensions. From that and various rules about competitive bidding and contract requirements, FEMA determines what portion of our expenses are eligible for reimbursement. This has been important to know: that unless the rules are followed, all expenses might not be reimbursable. As a result several of us have participated in online FEMA workshops to understand what is needed.

Town Engineer Erin Darrow, Deputy Emergency Management Director Jennifer Bland and Road Agent Mark McIntire have been the main resources for the detail site descriptions being required. Jennifer and Mark assembled photo files for each site that show the original damage which have provided important documentation now when many sites have had repairs.

The Highway Department completed spring grading while incorporating remaining flood repairs which can be done in-house. Acworth Volunteer Fire and Rescue Company is working with the Department on culvert cleaning which is much appreciated. The Company was also able to assist with bridge cleaning.

Every Selectmen's meeting requires time spent on compliance. The Board was recently asked by a property owner why the Board was requesting junkyard compliance and whether there had been a complaint. When we talk about compliance we are talking about the Acworth Zoning Ordinance (ZO). The ZO was adopted by the Townspeople in the 1970's and it lays out how Townspeople wanted their Town to look. In the ZO Selectmen are charged with carrying out its guidelines, not because of a complaint but because the Townspeople voted for those guidelines. Compliance problems are hard to fix once they get going. It is less costly for the Townspeople if the guidelines are known and can be followed. The ZO is available on our website and from the Town office. Recently, the Board resolved compliance issues on Connecticut Heights and Black North Roads and owners on Tucker, Heino and Breier Roads are working toward resolution.

On July 14 representatives from New Hampshire Electric Cooperative (NHEC) and NH Broadband commemorated the first broadband connections installed in Town under NHEC's initiative to bring broadband to Acworth. State Rep. Judy Aron, Acworth Broadband Committee lead Gregg Thibodeau and United Church's Sally Eaton were present along with various others. Improved internet has been a goal of the Acworth Master Plan and a dream for those residents unable to access other means and now we are there; Woo-hoo!

We are one month into summer; may the time go slowly. See you soon, Kathi