

➤ **Article 34: Road Improvements**

9/14/16

Christopher Fava, Petitioner, presented Article 34. He hears a lot of discussion around town about how bad the roads are. The money spent on road improvements is insufficient. We receive approximately \$1.55 million in Chapter 90 funds and Town Meeting approves another \$500,000 each year for private/unaccepted road maintenance. That \$2 million per year only funds 5.3 miles of road repairs. Currently the amount of roads deteriorating is larger than the amount of roads we are repairing so we are digging deeper hole. The town currently has 241.7 miles of roads that need immediate repairs, rehabilitation, or maintenance with an estimated cost of \$134,456,390 not including repairs to sidewalks, bike paths or ramps. We need to think about a long term plan. This article looks at a phased approach to road maintenance. If we take out a bond where borrowing is phased over time, \$25 million in total, that will allow us to add \$5 million to our existing \$2 million per year for 5 straight years. The DPW is comfortable that they could handle this additional road work. If this total is all placed on the tax levy it will increase our tax rate by approximately 26 cents. That is a conservative number run at 5% interest rate, we can most likely receive a lower interest rate. Auto excise receipts are \$8 million per year in Plymouth. We should look at earmarking some of those revenues for road repair. The Selectmen indicated that it would require special legislation but they do have the power to set fiscal policy. Maybe they could say any dollar over \$8 million in excise tax receipts be placed in a fund to support road maintenance. That option can be explored later. Right now it is important to get the budget process in place and start on road improvements early in FY2018. With 2020 coming up, we have a unique marketing opportunity. Our roads are the first impression visitors receive. We want to be seen as a town on the go, investing in our infrastructure and businesses will catch on to that. Residents will also be happy to see infrastructure improvements which also improve public safety. They may see a reduction in car maintenance costs which may more than cover the increase in their property tax. This is a very workable plan.

Questions/Discussion:

There were a lot of questions about funding and the use of excise taxes. If we utilize existing excise tax revenue to fund roads than that will leave a hole in the budget elsewhere. If we earmark only the new revenue above the \$8 million, that would solve that problem. We can also look at grants that may be available for green gate type projects like bike lanes, etc. The phased approach provides flexibility. Braintree has instituted a similar approach and it is working well for them.

Jonathan Beder, DPW Director, said that Chris Fava is spot on with this article and numbers and need. The town invests in water and sewer needs but not roads. We need to invest more in roads and \$7 million per year is very doable for his staff. It is cheaper to maintain roads than it is to rebuild them. We would like to use the bond to fund road repair and the Chapter 90 funds for road maintenance. We started this discussion with the Board of Selectmen last year and then the sewer broke. We were told to follow through with the road discussion.

Public Comment:

- Paul Hapgood shared a large map which illustrated the road plan. He said the town has worked hard at coming up with the plan and scheduling the specifics and priorities and now all they need is the funding to move forward. Jonathan Beder added that the maps are available on the town's website on the Engineering Department page.
- Dave Bustere said that everyone uses the roads and everyone uses the infrastructure. Yes, 2020 is coming but the residents are the ones using the roads everyday. The road conditions are a safety issue, an aesthetic issue, and a quality of life issue.

Christopher Merrill made a motion to recommend Article 34 to Town Meeting. Mike Lincoln, second.

Discussion:

- This is a significant amount of money and it would be nice to see new excise tax revenue above the \$8 million earmarked for road repair and maintenance. (B Cavacco)
- Roads are important to public safety and to commerce. I am grateful this has been brought forward our roads are in desperate need for repair. Excise tax should fund road repair. This article should go to Town Meeting for discussion. (M Lincoln)
- The complete lack of funding is negligence and once again taxpayers are being asked to bail out negligence, I can not support a \$25 million bond with the tax burden we have going on now. (H Helm)
- Why can't the selectmen make a decision regarding how the excise tax is used? I believe what has been presented but believe the eggs are in the Selectmen's basket. Now we are asking Town Meeting to make a decision because the Selectmen haven't. (S Sheridan)
- I do not usually embrace petitioned articles but this one is well thought out, it places the Selectmen in a position to fund roads, and sometimes we have to spend money to save money. Preventative maintenance saves taxpayers money in the long run. We can not ear mark dollars like the Selectmen can. It does not matter which pot the funding comes out of. Roads have a weaker voice in town and this article gives roads a voice. (H Salerno)
- I agree with Mr. Salerno, it forces the hand of the Board of Selectmen. We can grapple with the problem now or face a much larger issue later. Infrastructure has been neglected throughout the country not just Plymouth. Roads are our red carpet, greeting potential house buyers or those considering opening a business in town. The plan is a good start to solving the problem. (K Canty)
- I am not supporting this article because this is not the right time. A year ago this topic was pulled because of the sewer issue, we are still working on that issue. I understand the concepts of sending the message and putting excise tax towards the roads, but not yet. (E Kusmin)
- I support this article. We have to stop kicking the can down the road. We have to stop acting reactively because that always costs more money. We should send Selectmen the message that we would like to see every \$1 over \$8 million in excise tax revenue earmarked for road maintenance and repair. (B Cavacco)

The motion carries (10-4-0). Ethan Kusmin, Harry Helm, Marc Sirrico, Judith Fitzgerald, opposed.