

Protecting a Major Investment

Infrastructure is defined as the basic, underlying framework or features of a system or organization; the fundamental facilities and systems serving a country, city or area such as transportation and communication systems and public buildings. For the Town of Durham that means 62 miles of roadway; a drainage system of over 1200 catch basins, culverts, and swales; hundreds of street signs; 8 town buildings to include an ambulance building, library, town hall, two houses, firehouse, town garage and a barn; one park, town green and 2 ball fields; hundreds of acres of open space. One of the most important tasks facing any municipality is maintenance and improvements to its infrastructure. However, in tough economic times such as these, it is easy to defer such maintenance. We are trying to protect our investment despite our tight budget with the understanding that deferred maintenance can cost twice as much in the end. Some of our projects are as follows:

The land we now know as Durham was originally named Coginchaug, meaning long swamp. And as someone said in a meeting with me yesterday, they didn't call this land Coginchaug for nothing! The overwhelming issue we have affecting our road system and neighborhoods is drainage. Water over the road causes grave safety issues as well as property damage. We have restored the budget for road projects and have addressed issues on Maple Avenue, Johnson Lane, Higganum Road, Old Wallingford Road, Foothills Road and Trimountain Road. This is progress but I assure you, we have a backlog of similar projects to span multiple budget years.

Sometimes water over the road occurs because private property owners have not maintained the drainage systems installed by their contractors. This puts the town in a very precarious situation because we cannot make improvements on private property. Some of you have heard me say, that would be the quickest way to bankrupt the town!

Our drainage system includes storm drains or catch basins and swales that are sometimes situated on or near private property. I urge everyone to help us take care of these assets. If you have a storm drain or swale in front of your property, please do not block the water flow with grass clippings, leaves or any other debris. Also, please do not pour any substance down a storm drain. The water through these structures is designed to flow into our brooks and streams. Foreign objects and substances can harm the quality of our watercourses and wells.

We have applied for stimulus money to pave Higganum Road, Maiden Lane, Pent Road and Parmelee Hill Road, the only roads eligible for federal money. Even though you may have heard that this funding intended to be used expeditiously, we probably won't see it until next spring.

The culvert on Pickett Lane by Allyn Brook Park has flooded twice in the past 18 months causing damage to the park and delaying school opening for CRHS and Korn Schools. This project is estimated to cost approximately \$600,000. We've applied for a STEAP grant for funding and we are on the list for federal earmark funding.

Our town buildings are also a priority. Not only are we creating a long term maintenance program for budget purposes, but we are in the planning stages to renovate and enhance the ambulance building and firehouse. Also we are finally applying for the DEP required Stormwater Discharge permit for the town garage which will undoubtedly require some improvements to that site.

None of these projects will happen overnight, especially the big ticket items. The public will have ample opportunity to be involved in the process. The grant application course will be highly competitive but we are doing our best to put us in a viable position.

I would like to thank our staff, especially the public works department, finance director, executive assistant, town planner, as well as our volunteer boards and commissions and chiefs of service for their efforts. It takes a team effort to put it all together!