

Town of Exeter
Deliberative Session Fact Sheet
Article 1
Norris Brook Culverts

Description

Article 1 of the Town Warrant is a request to approve bonding for replacement of two defective culverts through which Norris Brook flows into the Squamscott River. One culvert is located on Water Street and the other is in Swasey Parkway. The replacements are structural in nature and will not impact flooding.

The culverts are old (estimated at 50-plus years) and deteriorated. Engineering studies completed in 2004 declared them to be in “extremely poor” condition. One-inch steel plates were installed in 2004 to support the road, but that was intended to be a temporary improvement; both culverts are in need of permanent repair. This project has been part of the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process since 2004, with the culverts deteriorating gradually each year since.

At the deliberative session February 5, 2011, voters placed the article on the warrant without further discussion after a brief presentation. However, at the Town vote on March 8, 2011, the article requesting funding for the culvert replacements was defeated by receiving 53% of voter approval. Although the warrant article did receive a majority vote, it needed sixty percent (60%) for passage as a bond authorization under our form of government.

After the vote in March, the Town received an updated structural engineering evaluation and report regarding the condition of the culverts (this report is online at www.town.exeter.nh.us) which detailed heavy deterioration and a further failed condition of both culverts. The report demanded immediate attention as the deterioration had become so pronounced within the structures that the culverts were in danger of collapsing from heavy loads. As a result, two-way traffic was no longer feasible on both Water Street and the Swasey Parkway. The Board of Selectmen reviewed potential solutions from the Town’s Department of Public Works on April 11th, 2011, and approved an option for a temporary fix. This included removal of the speed bumps in the parkway and the re-routing of traffic one way northbound, and one way southbound on Water Street. Detours have since been set up.

The issues and subsequent temporary solutions have caused a major disruption for travelers, vendors, parkway events and downtown businesses. As a result, the Board of Selectmen petitioned the superior court to be able to hold a special town meeting for voters to reconsider the matter of replacing the culverts. Judge Lewis granted the order to the Town and thus the article is again before the Town for a vote. A permanent solution will mean the re-opening of Swasey Parkway and Water Street to two-way traffic, and an end to planning issues surrounding major parkway events. The Town will also be able to lift the no parking restriction on the parkway. Further, residents will be able to back to enjoying the parkway as it was.

If the vote is approved on July 12th, the Town will borrow funds through a construction loan and design the project. The Town will need to go through final design and permitting process before construction can start. Construction on the culverts would start in the spring of 2012, with completion of Water Street by summer and Swasey Parkway by the fall. The project budget has remained unchanged from the 2011 warrant article amount of \$575,000 for both culverts.

If the vote is not approved on July 12th, conditions around Swasey Parkway and Water Street will remain until a permanent solution can be found. If the condition of the culverts continues to deteriorate, additional load restrictions, up to and including road closure, may become necessary to protect the safety of the traveling public. The Board of Selectmen would need to present the article again to the voters in February, 2012 with a subsequent vote in March, 2012. This time delay would cause the current situation to remain in place until late 2013.

Financing

The funding for this project will come from a loan through the general fund. It has been amortized over 10 years based on the useful life of the culverts and the total project cost, with a principal payment of \$57,500 per year. Assuming a 4.5% interest rate, total interest paid on the project will be \$142,313.

If this project was funded in one year it would impact the tax rate by 37 cents per 1,000 of assessed value, and cost \$111 for a \$300,000 home. Amortizing over 10 years results in a total cost of \$139 for a \$300,000 home, however the cost is spread out to between \$12 and \$16 (4 to 5 cents per year on the tax rate) over the life of the loan.

The Town's total debt service budget for the general fund will decrease by \$154,877 in 2012 primarily due to a retirement of debt from a previous storm water separation project. Therefore this article may be added to the general fund debt service budget in 2012 without increasing that budget over 2011 levels.