

Memorandum

TO: Greg Duggan, Town Manager
Marguerite Ladd, Deputy Town Manager
FROM: Aaron Martin, P.E., Public Works Director 
DATE: November 30, 2023
SUBJECT: Lower Sand Hill Road Truck Traffic Concerns

ISSUE: This memorandum is for informational purposes and provides additional information regarding some of the concerns and questions from the residents along Lower Sand Hill Road at the November 20th selectboard meeting.

DISCUSSION: The functional classification of the lower portion of Sand Hill Road would be considered an arterial road within the Town's transportation network. The Town of Essex currently has nearly 100 miles of roadway throughout the town. This network consists of 77.1 miles of Class 2 and 3 town highways and 22.0 +/- miles of State highways, VT RT 15, VT RT 2A, VT RT 117, VT RT 128, and VT RT 289. The Town has eight Class 2 Town Highways within our road network, (15.01 miles). TH#4, Sand Hill Road, is a 2.21-mile Class 2 town highway within the Town of Essex.

Sand Hill Road begins at the intersection of VT RT 15, (Jericho Road), extends 1.11 miles south to the intersection with TH#8, Allen Martin Drive, and continues 1.1 miles south to the intersection with VT RT 117, (River Road). The section of Sand Hill Road from VT RT 15 and Allen Martin Drive is currently posted for "No Thru Truck Traffic", under 7.16.045, Weight Limits and Control of Thru-Truck Traffic. This was done for several reasons, the main reason was this "upper" section of Sand Hill Road has narrower cross-section varying from 21.0' to 23.0' and does see a significant amount of traffic to and from the schools off Founders Road, including a significant amount of school bus traffic. Removing excess commercial truck traffic was a safety concern of the selectboard at the time of approval of this ordinance.

The section of Sand Hill Road that is currently a concern with neighbors is the "lower" portion of Sand Hill Road between Allen Martin Drive and VT RT 117, (River Road). The intersection of Sand Hill Road and Allen Martin Drive was reconstructed in 1996. This 1.1-mile section of class 2 town highway has a width of 30.0'. The intersection of Sand Hill Road and River Road was updated once in 2000 and again in 2014 with a signalized intersection. This lower portion of Sand Hill Road has historically been the preferred truck route into the industrial zoned district off Allen Martin Drive.

The Town of Essex Public Works Department approves and issues all over-weight permits within the Town of Essex. Applicant can request a single truck or fleet permit, \$5 and \$10 respectively. Copies of the applications and the additional information provided to applicants has been provided with this memorandum.

The Town performed traffic counts along the Sand Hill Road / Allen Martin Drive corridor this past summer and again last month. This past summer, Public Works placed a traffic counter on lower Sand Hill Road, from 7/13/23 to 7/20/23. The total vehicles analyzed during this period of time was 38,778. A breakdown by vehicle type and total volume has been provided with this memo. Medium and heavy truck traffic makes up 3.65% of the total traffic volume along this portion of Sand Hill Road. The remaining 96.35% is from passenger cars, light trucks, and buses. The counters were set up again after the November 20th meeting to confirm what was previously documented. In addition to the counter on lower Sand Hill Road, a counter was placed on Allen Martin Drive as well. This data has not been downloaded and analyzed but we will get the results as soon as they are available.

At the November 20th meeting there were a couple ideas floated by some of the residents to alleviate their concerns. These ranged from completing the construction of the road from Thompson Drive to VT RT 117 or detouring heavy trucks to VT289 through to VT RT15. Both options do address truck traffic on Sand Hill Road, but they do create new problems. Constructing a new road from Thompson Drive, although constructable, would cost roughly \$4.5 M to \$5M, depending on the continuation of the pedestrian path and the amount of street lighting proposed. This could be an option in the future as the industrial park builds out further and developers construct the access from Thompson Drive to VT RT 117. The detour alternative would avoid heavy trucks along lower Sand Hill Road but would have significant impacts to residents and commuter traffic along the detour route.

One of the major concerns of the Sand Hill group was the exposure of residents along this road to diesel exhaust. The Lower Sand Hill Road route has a total of 39 residential dwellings along the route. By re routing the heavy trucks to VT RT 289 and VT RT 15, this not only increases the length of travel by 4.7 miles, but the number of residential dwellings also increases to 132. Looking at this option through the lens of pollution exposure, this is not a valid option.

The Town will be applying for a UPWP grant through the CCRPC to perform a comprehensive study on truck traffic to and from the Saxon Hill Industrial Park and provide options to provide truck access and address the concerns of the residents along the lower portion of Sand Hill Road. These applications will be due in January and the Town will be informed this spring whether funding will be available for the project. If a UPWP grant is awarded, the funding will be made available July 1, 2024, with the RFP consultant selection process to follow soon after. It is likely this project will take about a year to complete.

RECOMENDATION: For information only, no action required.