

On September 6, a Special Town Meeting will be held at the Braintree Town Hall on Rt 12A in West Braintree. The meeting will be called to order at 6pm. The meeting has been called to ask voters to consider this Article: "Shall the voters authorize the selectboard to negotiate the purchase and financing of a parcel, located on Vermont Route 12-A in the town of Northfield, 22+/- acres in size, for the purpose of extracting, processing, and storing material for the maintenance of Braintree highways, in an amount not to exceed \$400,000 to be financed over a period not to exceed ten years?". Based on a cost analysis, as detailed below, purchasing the proposed property should result in nominal tax increases not in excess of the normal rate of budget increases that occurs annually. If the town does not secure a property to source winter sand, the highway operations budget is projected to increase \$75,000-100,000 annually within the next 2-3 years.

The reason for calling this special meeting is two fold: 1) When a town wishes to purchase an asset of significant size or value that requires a financing period of five years or longer, the voters must approve the purchase. Voters may recall that these questions come up quite frequently at regular Town Meeting, when the Town asks to purchase and finance a large piece of equipment. We expect that financing period to be between five and ten years for this purchase. 2) The selectboard agreed this summer that the voters should weigh in on a purchase of this magnitude. It is a large investment for a small town and has the potential to pose significant savings and also significant costs for the town's highway operations budget.

Over the last decade, Braintree has extracted, processed, and used material from two gravel pits located on Riford Brook Rd. We expect that there is enough material remaining to supply the town with winter sand for two years. After that, we do not have a dedicated source of winter sand and must either find another parcel of land for extracting material, or purchase processed material from a supplier. The proposed pit was offered to us for purchase by R.E. Tucker, Inc. in March of this year. No other parcels have been offered to the town for consideration.

During an initial meeting on July 26, the voters agreed to table the question so that more information could be collected. Since that meeting the Selectboard has been working to gather additional information about the parcel to help inform the decision. In order to understand and weigh the implications of this potential purchase, the voters need to know more than just the price of the parcel, including:

- 1) How much material exists at the parcel, and is it good quality?

While it is impossible to understand exactly how much material we will be able to extract over the lifetime of the gravel pit, a survey conducted by American Consulting, estimated a yield of approximately 80,000 - 100,000 yards of material. This type of land surveying provides us with the best estimate of volume of material. Other types of testing that could yield a more precise estimate are likely cost-prohibitive and not widely used.

On August 7, the Selectboard voted to hire Vermont Testing & Consulting Corporation to meet the Braintree Road Foreman at the parcel to dig a series of test pits and remove samples of

material for testing. A total four test pits from upper most elevation to lowest elevations were explored with an excavator, with depths of ten feet deep.

The following was observed by the consultant: "Sand and gravel layers existed at various elevations on all three top test pits, samples that were extracted for laboratory analysis indicated that this material is acceptable for road usage. At the bottom lowest test pit, coarse clean sand was present at more than ten feet below; this coarse sand can be used for various applications as well". Selectboard members present at the digging and extraction observed a diverse mix of materials that can be used immediately for winter sand by screening, or crushed to make winter sand. Observations also aligned with the material volume estimates included in the land survey previously conducted.

- 2) How does the railroad transecting the parcel impact the upfront and operational costs of owning the property and using it to extract gravel?

The questions related to the railroad have been challenging to resolve. After the July 26 special town meeting, the selectboard hired a commercial real estate attorney who has experience working on property transactions involving railroad rights of way. While this has yielded some progress, at the date of this writing, questions remain as communication with both local and out-of-state representatives of the railroad is slow. The most significant outstanding issue is what improvements the railroad might require for the town's use of the crossing, and whether or not and what kind of signal needs to be installed.

The Selectboard will continue to pursue resolution of these questions pertaining to the railroad and relay as much information to the voters as possible at the September 6 meeting.

- 3) Who will be responsible for maintenance of the bridge over the Dog River used to access the parcel?

Because the 22 acre parcel is being divided from a larger parcel, the adjacent landowner will retain an easement over the 22 acre parcel and will also use the bridge for access. Therefore, if the Town acquired the property, it would enter into an agreement with the landowner for joint maintenance and upkeep of the bridge. The current condition of the bridge is appropriate for use by trucks and heavy equipment.

- 4) Compared to how much the town currently has budgeted for winter sand, what would be the additional costs or savings of purchasing the Northfield gravel pit for winter sand?

Our current annual budget for sourcing and processing winter sand is \$41,000. If the proposed gravel pit is purchased, this budgeted amount would likely increase to account for inflation and changes in crushing costs; however, this budget line is not expected to increase significantly after the purchase. The town contributes annually to a Gravel Pit Reserve Fund, which has a current balance of approximately \$122,000. Town Treasurer, Jessica Brassard, has advised that this amount could be applied to the purchase price of the potential pit, and further

contributions to the fund, \$31,000 annually, could be reallocated to pay the principal and interest on a loan to finance the purchase of the gravel pit.

While it is impossible to predict all elements of future costs for either purchasing processed sand or extracting and processing sand from a gravel pit, we can use current costs and estimate future costs to inform a cost-effectiveness analysis. To compare the costs of owning a gravel/sand pit and purchasing processed sand from a local supplier, we can consider all expenses in terms of a per-yard cost.

For material extracted and processed from the potential pit in Northfield, we consider the purchase price of the parcel, property taxes, loan interest, trucking material from the parcel to the town garage (based on an hourly trucking rate), crushing costs, and the cost of equipment and necessary site work. For material purchased from a supplier, we consider the price per yard of material (including annual price increases), and the cost of trucking the material from the supplier location to the town garage. This analysis yields a cost per yard comparison, shown below:

Source	Cost per yard	Total cost of 100,000 yards	Comparative cost
Proposed Northfield pit	\$18.94	\$1,894,349	-
Local supplier 1	\$37.36	\$3,736,286	+\$1,841,936
Local supplier 2	\$43.99	\$4,399,214	+\$2,504,865

The above comparison shows that the estimated additional cost of purchasing winter sand, compared to extracting and processing winter sand from the proposed parcel, would likely require the town to increase its annual budget for winter sand by over 100% initially, and likely over 200% in the decades to come.

The calculations and assumptions made in performing this cost-effective analysis, as well as the results of the materials testing, are available for inspection on the Town of Braintree's website: braintreevt.gov. We encourage all Braintree voters to attend the Special Town Meeting on September 6th at 6pm, at the Braintree Town Hall.