

**DECISION OF THE GRANVILLE TREE WARDEN
Regarding the Public Hearing on Butz Road Improvements
Held July 23, 2016**

Kathy Werner, Granville Town Clerk, has provided minutes of the public hearing, and those are attached as a part of this record.

The sole purpose of this hearing was to examine whether certain trees within the clearing limits of the Butz Road Improvements project should be cut. The clearing limits are described in the survey and construction plans titled "Butz Road – T.H. #17 – Subbase, Drainage & Safety Improvements."

Four written comments were received prior to the hearing and are summarized here:

- Tracy Winn, property owner in Granville, asks that the road shoulders not be denuded and believes the proposed clearing is too draconian. She asks that some reasonableness be applied to leave trees for privacy and shading purposes.
- William Wright, property owner on Butz Road asks for a more moderate approach to clearing. While recognizing the need to clear trees where new ditches and culverts are required, he asks that as many trees as possible be saved on both sides of the road in the approximately 250 yard distance east of his driveway. He wishes to preserve privacy and shaded conditions.
- Bruce Hyde, Chair of the Granville Selectboard states that Butz Road Improvements is a perfect example of the attempt to maintain safe travel on Granville's roads. The current proposal, Option 1A, was trimmed down by the selectboard from the initial proposal to widen Butz Road to 20 feet. By doing so, the area to be cleared of trees was reduced by more than half – from 6 acres in the original proposal to 2.8 acres in the current plans. The selectboard believes that Option 1A balances safety issues while maintaining the rural character of the road.
- Julie and Paul DiSilvestro, property owners on Butz Road express their love for the beauty and peacefulness of Butz Road as it is now. Being new owners, they find it difficult to express what they think should be done or not done, but their overall sentiment is: "Please save as many trees as possible wherever you can." They ask that the clearing limits be applied as conservatively as possible while recognizing that new ditches and culverts will be installed.

In preparation for the hearing, and having heard expressions of concern from several parties wishing to preserve shade trees and privacy along Butz Road, I decided to take a more intensive look at those trees likely to be within the clearing limits of Butz Road Improvements. Trees of greatest concern seem to be those larger trees nearest the road. Since clearing limits are not yet marked on the ground, I concentrated on all trees 12" diameter and larger which were within 10' of the road shoulder, which is the minimum distance to be cleared. For my purposes I did not tally smaller trees and I did not attempt to determine where the clearing limits might be at those points where proposed construction dictates a wider zone.

I inventoried a total of 111 live and dead standing trees along the 1.15 miles (two segments) of Butz Road where clearing is to be done. I tallied the species of each tree and made an assessment of its condition, health, indications of disease on the bole as well as the health of the crown. In brief, I found 45% (50 trees) to be healthy; 44% (48 trees) to be diseased or dying; 13 trees (11%) standing dead. A summary of my inventory was made available in chart form and discussed at the hearing, and it is attached as part of this record. At the hearing, I displayed 15 photographs of inventoried trees in the diseased, dying and dead categories.

It is obvious that trees near a public highway which are diseased, rotten, dying or standing dead constitute a public hazard. Though a casual observer might recognize the frailties of some of these trees, they may not notice the partially dead crowns, nor the extent of rot, nor the factor of tree age which is important in predicting the health of short-lived species such as aspen, balsam fir and paper birch. I examined one very large white ash from the road and initially tallied it as healthy. Later, I thought I'd better climb that steep bank and look at the backside, which turned out to have a large rotten hole in the base. I changed my tally. It should be an eye opener that more than 50% of the large trees now standing near the Butz Road are truly hazardous.

I would like to discuss the healthy trees I tallied along Butz Road. These trees, as well as most of the hazardous trees, are indeed supplying shade and do contribute to a peaceful atmosphere. Unfortunately, many of them are either immediately adjacent to the public road, or standing in one of the six "blind curves" which constitute safety hazards, or standing in a location where new ditches will be constructed or new and larger culverts installed. Fixing the "blind curves, and installing proper drainage have been hallmarks of the Butz Road Improvements project since the fall of 2013 when the FEMA Alternate Projects were selected, and both these objectives have been supported repeatedly by the taxpayers at town

meetings and selectboard meetings since then. They were included in the original proposal to FEMA approved in December 2014 and they are included in Option 1A. At a selectboard meeting discussion with William Wright on July 11, 2016, several attendees spoke of the danger of the curves – can't see around them in summer and must avoid snowplows in winter – and mud season on Butz Road was called the worst in town. These sentiments are commonly felt and expressed in Granville. Improving sight distance at the curves and widening the road two to three feet on the inside of the curves is intended to promote safe public travel. Installation of new and larger culverts and rock-lined ditches designed to carry more water and slow its velocity is intended to lessen the affects of mud season, and ameliorate erosion and damage to the road in high water events. Yes, many of the healthy trees are standing in the path of these planned safety improvements.

Tree Warden Decision

I conclude from the written and oral testimony presented at the hearing, and from my own observation and examination of the trees in question, that the clearing limits as described in the survey and construction plans titled “Butz Road – T.H. #17 – Subbase, Drainage & Safety Improvements” are necessary, and should remain as they are in order to achieve the objectives of improved safety for vehicular traffic, including fire and emergency vehicles. The Granville Selectboard has already considered and modified this project to one of much less consequence – from clearing 6 acres versus clearing only 2.8 acres in the current proposal. Clearing of healthy trees, diseased and dying trees, and trees already standing dead will be necessary to insure the safety of the public traveling this road. The tree clearing should insulate Butz Road, to a degree, from future dangerous wind storms or heavy snow damage, both of which are common in Granville.

I do believe there is some latitude in applying the clearing limits on the ground which offers an opportunity to satisfy some of the concerns which have been expressed about the loss of shade or privacy. Therefore, my decision includes the following: While the clearing limits are being measured and flagged along Butz Road, I will work directly with the contractor, G&N Excavating, to adjust the outer edge of the clearing limits as much as possible where a healthy tree or group of trees can be saved without interfering with construction of the road, culverts, ditches or other necessary features. Surely there will be opportunities to do so, but they won't be obvious until the clearing limits are laid out. To be clear, this option will not satisfy those who are most concerned about saving trees at the road's edge. The adjustments will be made to the clearing limits farthest from the road. Similar suggestions for compromise were made in testimony by several people who hoped as many trees as possible be saved wherever they could be saved, or that trees be saved to protect privacy, or so as to retain shade.

I have already discussed applying the clearing limit adjustments with the contractor's representative, Michele Gaboriau, and she believes we can do so if we work together. Similarly, Kevin Bagley, Granville Road Commissioner, agrees that adjustments can be made without interfering with the work to be done, and he will assist with that effort.

At this point, I can make no estimate as to how many trees may be retained as a result of the clearing limits adjustments, but I am committed to saving as many healthy trees which could provide shade or screening as possible.

Norman Arseneault
Granville Tree Warden
July 26, 2016

Attachments

Hearing minutes compiled by Kathy Werner
Tree Warden's Partial Inventory of Trees to be Cleared

Post-Hearing Weather Event

I would like to mention here a weather event which occurred just hours after the hearing. Very strong winds ahead of a changing weather front blew through Granville and surrounding towns felling many trees and causing power outages. The effect of this storm in Granville was variable, but a very dangerous situation developed along North Hollow and Town Line Roads. Those roads were blocked in a dozen locations by trees blown over or snapped off in what was described to me as swirling and violent winds. Luckily, no one was hurt and enough of the roadway has been cleared to pass traffic, but a big and costly mess remains to be addressed. I drove through the damaged area the following day and stopped to view each broken tree. Aspen, which are dangerous and brittle, broke over Town Line Road. A dead standing spruce fell over that same road. A forked red maple, looking otherwise healthy, split with one fork falling over the road.

On North Hollow/Puddledock Road the following trees came down across the road: the top blew out of a butternut; the top of a rotten yellow birch blew out and is hanging over the road; a large, mostly dead sugar maple broke off 15' above the ground; a large red maple broke off 16' above the ground hitting a yellow birch on the other side of the road resulting in the birch hanging over the road.

Butz Road was not hit by this storm on July 23, 2016, but in my estimation, the conditions on Butz are very similar. Even healthy trees are susceptible to such winds, but Butz seems even more susceptible given that 55% of the large trees near the road are already compromised.