

Wiscasset to have traffic officers on Main St. this summer

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Staff Reporter

The Wiscasset selectmen voted unanimously Tuesday evening to have two traffic officers on Main Street for six weeks during the summer months.

Maine Department of Transportation (MDOT) Project Engineer Gerry Audibert attended the selectmen's meeting and recommended two police officers to manage pedestrian crossings, and traffic at Water and Middle streets on Main Street from July 17 through August 14, seven days a week from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. for the purpose of improving the traffic flow on Route One in Wiscasset.

MDOT will conduct traffic counts before and during the officers being posted to see what effect they have on traffic flow.

Selectman Judy Colby said she would like to see the study done for six weeks instead of the four recommended by Audibert. "If we are going to do this study, let's do it right," she said.

Audibert made it clear if the selectmen wanted to go with six weeks it would be okay with MDOT, and they would fund 50 percent of the cost for the extra two weeks.

After a brief discussion by the board they agreed to have the traffic officers begin July 10, through August 21. The cost to the town for those six weeks is estimated to be about \$5,000, and \$7,000 to MDOT. E. Davies Allen of Westport Island contributed \$2,000 toward the study, and MDOT will credit that to Wiscasset's share.

Audibert noted perhaps if there is a substantial improvement in the traffic flow with the traffic officers in place, the study could be extended even longer. He also noted if there was no improvement there would be no problem cutting the time short.

RSU Superintendent Presentation

Sheepscot Valley Regional School Unit Superintendent Greg Potter outline the implications for Wiscasset returning to be a school Administrative Unit (SAU) compared to participation in RSU 12 for 2011-2012.

According to Potter, if Wiscasset was not in the RSU for the school year 2011-2012 the town would need to raise an additional \$2 million. He said the major factor influencing the rise of local education costs in Maine has been the shift from state to local. The state has increased the required local share of education by \$2 mil-

lion and reduced the state's contribution by \$978,000. The total impact to Wiscasset is an increased local burden of \$3 million, according to Potter.

After Potter's remarks he opened the floor to questions from the selectmen and the public.

Selectman Colby asked if it was possible for Wiscasset to become an AOS (an alternative organizational structure). Potter said yes, it is possible.

An AOS is a regional school unit that requires communities to function as a single school system that reports a single budget to the Department of Education, with a regional school superintendent, much like Wiscasset, Westport Island and Alna had before school consolidation.

Potter was asked by Wiscasset resident Richard Grondin if there were any plans to change the RSU funding formula. He was told the RSU Finance Committee was going to review the recommendations that had been made from the towns and a recommendation would be made to the RSU board of directors.

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Grondin asked if a change in the formula would require a vote from the people, or if it would be a decision of the RSU board.

"It would be a vote of the people, either by a ballot vote or a meeting," Potter said.

Grondin questioned his meaning of a meeting. Potter explained if the funding formula was going to change it would require a ballot vote or a RSU-wide town meeting vote.

Grondin said, "Why should we vote, even if it fails they still have the amount of last year's budget to spend. Our vote is meaningless," he said.

Wiscasset Educational Research Panel Chairman Doug Smith asked how they are addressing the overhead cost of Wiscasset High School with only 40 percent of the capacity being used.

Potter said the RSU has formed a Facilities Committee that is looking into that issue and others with the RSU schools.

Sharon Nichols asked what was being done about the safety issues at the Middle School. According to Potter there have been air quality tests done at the school, and there are no safety violations at the school.

Sharon also asked why they were advertising courses being offered and no teacher on the staff listed to teach the course.

Potter said, there perhaps needed to be some updating in the information that was being advertised.

Potter was asked also why the high school students in other towns were going to high schools outside the RSU. He said, "Because it is the law; all the schools in the RSU, except Wiscasset have school choice."

Public Hearing

A public hearing was held to discuss an application to the state for the Communities of Maine's Future bond program to construct a railway facility and parking lot.

Don Jones, chairman of the Transportation Committee, said he was delighted to see the plan being implemented for two reasons: it would increase parking, and move the rail-

road station to Railroad Avenue.

Selectman Nichols read three letters in favor of the project, a letter from the Maine Eastern Railroad, Representative Les Fossil, and the owners of the Tall Pine Bed & Breakfast, Bev and Frank Risell.

The grant request is for \$400,000. Selectman Ed Połewarczyk asked about the town match. Town Manager Laurie Smith explained that if the town approves the \$350,000 bond to replace the commercial pier, that could be used as the match for the grant.

Montsweag Dam issue

The selectmen had a brief discussion on the Central Maine Power land transfer of the Upper Montsweag Dam property.

The town received a letter from the town of Woolwich indicating they were not interested in obtaining the land on the Woolwich side of the dam.

Selectman Nichols and Selectman Bob Blagden said they felt the town should accept take the land.

Blagden said, "I can't see that it would be a bad thing to own that land. Since Woolwich doesn't want the land in Woolwich, I think it would be good for Wiscasset to have. We could put that \$100,000 in an interest-bearing account and leave it there," He said.

The selectmen are waiting to hear from Central Maine Power as to maintenance history on the dam.

Fourth of July

The Fourth of July Committee of three, Mary Ellen Barnes, Lisa Garman and the town manager, presented the town's plan for the daylong celebration.

The parade will start at 11 a.m. It will start forming at 10 a.m. The parade will go down Gardiner Road to Route One, down Main Street to Water Street then to the waterfront.

The Fire Department will be selling hot dogs; there will be fireworks at 9 p.m. at Sherman Park, and a dance will follow at the Community Center.

According to Garman, those are the plans to date. The town manager

noted that the committee has a membership of three who are working very hard to make sure the town has a great Fourth of July celebration.

"However, we would be very pleased to have others step forward to volunteer for the event," Smith said.

Blagden Recognized

Selectman Bob Blagden was given a standing ovation during the meeting. Selectman David Nichols stood up, walked across the room, took the microphone from the podium and announced that this was the last meeting for Blagden as a selectman.

"We want to thank you for your service," Nichols said. Everyone in the room stood up and gave him a loud round of applause.

In other business

The selectmen opened bids for the municipal boiler repair. The town received four bids, and authorized the town to award the bid to the lowest qualified bidder.

The town received seven bids for the bituminous paving of the Mountain Road and the Bradford Road. The bids varied from a low bid of \$20,739 for the Mountain Road and \$48,825 for the Bradford Road to \$38,368, for the Mountain Road and \$85,183 for the Bradford Road.

The selectmen voted to authorize the town manager and Road Commissioner Greg Griffin to award the bid to the lowest qualified bidder.

The town has received word the Department of Education has accepted the reapportionment proposal for the RSU board, giving Wiscasset another member.

The town manager advised the selectmen they will need to appoint a member to the board for one year, until next year's election.

The town has a new road; the selectmen approved "Outback Road" as a new 911 road (located at 458 Willow Lane)

The Lincoln County tax commitment is out. Wiscasset's commitment is \$491,657.55, an increase of \$10,813.92. Wiscasset's state valuation dropped from \$466.85 million in 2010 to \$461.05 million in 2011.