

Should Waterboro build a new sand/salt shed?

(By Gary Lamb May 26, 2015)

Our June 9, 2015 ballot asks voters to approve borrowing up to \$700,000 to build a new sand/salt shed near our Public Works Garage on Bennett Hill Road. If approved, we expect bid prices will come in lower since a similarly constructed shed was recently built for \$650,000. Our existing salt shed is too small and we need to modernize this operation to be more efficient and maximize public safety. The existing shed could be refurbished for storage of vehicles and other equipment. The following are reasons in favor of building this new structure.



1. We are concerned about the inadequate capacity of our present salt shed, which only holds enough for 2-3 storms. The thought of Waterboro roads without salt during commuter and bus time does not paint a good picture of public safety. Morton Salt, a major regional supplier, ran out of salt this past winter. We buy from Eastern Salt and they did not run out, but demand was strong considering the winter we had. We use approximately 2,000 yards of salt per winter at \$56.93 per ton (about the same as a cubic yard). The proposed salt shed would hold well over 1,000 yards, several times what we can store now.

2. With inside storage, our salt and sand would be drier and can be put up when convenient throughout the summer and fall. Our present salt shed has a leaky roof and walls. Our outdoor sand/salt pile has rainwater leaching much of the salt from the pile, thereby requiring more salt to prevent the pile from freezing. We presently use about 200 pounds of salt in each of our 3,000 cubic yards of sand. With indoor storage, we can reduce salt usage to the DOT recommended 90 pounds of salt per cubic yard of sand, thereby saving up to \$9,000 per year.



3. We have reduced our sand usage considerably over recent years, from 5,000 down to 3,000 cubic yards. We think we can reduce it further down to 2,000 yards with more salt-only applications in conjunction with more frequent road scraping during storms. Some estimates of the total cost of winter sand are over \$100 per cubic yard, which includes hauling, piling and mixing with salt, spreading it during storms, and pickup and hauling during spring and summer ditch cleanouts. This is why DOT uses almost exclusively salt on Maine roads now, it is cheaper. For every cubic yard of sand we do not use, even if we replace it with a cubic yard of salt, the town is still saving about \$50 per cubic yard in total sand costs. If we reduce our sand usage by 1000 yards, we could net as much as \$50,000 in annual savings in reduced material and operating costs.



4. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection endorses our new salt shed as an environmental site improvement to the industrial lagoon pollution site next to our DPW garage. Two lagoons were constructed decades ago to receive tannery waste liquids. The liquids that were dumped there have diluted somewhat in subsurface water tests, but those contaminants will still remain there for many decades. When the town acquired the property, we acquired the responsibility of the pollution. A two phase assessment has been conducted by DEP (at their expense), and the plume of subsurface contaminants has been documented as moving easterly towards Bartlett Brook. In DEP's mind, this large building's foundation will cap one lagoon site, thereby reducing rainwater that is leaching contaminants farther from the lagoon. As part of our site reclamation, grading around the new salt shed would be conducted per DEP guidelines to also keep rainwater out of the second lagoon.



Selectmen and staff recommend approval of this question from a public safety and reduced-operational-expense aspect. If we borrow \$700,000 over 10 years, the annual payment would not exceed \$77,000 per year. With potential savings in excess of \$50,000 per year, building this new salt shed is a smart fiscal decision.