

January 19, 2018

Letter from the Club President

It has been anything but a quiet winter at Hammond Pond. The Club has been in an often-contentious discussions with the Goshen Select Board over the issue of snow plowing and sanding our roads.

In October, 2016, the town Select Board advised the club that plowing our private roads in the future would be an agenda item and we attended a board meeting. We were told our roads had certain issues that needed correcting before the town could plow. Our roads were plowed last winter by the town and we agreed to address the areas of concern. Last summer, Douglas Thayer and I met with Todd Dewkett, the town road superintendent, to go over what needed to be done. Douglas undertook the work. We again met with the Select Board in late fall to discuss the snow plowing topic. Last month, on a Friday evening before the first big snow storm of the season, I was called by the Select Board and told the roads would not be plowed the next day as the road did not meet the specifications of the superintendent. We quickly arranged with Cam Lacey, Dan Pikett and John Skorupski to plow for us at an agreed price. They had no trouble plowing. They have been plowing the roads ever since, and C.E. Roberts Jr. has been sanding.

The remaining “problem” with the roads was corrected to the Select Board’s satisfaction, but the town still did not plow our roads despite having done so since about 1959. The issue was again or “private roads.” We appeared to have gotten past that obstacle, at least for the time being, when it was revealed to us that the town had broken equipment and was short-handed in personnel. This seems to be the real problem. The Select Board suggested reimbursing us for our costs and I pursued that avenue. But town counsel opined that a town could not do that. At our last meeting with the Select Board on January 17, the Select Board was willing to hire Dan, John and Cam to plow our roads and be paid an hourly rate. Unfortunately, Dan and John were unpersuaded by the hourly rate offered. It might have been satisfactory if the town had accepted the total number of hours our guys say it takes to complete the job. But coupled with the low number of hours the town was willing to compensate, Dan and John said no. Nor has any other private plow operator been willing to enter a contract with the town. So, the club continues to pay for the service. The issue of compensation remains open and the Select Board chair asked that I continue to be in contact with the Board.

The Select Board says it is committed to hiring a qualified applicant and the equipment has been repaired, but they have been having trouble finding someone willing to accept the town’s pay scale. If you know of someone who might be willing to plow for the town of Goshen, ask him or her to contact the Select Board. I remain confident that if someone is hired, our roads will be plowed and sanded by the town, at least this winter. However, it was made clear to us that the issue of plowing private roads will be placed on the agenda for town meeting next spring. Although there is evidence that the town meeting in the

1950s voted to authorize the town to spend money to plow private roads, the ultimate decision remains with the Select Board.

There is much consternation over the town's not plowing from the start. We all pay real estate taxes, some based on high valuations because of location. Some feel we should get the same service as other town residents not on a private road and have made that very clear to the Select Board during the several meetings we appeared at. But the law may be otherwise.

The HAC Board of Directors has met frequently this winter to deal with this issue. Some feel we ought to hire an attorney whose practice concentrates in municipal law to assess whether it would be worthwhile to sue the town. Others advise a more measured approach.

If the service of snow plowing is terminated, will our property be worth less than before? If so, should we file applications for abatement of the real estate tax? I leave that to you to decide. I have asked Gloria Allen to send out by email abatement application forms to you. However, filing for an abatement now is probably premature, as the issue of town plowing remains fluid. The Board of Directors will try to construct an appropriate strategy with respect to abatements.

For now, please be assured the club will continue to pay to plow and sand the roads customarily plowed should it be necessary.

At a meeting of the Conservation Commission several weeks ago our plan for beach renewal was discussed, commented on by a representative of the state, and approved with some revision. Lyne Laliberte reports the beach committee has been working tirelessly on the beach improvement project and we hope to celebrate the "grand opening" of the new and improved beach this summer.

Watch for the 2018 Meltdown announcement that Bob Labrie will send. Fill out your day and time picks early. This year's contest will benefit an upgrade to the 1950's style kitchen operated by the Goshen women's Club located on the second floor of town hall.

Also, remember to check the Club's website HammondAcres.org for the date of the first work party. Your help is greatly appreciated. We especially invite new members to join in as a good way to meet neighbors and make new friends.

Think spring! Think summer!

Best wishes,
Gerry Glasser