

March 3, 2008

Dear Fellow Danville Taxpayer:

For the past two years, Danville voters have resoundingly rejected the proposal to spend three quarters of a million dollars to build a useless “Bridge to Nowhere” on Sandown Road at the extreme northwest corner of Danville. Now, at a time when most of us are being forced to cut back on spending in the face of falling home prices, mounting debt, sky-high gas and heating oil prices, increasing unemployment, and a looming recession, we are being asked yet again to increase our taxes to pay for a so-called “fix” to the bridge. Only this time what’s being proposed is disguised as a \$30,000 “Culvert to Nowhere.” \$730,000 *less* than what it would cost last year!? If you buy that, I know a guy who will sell you a bridge over the Mystic River in Boston for thirty bucks.

What’s going on here? Neither the Road Agent nor the Selectmen proposed any plan for the Sandown Road Bridge this year. Rather, they are supporting a last-minute citizens’ petition—more than a third of whose signers work for the town—a proposal that serves the mere convenience of only a tiny handful of people on lower Sandown Road. Here is what the petition said, the phrase in brackets having been taken out during town meeting in an attempt to cover up the true nature of the scheme:

“Article 2008-28 *Citizen Petitioned Warrant Article: Sandown Road Bridge Repair*

To see if the town will vote to replace the culvert with necessary materials and repave the Sandown Road Bridge to allow weight limit restrictive passage, and to raise and appropriate \$30,000 for this purpose. The sum of \$30,000 to be raised by taxation. This appropriation is to repair the bridge culvert only [*and not to repair the bridge structural damage or flooding problems that exist with the current roadway.*]

Recommended by the Budget Committee & Recommended by the Board of Selectmen”

This amounts to what the town Road Agent himself called “a cheap fix,” except it’s not a fix (as the petition itself specifies: more flooding, more use restrictions, and more safety issues) and it’s not cheap (\$30,000 here, \$30,000 there, and before long it adds up to real money). No engineering, ecological, economic, or feasibility study has been done for this scheme, which has been concocted on short notice with no professional input. It involves replacing the bridge with a *plastic* culvert that would not even meet the state’s minimum environmental or structural standards. It is a boondoggle, pure and simple, with no fiscal credibility whatsoever. If it was a bad idea the last two years to do it the right way (and it was), it is certainly an even worse idea to do it the wrong way today.

But it really doesn’t matter whether the bridge will cost \$3 million or \$300 thousand or \$300, because it is just plain unnecessary. In the nearly three years the bridge has been closed, not a single emergency effort on Sandown Road has been effectively hampered. Nothing, indeed, has changed for the vast majority of Danville residents or for those who live on or near Sandown Road. In fact, in a

recent opinion survey, two-thirds of Sandown Road residents who had an opinion said they were opposed to repairing the bridge.

What *has* changed is that our tax bills went down dramatically last year, owing in good measure to voter rejection of the \$750,000 Sandown Road Bridge, as well as rejection of the \$2,431,000 Selectmen's budget and the \$236,000 laundry list of warrant articles. Let's not make it any different this year. Between them, the Board of Selectmen and Budget Committee have recommended another \$2,428,144 budget this year, along with warrant articles proposing an additional \$325,698 in special earmarked spending. Let's not undo all the tax relief that we voted for (and got!) by automatically approving this year's laundry list of warrants and petitions.

And just because the "list price" of the Sandown Road Bridge *looks* cheaper, the hidden extras and unspecified costs will drive our property taxes and tax bills right back toward the high levels of 2006.

So I am urging you to join with me, with scores of other Sandown Road residents, and with many hundreds of Danville voters to say no to higher local taxes. Let's go to the polls on Tuesday, March 11 and reject—one more time—this money-wasting proposal. I ask you to vote "NO" on Article 28, "Sandown Road Bridge Repair."

Thank you,

Charles Coffin

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Danville