



To: The Hinesburg Selectboard

From: Trevor M. Lashua, Town Administrator

Date: July 6, 2016

Re: Questions related to the wetlands delineation and analysis conducted for Geprags Park (part of the Addison Natural Gas Pipeline project)

The initial wetlands review of and the corresponding pipeline route through Geprags Park will be receiving a second, in-depth, examination from State environmental officials following a June site visit to the park that highlighted wetlands not included in the initial analysis.

The June 17th site visit included members of the Town's subcommittee¹, a representative for the six intervenors², and representatives from Vermont Gas and VHB³. VHB is the environmental analysis/consulting firm working for Vermont Gas. The site visit was set up to discuss questions and concerns raised by members of the subcommittee⁴ about the permitted route and walk an alternative route.

The permitted route⁵ through Geprags Park, based on the initial analysis, has long been billed as the one with the least amount of wetlands impact. During the site visit, while walking the permitted route, the group came to an area of wetlands that was not included in the initial analysis and delineation and should have been.

The State's analysis, according to Laura Lapierre, the wetlands program manager for the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), did include an initial site visit but not a "boots on the ground" review of the wetlands delineation conducted by VHB at least two years ago. The "boots on the ground" delineation and initial data compilation was performed by staff at VHB. DEC used that delineation and analysis, combined with aerial interpretation and existing mapping, in its process of review and approval. The general sentiment was, based on the initial delineation and analysis, the route approved was the one with the least amount of wetlands impact.

DEC has performed site inspections along the pipeline corridor, but is not able to perform such detailed work on a utility route whose linear distance is 50 miles. Delineations are generally considered valid for five years.

The questions raised about the initial delineation will result in a "new" review of the wetlands impacts of the permitted route and likely alternative routes. The review will begin with a new delineation and flagging of wetlands boundaries by VHB. DEC will follow that with a detailed on-site review of the delineation and flagging.

¹ Selectboard chair Michael Bissonette, Conservation Commission member Bob Hyams, Town Administrator Trevor Lashua, and Special Projects Coordinator Renae Marshall.

² April Moulart, who owns and operates Northwoods Ecological Consulting, a firm specializing in wetlands delineation and ecological consulting.

³ Tom Murray and Chris LeForce of Vermont Gas; Adam Crary and Josh Skye of VHB.

⁴ Conservation Commission and subcommittee members Bob Hyams and Alison Lesure.

⁵ The route was approved by the Public Service Board as part of the process of review and approval of the project's certificate of public good.

The whole process may result in a number of options, ranging from an amended wetlands permit for the route as approved to a proposed alternative route through the park to an amended pipeline route that does not cross through Geprags Park. The review process will take an amount of time not yet determined, and any following action would need to comport with the State's various notice and hearing requirements. Another State permit that will need to be revisited is the stormwater permit, which would have its own process separate from (though linked to) the wetlands permit.

The re-examination of wetlands and route selection does impact the Town's on-going process related to the easement deed and stipulated agreement. While much of the content of both would apply regardless of where the park is crossed by a pipeline, some of it is quite specific to the route permitted (golden-winged warbler habitat protection, restoration and remediation efforts, and so on).