

# J Class Road Paving – What to do?

By Maurice Rees

For years Colchester Council has wrestled with how to improve the 110 Km of J-Class roads scattered throughout the county. The matter has occupied council's time in both January and February meetings. J Class roads are identified as provincially owned subdivision roads which were constructed prior to 1995. There are 110km of J Class Roads within the County for which the province is responsible for maintenance, but any full repaving must be cost shared. Previously council has adopted the format of conducting a survey of area residents, which if it receives 66% positive results, a public meeting will be held, then proceed toward implementation.

At their January meeting, Council referred funding for J Class Roads to staff requesting details at the February meeting for Council's consideration on options of applying area rates for the paving of J Class Roads, which are Provincially owned.

At the February 25th meeting a second motion by Councillor Sandeson, seconded by Council-

lor Johnson received unanimous approval directing staff to bring back information at the March Council meeting on area rates for all J Class Roads in the County as well as other potential funding sources for paving.

An earlier motion during the February 25th meeting Councillor Parker, seconded by Councillor Johnson asked for Council to approve applying an area rate within the electoral boundaries on a 20-year rotation. The motion was defeated with opposing votes from Mayor Blair, Deputy Mayor Stewart, Councillors Boutilier, Sandeson, MacKenzie, Gregory, Patton and Taggart. Councillor Benoit was not available for this vote as she left the meeting due to illness.

Going back to their meeting of August 13, 2020, Council elected to enter into a 3-year agreement with the Province for cost shared paving of J Class Roads. Under this program, Municipalities can apply to have J Class Roads paved or repaved, with 50% of costs being covered by the Municipality and 50% by the Province. The agreement expires after fiscal 2023/24.

During her presentation to council at the January meeting, Public Works Director, Michelle Newell provided a detailed sampling of various area rate increases in six districts containing 70% of all J Class Roads in the County, on a 15 and 20 year rotation.

Newell's January submission of sample of J class roads included:

District 1: Bible Hill, \$172.0-Million Assessment; 9.9 Km in length; \$43,020 per year based on area rate of \$0.025/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$32,260 per year with area rate of \$0.019/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

District 3: Brookfield, \$241.5-Million Assessment; 11.2 Km in length; \$48,570 per year based on area rate of \$0.020/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$36,430 per year with area rate of \$0.015/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

District 5: Salmon River, \$170.7-Million Assessment; 11.1 Km in length; \$48,030 per year based on area rate of

\$0.030/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$36,020 per year with area rate of \$0.021/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

District 6: Valley, \$289.0-Million Assessment; 19.9 Km in length; \$86,060 per year based on area rate of \$0.030/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$64,544 per year with area rate of \$0.022/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

District 9: Debert, \$267.0-Million Assessment; 8.0 Km in length; \$38,090 per year based on area rate of \$0.014/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$28,570 per year with area rate of \$0.011/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

District 11: Bible Hill, \$260.6-Million Assessment; 16.8 Km in length; \$72,700 per year based on area rate of \$0.028/\$100 assessment on 15 year rotation and \$54,520 per year with area rate of \$0.021/\$100 assessment based on 20 year rotation.

The above 6 sample area comprise 70% of all J Class roads in the county. As with all discussions on J Class roads, concern was expressed with this being a

download from the province. Additional concerns were raised with other potential tax increases for the upcoming fiscal year, as well as the need for public consultation prior to making any such decision on area rate increases. Further discussion was held on needing the information on the remaining 30% of J Class Roads in the County for councillors to make an informed

decision.

Other discussion points included roads being one of the number one priorities of constituents; recognizing this as a download of the province but at some point, it will have to be done; the number of times this matter has been referred back to staff; public consultation options during Covid pandemic; and, any other potential funding sources.

## Background Notes to J Class Roads

The following are the background notes, which Public Works Director, Michelle Newell, provided to Colchester Councillors for their deliberations regarding 110 Km of J Class roads located throughout the Municipality.

In past years, the 50% cost share for J Class Road paving was funded by the residents, pending a successful petition.

In recent years, the Province has budgeted \$10M for their 50% share of J Class Road paving projects.

At their meeting of January 2021, Council discussed the matter of J Class Road paving in detail, including the proposed funding mechanism for the County's 50% share. A motion was made to have staff explore options for applying area rates to produce the required revenue.

As indicated by staff at Council's January 2021 meeting, the estimated cost of repaving a road is \$120 to \$140 per metre.

Given the County's total J Class length of 110km, a 15-year rotation for paving would result in the resurfacing of about 7km of road per year. A 20-year rotation would result in the repaving of 5.5 km per year. These numbers exclude inflation.

Given that the Province would fund 50% of the work, the County's annual contribution towards J Class paving would range between \$500,000 and \$350,000, for 15 and 20-year paving rotations respectively.

A half cent increase in the general tax rate would result in revenue of about \$114,000. Therefore, a minimum of a 1.5 cent increase on the general tax rate would be needed to fund paving of J Class roads on a 20-year rotation.

During their January meeting, Council defeated a motion to fund J Class Paving via the general tax rate and the gas tax.

### OPTIONS

Apply area rates within electoral boundaries.

Levy uniform charges for residents fronting on the improvement.

Select alternative boundaries for area rates.

Create a hybrid of the above options.

### RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

The sampling of 6 districts (included in above article) contains data of 70% of all J Class roads in the County. The calculations include J Class Road length, total assessed value of properties, and a proposed area rate to support the required J Class Paving on a 15 or 20 year rotation.

The province is responsible for on-going maintenance but covers only 50% of overall paving costs.

As expected, the area rates increase in areas with a higher concentration of J Class Streets.

To give a general idea of impacts, an area rate increase of \$0.020 on a \$150,000 assessment would result in a tax bill increase of \$30 per year.

For a \$200,000 assessment, the increase would be \$40 per year.

In addition to considering area rates by district, there is also the option of levying uniform charges for people fronting on the street paving project.

As a very high-level example, the repaving of Ice Pond Drive (800 metres) would cost \$104,000 and 50% of this would be divided among 39 property owners based on frontage.

The rough cost per property would be \$1,300, to be paid over 10 years. Considering the average assessed value on Ice Pond Drive is \$215,000, this \$130 per year would be equivalent to an area rate of \$0.06 per \$100 of assessment for 10 years.

The smaller the area sharing the cost of paving, the larger the proposed area rate needs to be to cover the costs.

# Clean Technologies in Agriculture

The Rankin government is investing \$5 million over two years in projects to increase Nova Scotia's year-round food production, reduce emissions and reduce the amount of food imported. The Agriculture Clean Technology Program will support farmers and food processors in improving their operations. This includes adopting clean technologies that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improving energy efficiency, promoting sustainable and clean growth, increasing value-added agricultural production, extending

growing seasons and improving costs of production.

"Food is the single biggest industry in Nova Scotia, and our government wants to help it grow," said Premier Rankin. "Many Nova Scotia food producers are already innovators, so investing in green technologies to reduce emissions is the next step." The program is aimed at supporting small to medium projects that will strengthen the food security of Nova Scotians.

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