



Town of Island Falls

Growing Into Modern Times

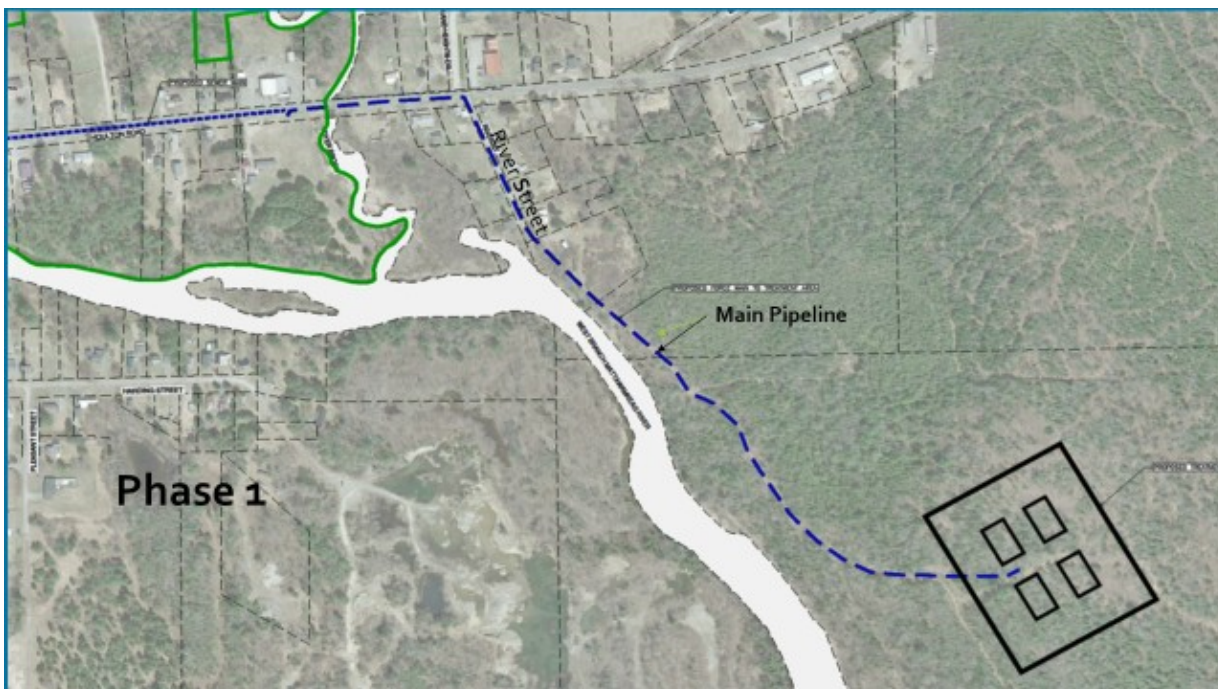
Public Sewer System

Finally, meeting restrictions have been lifted and we can have informational meetings to discuss our future. As your Selectmen our primary goal is to return Island Falls to the vibrant community it once was. The survey many of you completed several months ago showed that the overwhelming majority of our residents agree. We have always known what we need to do: clean up our image, address the abandoned buildings problem, attract new residents, and attract new businesses. The issue is how best to do it.

We have studied this problem for years. We have approximately 9,000 acres of forest, two beautiful lakes, a Class-A river, easy access to I-95, an excellent water department, and a school system ranked 6th in the State. What we don't have to support new business is high speed broadband and a public sewer system. Broadband is being addressed by the State. It is up to us to address the sewer system.

It has been a while since our last meeting on the sewer system. Here is a review of the proposal presented as part of the Feasibility Study completed by Dirigo Engineering:

- Our best option is a sub-surface system. To minimize distance (cost) from our downtown area and take advantage of gravity feed, the facility would be located on 10 acres of Town property downstream of River Street.



- The project would be divided into two phases. Phase 1 would include construction of the main facility as well as the piping connecting the properties adjacent to the Main Street coming into town and Library Street.



- Phase 2 would connect remaining town properties north of the river to Church Street.
- Phase 1 would take approximately 2 years to complete. Phase 2 probably another two years.
 - All businesses on the route would be required to connect.
 - All multi-family dwellings would be required to connect.
 - All abandoned buildings would be required to connect.
 - All properties with cesspools would be required to connect.
 - All new construction would be required to connect.
 - Single family dwellings would not be required to connect; however, when the property is sold the new owners would be required to connect. This ensures that eventually all properties serviced by the system would eventually be connected.
 - While the construction equipment is on site, connection cost will be considered part of the project. If a property owner decides not to connect and then later wants to connect, construction connection costs would be the property owner's responsibility.

The controversy over this project concerns the impact on real estate property, tax rate, and sewer rates. To answer these questions accurately, we need to complete a Preliminary Engineering Report (PER). The PER will survey the route to determine exact locations of pipelines and catch basins, conduct ledge probes, decide on connection options, talk with all affected property owners, and determine the construction cost.

Every effort will be made to bury the line under existing road right of ways to minimize the impact on private property. Where the system does need to cross a private property line, we will work with the property owners. We realize this could be an emotional issue and will do our best to resolve any conflicts.

With Economic Stimulus money becoming available, we are optimistic we can obtain substantial funding for the project. However, there is a caveat – money is not available without a Town commitment. We will do everything we can to secure the maximum government support, but the project will require the Town to be committed to its completion. For an environmental system of this magnitude there are a number of specific grants as well as low interest loans and forgivable loans available.

Initially, we do not expect to have enough customers to cover the maintenance cost. The system will have to run at a deficit to ensure service rates are reasonable. There has been no decision on what that rate may be, but it will be based on water consumption.

As expected, emotion over this project is high. We plan to have a second informational meeting to discuss this project and answer as many questions as possible. If we cannot answer all questions, we will get the answers and have a third meeting if necessary. We will then have a formal public hearing to answer remaining questions and hear public comment. Before the end of this summer we will have a ballot vote if we are moving forward with the sewer system or not.

Although the vote will be specific to the sewer system, it will actually be a vote about the Town's future. As Selectmen, we have spent years studying ways to bring Island Falls back to becoming a vibrant village. Without a sewer system, the town will not die – but it cannot grow into the future.

Tony

Anthony Binotto
Selectman – Town of Island Falls