

Community Facilities and Infrastructure 03/18/08

Facilities and infrastructure are fairly broad categories to describe the physical buildings, equipment and land improvements necessary for the operation of the community.

Facilities include buildings that house public functions such as schools, town hall, fire and police departments, libraries, highway departments, recreational facilities and senior centers. Infrastructure is a general category to describe physical items needed to provide and distribute services to the residence. Typical infrastructure items include roads, water distribution systems, electric power, telephone and cable service, emergency communications for Fire and Police, and gas service.

ROADS

As of 1997, there were approximately 64.29 miles of town roads in Rochester. This includes 2.88 miles of unaccepted roads, 6.36 miles of Mass. Highway roads, and 55.05 miles of town-accepted roads.

Rochester also includes .23 miles of interstate (Rt. 495), 13.89 miles of rural major collector roads (Rt. 105, Rt. 28, Mary's Pond Road, and New Bedford Road), and 10.25 miles of minor collector roads (Mattapoissett Road and Walnut Plain Road). All other roads in Rochester are classified as Local.

Lacking other means of transit, virtually all transportation is by motorized vehicle whether private personal vehicles or major commercial agricultural vehicles, earth removal vehicles or other business traffic.

Rochester itself is predominantly well dispersed single-family residences, interspersed with home businesses and agricultural activities, mostly but not all in cranberries. Except for an approximately 2% of the population in agriculture, almost all work out of town traveling by private vehicle.

Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District (SRPEDD) studies indicate that Rochester roads are adequate for the foreseeable future with few identifiable safety or capacity problems. The Highway Department maintains them well on a fairly modest budget. All of this may seem satisfactory but problems exist and will grow with the build-out of Rochester and the neighboring towns:

- The new Wareham shopping center will draw traffic through the Town Center with little interest in Rochester except to get beyond. Professional estimates are an increase of one to two vehicles per minute.
- Growth in the form of new subdivisions has cut off shortcuts for kids to move about forcing them to use the adjacent roadways.
- Because of ever increasing aggressive traffic, children must be driven to ball fields, lessons and activities.
- Increased traffic on the roads makes cycling increasingly dangerous and this compounds the traffic load as children are transported to various activities.
- Rural objectives have historically avoided sidewalks and bicycle paths as out of character with town persona.

- Multiple non-traditional (less than 90 degree intersections), left over from horse-and-buggy days, are causing an increased level of accidents with increased local and through traffic.

Some of Rochester's roads may be too wide, too straight and too conducive to aggressive, through traffic to meet the objectives of "The Town We Want". New Bedford Road, Mary's Pond Road, North Avenue and Mattapoissett Road may qualify here. Special attention and strategies for remediation are required to maintain a quiet, rural town image.

The remaining narrow and winding and tree-lined country roads contribute to Rochester's rural flavor and should be preserved through careful, proactive planning. Some trade-offs exist relative to emergency preparedness associated with evacuation planning and with tree limbs putting power lines at risk in wind and ice storms. Compromise is necessary.

SCHOOLS

Several years ago, the Town formed a Rochester Memorial School Building Committee to address the school needs as a result of growth within the town. In 2004, the committee concluded that additional classrooms are needed at the Rochester Memorial School. At the time, due to the discontinuance of the State Building Assistance Bureau funding, there were no state funds available to assist building. The issue went to town meeting where funding was approved for design of the addition. The proposition 2 ½ override election to support the funding, however, did not pass.

In 2006 the new school building funding source was formed by the Commonwealth to

aid cities and towns in meeting school demands. After developing revised application procedures, the responsible agency began accepting applications. In early 2008 the town was informed that it would potentially be eligible for funding up to 55% of the cost of construction. Eligibility criteria require that a feasibility study be conducted to determine whether expansion of existing facilities or building a new one makes the most sense. As of this writing, the process is continuing.

The Old Rochester Regional High School and Junior High School have recently undergone extensive renovations and it is felt such renovations should be sufficient for at least the next five years.

As previously, Old Colony Regional Vocational Technical High School serves Acushnet, Carver, Lakeville, Mattapoissett and Rochester. At this writing there continues to be adequate space to accommodate these towns.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Rochester Police Department is located in a new facility on Dexter Lane, no new construction is required.

FIRE DEPARTMENT

The Fire Department's Main Station is located at the corner of Hartley Road and Pine Street in a building originally the Waterman School when Rochester had multiple small schoolhouses in each village. There is an auxiliary station located on Ryder Road as part of the new Highway Barn which houses three trucks; a tanker, a ladder truck and a brush breaker. A third

station on Neck Road, almost at the Middleboro town line houses one pumper-engine. The Fire Department shares communications with the Police Department in the Dispatch Center on Dexter's Lane due to a recent upgrade.

Because it is a converted schoolhouse, the main facility is not fully suitable for efficient firehouse operation and should be replaced sometime in the future. A slightly more centralized location would be optimal. The Neck Road facility is on a long-term lease from the New Bedford Waterworks and houses one engine. It's location serves an important function to establish that most of the town is within 3 miles of a fire facility; an important statistic as Fire Rating services determine fire insurance rates for the residents.

Fire apparatus should be updated with a combination Rescue/Pumper truck to replace a 1976 pumper and a 1981 Rescue truck in the near future. The 1992 ambulance should be replaced due to wear and obsolescence. Longer term, the 1974 ladder truck should be updated.

HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

A new building located off of Ryder Road to house the Highway Department was constructed in the past five years. That building, in combination with the former building at the intersection of Robinson and Cushman Road provides adequate facilities for the Highway Department.

LIBRARY

The library has always played a small but important role in the town. That role has gotten bigger as the library increased its hours, expanded services and improved the collection. Formerly located at the Town Hall, the current library building was donated in 1976 by Dorothy Plumb in memory of her late husband Joseph. It is governed by an elected board of six Trustees and run by a Library Director appointed by the Trustees. There is a small full-time staff and a group of dedicated volunteers who donate time to assist with projects and chores.

An extensive expansion of the facilities was proposed in the Fall of 2002 but both this proposal and a revised plan in 2003 were rejected by Special Town meetings in respective years. In the light of these rejections, creative efforts have been undertaken to renovate the existing building. With relatively modest money the library has achieved a new roof, HVAC, and renovated lavatories. A new and spacious entrance is the latest improvement.

The Trustee's objectives include expanded hours of operation and increased depth of library programs plus growth in the library collection.

WATER SUPPLY

The majority of homes in the town continue to be serviced by private wells. The town is blessed by a highly productive aquifer. As the town continues to grow, increased sewage disposal will compromise the quality of our groundwater supplies. Planning is essential to protect the quality of the major water supplies as well as to be able to provide a clean source of water for everyone.

Through an Inter-municipal agreement, Rochester has the rights to 50% of the capacity of the wells that the Town of Marion owns and operates in Rochester. In addition, Rochester is part of the Mattapoissett River Valley Water Authority and has water rights through this Authority if needed.

At this time, no significant change is envisioned for Rochester's water supply system. The Board of Selectmen recently requested that the town's water supply committee complete an evaluation of the steps necessary to expand municipal systems within the town.

In addition, an expanded municipal water supply can play an important role in fire protection as the density of our town continues to increase.

SEWAGE DISPOSAL

The entire town is serviced by individual on-site subsurface sewage disposal systems. Although the need for municipal sewer systems is not envisioned at this time, the possibility of shared systems in future could be necessary in order to support cluster housing or villages.

A shared municipal sanitary system could be desirable for the greater town center area should growth overtax conventional subsurface disposal systems. If the town were to approve denser residential development to achieve "Affordable" living units, or increased commercial activity, in areas of municipal water supply (Marion's supply), the resulting sanitary issues may require such a shared facility.

TOWN OFFICES

Our handsome late Victorian 1892 Town Hall replaced an earlier block-house style building from much earlier. History records that the block-house style building illustrated in the painting in Town Hall burned beyond recovery. The current building was designed to have a cathedral ceiling and exposed varnished beams. Much of the original ornamentation still exists in the attics and crawl-ways. To accommodate growth through the years, it has experienced multiple renovations and revisions with the last extensive upgrade in 1974. There are still people in town who remember when this facility was serviced only by outhouses. Of course, careful husbandry and routine minor upgrades have brought it to the current serviceable but somewhat overused status.

In 1994 the Town of Rochester and the First Congregational Church exchanged land, permitting expansion of the town hall. A late 1990's feasibility study conducted by Durland & VanVoorhis, New Bedford architects, recommended renovating the Town Hall and construction of attached office facilities in the back. The Annual Town Meeting of 2000 denied funding for the project which resulted in significant crowding until 2005.

In that year the permitting departments and their staff (Planning Board, Board of Health, Conservation Commission and Building Commissioner), moved their offices to rented facilities at the Rochester Women's Club that has become known as the Town Hall Annex.

This has helped with over-crowding and assisted the permitting departments to coordinate activities. The current Town Hall, however, is in need of expansion and

upgrading. The existing office layouts are suboptimal at best. This upgrade should include improved accessibility by disabled persons, addition of conference rooms and offices, and possibly restoration of the original cathedral ceiling

As one of only a few anchor points in the town center, The Town Hall is a symbol of who and what Rochester is about. As such, it is important to restore and maintain its traditional grace as well achieve functionality.

In addition, it may be appropriate for the town to investigate the acquisition of the Women's Club and surrounding land for future expansion of town offices and functions.

PARKS AND RECREATION

The Recreational area on Dexter's Lane has recently received upgrades of lighting and sanitary facilities. In addition, the town has a regulation Little League field and one practice field at Raynor Gifford Memorial Park with picnic area and restrooms. An ad hoc committee to investigate the creation of a resident's beach at Mary's Pond discovered that bathhouse and sanitary facilities at such an area are not cost effective.

COUNCIL ON AGING

Established in 1971 to address the needs of the elderly population, the Rochester Council on Aging continues to be quite active. A Board of Directors is appointed by the Selectmen which hires a Director to manage the facilities and multiple programs.

The construction of a Senior Center on Dexter's Lane in 2002 has proved extremely effective in promoting senior activities and sociability. It is felt the elderly population in the town will continue to grow rapidly.

There is currently one van used as a commuting resource by the elderly to area towns. With no health facilities or pharmacies in the town, it is felt this creates a need to provide additional transportation in the future to receive such services.

In addition to the current need for transportation, there is a need for nursing facilities at varying levels plus availability of affordable elderly housing. Consideration for construction of affordable senior housing should be investigated. Also, some investigation is appropriate into feasibility and desirability of providing senior daycare services. Regionalization of some services may generate better service at lower expense.

CEMETERIES

The Rochester Cemetery Commission oversees six active cemeteries in the town: Ashley Cemetery (North Ave.), Hillside (Off High St.), North Rochester (North Ave), Sherman (Pine St), Union (Walnut Plain), and Woodside (County Road). There are a few smaller and less used cemeteries located throughout town. The six major cemeteries have little room for expansion and the town should explore the possibility of future locations.

In addition, there is a need for water resources at each major cemetery. This can be accomplished by installation of wells and some type of pump system (i.e. electric or hand pumps) along with a supply of portable water containers. It is felt the Highway

Department could assist in the installation of these pumps.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Provide adequate and accessible community facilities for public use.
- Protect the Town’s rural character while providing necessary services
- Maintain fiscal stability while managing growth
- Encourage “The Town We Want” as a cohesive, mutually respectful “community”.

IMPLEMENTING ACTIONS

The following actions have been identified to carry out the above goals and objectives:

Facilities Expansion and Improvements

- Implement the recommendation of the 1999 Town Hall Renovation & Expansion Study
- Design, construct, or renovate the Town facilities in keeping with the rural character of the town.
- Provide affordable housing for the elderly
- Install wells and pump systems at each of the six main cemeteries

- Consider future locations for cemetery expansion

Fiscal Planning

- Continue to seek all grants to supplement funding initiatives for town facilities
- Continue to practice fiscal responsibility while maintaining community facilities

Streets and Roads

- Promote Scenic Road status and/or local road-care by-laws for all in-town roads.
- Redraw Town Center intersections to be as close to traditional 90-degree intersections as possible and implement, with stop signs.
- Develop a prioritized schedule for building sidewalks and pursue annual funding to implement.
- Explore future possibilities for public transport for the disabled and others unable to drive private vehicles.

Library

Continue to expand the collection of printed and non-printed materials (music, videos) for circulation

Expand outreach for awareness of Library services

Provide high-interest programs for adult through the year.

General

- As community members, we all observe posted speeds and hazard signs and generally behave throughout town as if each person were operating in their own front yard.