

**HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE SPECIAL MINE ROAD BRIDGE MEETING  
VIA ZOOM VIDEO COMMUNICATIONS**

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**Wednesday, January 27, 2021 – 5:07 p.m.**

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**PROPER STATEMENT OF NOTICE** – Mayor Blake called the meeting to order stating that notice of the meeting had been posted on the municipal bulletin board and forwarded to the Hopewell Valley News, The Times, the Trentonian and the Hopewell Express (the official newspapers) on January 19, 2021, in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975.

**ROLL CALL:** Those answering the roll call of the Municipal Clerk:

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Kuchinski, Kristin McLaughlin, Courtney Peters-Manning, Michael Ruger, Mayor Julie Blake

**ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Acting Administrator George Snyder, Municipal Clerk Laurie Gompf, Director of Community Development/Engineer Mark Kataryniak

**ALSO PRESENT:** County Engineers, George Fallat, Basit (Sunny) Muzaffar

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**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG** – Mayor Blake led those in attendance in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

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Mayor Blake announced that the purpose of the meeting was to seek public input on the future of the Mine Road Bridge including discussion of alternatives and community preferences for the future of the bridge; that representatives from Mercer County will present alternatives; and that the public will be given an opportunity to comment on the disposition of the structure and the various options it is considering. She also made it clear that the meeting this evening was for listening and an opportunity to learn and that the Township Committee would not make any decisions this evening.

**MINE ROAD BRIDGE PRESENTATION –**

Mark Kataryniak introduced Mercer County Engineer, George Fallat, and Basit (Sunny) Muzaffar, Mercer County Bridge Engineer.

Mr. Fallat read a statement regarding the background of the Mine Road Bridge:

“The Mine Road Bridge is a truss structure and it carries a section of Mine Road between Route 31 at Stony Brook Road. The existing truss structure was deemed structurally deficient and functionally obsolete in year 2015. The structure was subsequently closed to traffic after a large limb struck the bridge. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) prohibited the County from making the necessary repairs on the bridge which has remained closed since that time. At that point, Mercer County contracted with an engineering firm, I.H. Engineers, to coordinate with the DEP, obtain required environmental permits, and develop plans for replacing the structure. In addition to complying with NJ DEP requirements the replacement structure would also be required to meet modern design standards in terms of width and structural capacity. (And that is largely due to the fact that we are seeking State funding for the project) At this time the DEP has approved the plans for the replacement structure with conditions, including requirements for removal and categorizing the existing truss structure.”

Mr. Fallat presented two options for the bridge:

**Option 1:** Removal of the old truss structure bridge and replace it with a new truss structure. The overall width of the bridge would be 37 feet wide and designed to accommodate a 40-ton

legal vehicle loading. Sidewalk would be provided on one side of the bridge.

**Option 2:** Retain the existing truss structure, however, permanently close the structure to all vehicular traffic, including emergency vehicles. The structure would remain open to pedestrian and bicycle traffic. Mercer County would place signage, bollards or other erections to physically restrict vehicular passage. Vehicular access to this section of Mine Road would be provided by Route 31.

Mr. Muzaffar showed a diagram of what the bridge replacement would look like and explained in great detail the design of the bridge, which would be a steel, pony truss. He also affirmed that the plans have been approved by the NJ DEP. Mr. Fallet emphasized that the structure is heavily damaged and the DEP refused to allow repairs to be made to the structure.

Mr. Fallet said that if Option 2 was chosen and the structure was to be utilized to only pedestrian and bicycle traffic, a new railing would need to be placed on the structure.

Committee Members inquired as to why the NJ DEP would not allow repairs to the bridge to which there was no finite answer; questioned if the bridge became a pedestrian bridge, if it would be repaired esthetically to which the answer was that there would be no esthetical repairs; questioned why someone from the DEP could not answer questions before the Committee; and discussed environmental issues of the bridge repair as opposed to the bridge replacement.

Mr. Fallet explained that when a bridge is on the inventory for replacement, they use their annual allotment of State funds to do so. The bridge must be brought up to current standards if they utilize State funds for repairs, and emphasized that the issue is that rehabilitation on this bridge is not allowed by the NJ DEP.

Committee Members asked if there was a way the bridge could remain a 4-ton bridge, Mr. Fallet said he would not, as an engineer, sign off on making a waiver to the bridge and that he did not know of any waivers that the State would make.

Discussion ensued regarding the tonnage of the road vis-à-vis the tonnage of the bridge and the type of vehicles that may use the bridge.

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## PUBLIC SECTION

The following members of the public spoke during public comment:

**Mark Kolombatovich**, a resident of Stony Brook Road, questioned if the bridge was totally repaired when it was struck by the tree ten years ago; asserted that most of the damage was ornamental; requested a written structural report; questioned how much the original repairs cost; asserted that a structural engineer should review the bridge and make a recommendation; and questioned why it isn't an option to open the bridge up to 4-ton traffic.

**Richard Hunt**, expressed that he did some research and if the bridge could be repaired and limited to 4-ton vehicles, the bridge could handle school buses, ambulances, motor homes, fire trucks, trucks, camping and recreation vehicles; and questioned if there was no choice to make it a 4-ton bridge again.

**Doug Michniewski**, a resident of Crusher Road, cited a strong preference for having the bridge open to pedestrian and bicycle traffic only; offered a suggestion of making the bridge a one-lane only road; and said that his understanding was that the DEP regarded the work required was so extensive that it was considered far more than a repair.

**David Wert**, stated it was a shame that the bridge could not be rehabilitated to a 4-ton vehicle load; didn't see a reason the bridge couldn't be restored; wants to see the bridge in tact the way it is and opened to bicycles and pedestrians; and advised to keep the heavy trucks off of Mine Road.

**Max Hayden**, Chair of Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission, stated the Township Commission voted for restoring the bridge "as is;" noted that there is only one house

by that section of bridge; asked for traffic counts on that section of road; mentioned how dangerous Mine Road was at its head; suggested doing better maintenance on all bridges; and said the bridge was a piece of history worth maintaining.

**Kathy Fedorko**, suggested that the 40-ton bridge be rejected; strongly supported the historic bridge alternative analysis report done by IH Engineers; urged the Township to apply for Historic Registration for the bridge after repairs; suggested making the bridge a one-lane bridge; wanted clarification on the DEP's position on the bridge; wanted the bridge to be repaired and rehabilitated; and if it can't be repaired and rehabilitated, would want it to be a pedestrian/bicycle bridge.

**Art Suckewer**, stated the bridge was rated at 7 tons prior to being closed and that it can be repaired and uprated to approximately 20 tons; recommended someone to come in and do the job; suggested there are wrought iron experts who could accomplish the rehabilitation of the truss structure; offered to provide contacts to the County for bridge preservation and repair; and if it couldn't be repaired, wanted it to be a pedestrian crossing.

**Brian Brooks**, requested to see a structural report on the bridge and urged to preserve the bridge.

**Catherine Granzow**, First Vice President of the Hopewell Valley Historical Society, cited that the Historical Society's position is to preserve the bridge at its original site.

**Amanda Nichols**, a resident of Stony Brook Road, stated that Mine Road is dangerous at the top and bottom because of the slope of the road and supported making the bridge a pedestrian bridge.

**Laurie Cleveland**, Executive Director of the Sourland Conservancy and resident of Van Dyke Road, stated that replacing the bridge would jeopardize the historic nature of the road and impact the character of the surrounding historic landscape; and the Conservancy urged the County to either conduct repairs of the bridge in order to bring it to safety standards for a 4-ton load rating or close the bridge permanently leaving it as a pedestrian/bicycle trail.

**Catherine Fulmer Hogan**, would like to see the bridge repaired so that vehicular traffic is resumed but noted that, since that option is not available, would like to recommend pedestrian/bicycle traffic only.

**Alan Upperco**, a resident of Nathaniel Green Drive, offered his opinion to keep the bridge as a bicycle/pedestrian bridge.

**Michael Shakarjian**, a resident of Milltown, questioned if other DEP permits were applied for with regard to the replacement of the bridge; questioned what would be done with the other permits; asked for a detailed explanation why no waiver would be given to rehabilitate the bridge; and said he would prefer the bridge to be a pedestrian bridge.

**Kimberly Robinson**, agreed that the bridge should be closed to vehicular traffic and made into a pedestrian/bicycle bridge.

Township Clerk Gompf read the following questions from Chat:

**Art Suckewer** – Requested clarification why the DEP is allowing a replacement but not a repair.

**Cynthia O'Connor** – Questioned if the proposed structure a true truss bridge or a superficial decorative element.

**Anne Hayton** – Requested the current width of the bridge; what would the difference be in the size between Option 1 and the current bridge size; questioned if the height will change; and asked why the DEP will not allow repairs to the current structure.

**Cynthia O'Connor** – Questioned if the NJ State Historic Preservation Office approved the proposal; questioned the discrepancy in the cost estimates.

**Anne Hayton** – Alleged an historical review by DEP; requested Mercer County get a clarification from DEP.

**Cynthia O'Connor** – Suggested going back to DEP for more options for the bridge.

Mayor Blake returned the meeting to answer questions from Zoom meeting attendees.

**Will Mullen**, Hopewell Borough Fire Chief, expressed that the bridge was a good shortcut for the ambulances before it was closed and questioned what the plan is for the decking.

**Robert Warznak**, opined there are no more historic bridges in Hopewell Township and requested that the bridge be kept as a pedestrian bridge.

Mr. Muzaffar reiterated that the DEP decided not to rehabilitate the bridge after they spoke to the State Historic Preservation Office and acknowledged that after those repairs were done, there would be no historic value left to the structure.

Mr. Fallat thanked everyone and said that the County would contact the DEP again and obtain clarification on the bridge being maintained as a pedestrian bridge.

The detailed public comment may be viewed at [www.hopewelltp.org](http://www.hopewelltp.org) in the video library.

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**EXECUTIVE SESSION RESOLUTION.** Read into the record.

Mayor Blake stated that the regular meeting may reconvene following the Executive Session.

Motion by Peters-Manning, seconded by Kuchinski to go to Executive Session to discuss contract negotiations, real estate, legal and personnel matters.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED**

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At 7:19 p.m. the Executive Session was held.

At 7:40 p.m. the Regular meeting reconvened.

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At 7:40 p.m., motion by Peters-Manning, seconded by Kuchinski to adjourn the meeting.

**MOTION UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED**

The detailed public meeting may be viewed at [www.hopewelltp.org](http://www.hopewelltp.org) in the video library.

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LAURIE E. GOMPF  
MUNICIPAL CLERK