

# Bloomsbury Borough Summer 2011 Newsletter

## From the Mayor

With summer on the way, hopefully there will be little of note. A quiet summer is a good summer. That said, stuff still happens. The big issue we are now facing has to do with the Route 579 (Church Street) bridge. But, before we get to that I do want to update you on the budget, the Mill and pending roadwork.

As noted in the last issue, our budget situation remains very tough, and no relief is in sight. Council continues to work on the budget, which we plan to introduce May 24. If you are concerned about the budget, which will be fully adopted in June, please stop by Borough Hall to review the same and leave us your comments. As you may recall, garbage pick-up, a big portion of the budget, may be affected. We are opening bids for our next possible garbage/recycling contract June 9th – we are hopeful the Borough will be able to continue offering this service from your tax dollars. The most likely – but by no means assured – outcome will be some limitation on number of cans that can be put curbside each week (probably 2 standard cans), with recycling becoming bi-weekly. Stay tuned for this ...

With regard to the Mill – despite the fact that no work is occurring to structure itself, work is happening. Our latest redeveloper has submitted applications to the necessary State and County agencies, and we are just waiting for permits to be approved. My understanding is that the agencies are favorably disposed toward the project. About the only good thing to come from this fitful process is that the regulatory agencies are by now very familiar with this project, so there is not nearly as much of a learning curve for them as in the past. Once the permits get approved the redeveloper will move on the architectural drawings and hopefully we can see actual construction work happening before the next snow.

We are also getting ready for some roadwork. Phase I of the Main Street reconstruction is almost ready to begin. Plans have been prepared and we are almost ready, at this writing, to go to bid. As you will recall this work will occur in the segment between Church and Center Streets, and will involve laying down a new asphalt (not chip and seal) roadbed, with drainage, curbing and sidewalk improvements (new sidewalks). Property owners along this stretch may be asked to grant temporary construction easements to permit the construction to occur. Also, we have budgeted funds to seal cracks that have developed in the roadways in the Fawn Run subdivision. We have been soliciting quotes and plan to have this work occur this summer. These roads are 20 years old and no work has been done to them since they were originally laid down, and now numerous large cracks have developed all over the roadway, which will soon lead to much worse problems. We are hoping that sealing these cracks will stabilize the roadways for many more years.

Finally, we have the 579 bridge. Much of what will follow about the bridge was included in an earlier e-mail to residents (if you have not yet signed up for the e-mail alerts, please do so through our Borough website: [www.bloomsburynewjersey.com](http://www.bloomsburynewjersey.com), and many thanks again to volunteer resident

webmaster Jennifer Rittenhouse for her prompt attention to both the website and e-mail service), so you can disregard much of the below if you've already read this.

To better understand this issue, an understanding of the history of this project is important. The bridge was originally constructed by the Lehigh Valley Railroad (LVRR). In 1967 the Board of Public Utility Commissioners ordered the LVRR to reconstruct the bridge, as the same was substandard and deficient. In 1968 the LVRR went bankrupt and the bridge was deemed to be an "orphan bridge" (a status it holds today). The State and County have assumed responsibility – but not ownership – of such orphan bridges. As a consequence of the LVRR bankruptcy the bridge project did not occur, and nothing much happened until 1984, when an inspection showed that the bridge had deteriorated considerably since 1967. The bridge was accordingly closed in March 1984, and the NJDOT provided \$100,000 for "interim repairs", which were made under County supervision. The bridge was then reopened in December 1984. The 1984 "interim repairs" were the last structural work done to this bridge.

The bridge is proposed to now be replaced for the following reasons: (1) it is substandard and not particularly safe, and (2) the State and Federal governments, along with railroads, wish to raise the height of the bridge by one foot to allow for the next generation of railcars to proceed underneath. There can be no doubt that the bridge needs substantial work, if not total replacement.

The Federal government has allocated \$4 Million to replace the bridge. Unfortunately, the federal government has certain design standards that must be followed – otherwise it will not pay for the work. The primary design standard is that the bridge must have two lanes. There are also certain sight distances that must be maintained. The currently proposed plans call for the replacement of the current bridge with a two-lane bridge, raising the elevation of the roadway both north and south of the bridge, removing the traffic light, and encroaching on the Park. To me this creates a straight, uninhibited shot into the Borough – very unsafe. Many of the plan details give us great cause for concern, and we let the County Engineer know of our concerns both in a public meeting and in comments submitted directly to him.

Unfortunately, we cannot just tell the County to fix the bridge and leave everything else alone (well, we did but were advised that it is not possible as a consequence of the Federal design standards). The State does not have any money for this bridge, nor does the County. If we are at a total impasse, and advise the County that we do not want the project to occur (because of all the associated detrimental impacts), the County will not do the project and the Federal government will re-allocate the funds. This means that the bridge will continue "as-is" until the day comes when it must be shut down for safety reasons. Then there will be no guarantees the bridge will ever be repaired or replaced.

In response to our concerns, the County Engineer has come back to us with some plan modifications. These include:

1. weight restricting CR 579 from the Musconetcong River to CR 614, and adding additional signage to reinforce this (along with some additional law enforcement attention);
2. reduce the design speed of the project from 40 mph to 30 mph, and posting a speed limit of 25 mph in the Borough limits;
3. creation of a 3-way stop at the intersection of Staats Road and CR 579;

4. County would repair Milford Road and Willow Ave. prior to the start of construction, and will resurface both when construction is complete (Milford/Willow will be one of the primary detours during construction);

5. limit time of construction to extent possible by prefabricating elements prior to start of construction;

6. creation of a bicycle/walking path from bridge to Park driveway;

7. creation of landscape plan to include landscape buffer;

8. consideration of retaining walls to limit impact of elevating roadway; and

9. review of Church Street to determine whether additional traffic calming elements may be installed.

We have had further meetings with the County Engineer, and we plan to request all of the above plan modifications in a letter to the Freeholders. We will also be seeking some additional traffic calming measures as well.

The bridge issue took on a greater urgency on May 16, when a State DOT inspector – in an action totally unrelated to the County plans to replace the bridge – did one of the State’s periodic (i.e. every 10 years) inspections of the bridge. Apparently, when he hit a beam on the underside of the bridge with his hammer, the hammer went right through said beam – the bridge was closed immediately so an emergency patch repair could be made. These repairs did happen, and the bridge is safe – for now – but clearly this bridge is on its last legs, can fail in the not-so-near future, and the bridge is a key part of a very important north-south route, not only for Borough residents, but for Hunterdon County residents in general. It is essential that we have a safe and secure means of passage.

That said, if all goes according to plan, work will not begin until 2015, and the same is expected to take 6-8 months. THANK YOU to all residents who came out to the public meetings about the bridge, and especially to those who submitted comments to the County. We were heard, and the current plan is greatly improved over what was initially presented. It is still not perfect, and I wish we could make further changes, but all-in-all if we get the plan revisions set forth above, this project will be a clear benefit to the Borough.

That’s it for this issue. Please consider volunteering with one of our many volunteer organizations – Fire Department, Rescue Squad, PTO, Planning Board, Recreation and more. If you have an interest in volunteering and have questions, do not hesitate to reach out to me. Also – our Council meetings are always the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.; feel free to attend and see what’s happening with your local government. In the meantime, enjoy your summer!

Mark Peck, Mayor