

Notes from the Select Board

March 1, 2021

Over the last month or so, the Select Board has received several complaints as to how the gravel roads are plowed and treated. So, I am writing this to perhaps give a little perspective into the challenges of maintaining gravel roads in the winter.

Gravel roads are a completely different road in many ways than an asphalt road. Especially in winter with snow and ice. On asphalt we can use salt or sand/salt mix to remove the last traces of snow and ice. Whereas on gravel roads if the same amount of salt were to be used, it would remove the top layer of frost in the gravel, making it a muddy mess and making it nearly impossible to plow the next storm without scraping gravel into the ditches or shoulders. Therefore Pownal uses a separate, lightly salted gravel road mixture to provide for traction on ice, but without too much salt to melt the frost in the roadway. This has to be loaded separately onto the trucks which adds to the time it takes to treat these roads.

The plowing of gravel roads is often slow. The plow drivers have learned to plow gravel roads slowly to avoid digging into the road, and to avoid damaging their equipment. Spring storms may take even longer as the sun's angle and higher temperatures have begun to naturally thaw the gravel on top, it is often necessary to use the grader to very lightly scrape the snow off without scraping off the gravel.

It may seem that gravel roads get the back burner treatment from the road crew, but they plow and treat all of our roads by prioritizing the most heavily traveled roads first, then working along until all roads are cleared and treated. This takes time, and they can never be everywhere at once. The Public Works crew monitors the Fire/Rescue Department and the County Sheriff's Department, and responds to any of their calls to ensure they are able to get to you.

I sincerely hope this helps you in your understanding of the challenges of gravel road winter maintenance.

-Andrew O'Brien , Pownal Select Board