

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Road Project moving forward – slowly

This week I can write my last column about the resurfacing of Longmeadow Street. On Monday, both the Senate and the House approved a Transportation Bond Bill for time sensitive projects with the hope and expectation that work can commence before the end of the current construction season. Politics as usual has acceded to the reality of the calendar.

As the saga of the Transportation Bond has worked its way through the legislative process, there have been times at which it seemed an impossible journey. Delays were the norm as the summer months of the construction season passed from sight. The last straw seemed to come when the Senate, as a last step, added a single alteration to the bill – a \$500,000,000 Boston convention center. House leadership rejected that proposal, so two very different bills were presented to a conference committee for concurrence. After weeks of impasse, the bill was presented this week only after the convention center and every other controversial issue were removed from the package.

I began the day on Monday with a call to the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction in Boston. The highway staff informed me that Longmeadow is a priority project. Then I called the Northampton office of the state Highway Department. Paul Sullivan in the office confirmed that Longmeadow Street resurfacing contract is a “soft award,” awaiting only the legislature’s vote. From a third call, this time to the town engineering department, I learned that preliminary conversations with the state have already begun.

The funding is now in place for our repaving job, but its completion this year is not yet assured. All of us who rely on the road are counting the days until its completion. Nonetheless, we might have to wait until next year. The town and the contractor must complete arrangements to reroute traffic. Contract specifications must be finalized to the satisfaction of all parties. And all agreements must be in place for the work to be completed by Thanksgiving at the latest.

This process has educated me about the chemical properties of asphalt, which cannot be applied in cold weather. It has educated me about the politics of brinksmanship as the construction season wasted away. And finally it has educated me about the hard working individuals who persist in the face of daunting obstacles to maintain the roads that let the cars run on time.