



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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2024
YEAR-END REPORT
for the
LEDYARD PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

by
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Director of Public Works
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the accomplishments and advancements of the Public Works Department during 2024 and outline expectations for the year ahead.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2024 was marked for a second year running both by well-below-average winter weather and no major tropical storm impacts. The Department continued to keep pace with essential infrastructure maintenance needs and was able to tackle a large project related to Lambtown Road Drainage improvements. The Department continued its recent progress in making substantial strides in both facilities and fleet maintenance and improvements.

For FY25 funding for the road restoration program was subject to the normal annual appropriation process; \$1,000,000 was budgeted (out of \$1,115,000 requested according to projected needs), of which more than 74% were grant funds (an increase over the 69% for FY24). This appropriation met the benchmark needs to maintain average road surface rating (RSR), but also bears vulnerability to State budget cuts that may affect grant fund appropriations.

A requisite balance between structural repair and preservation techniques was applied, resulting in a minor estimated decrease in the Town's average RSR to 86 (from 86.5) at the end of the construction season. There remained no roads below an RSR of 50 and only three (3) below 60.

The waste volume in our curbside/municipal service remained relatively flat for the third straight year. Additionally, in keeping with SCRRRA's long-term budget, another increase in tipping fee charged to member towns for MSW was approved at \$75.06 per ton effective July 1, 2025. Also, the curbside collection contract will expire at the end of FY25 and is presently being rebid; the result is expected to be a substantial increase. Bulky waste disposal rates rose significantly the year before. Generally, cost increases can be expected to continue their steady increase going forward, especially as the State has failed in its long-term planning for waste management State-wide.

OPERATIONS

Street Sweeping and Catch Basin Cleaning

The Department completed sweeping in a timely fashion. The annual basin cleaning requirements for 2024 were fully met. These tasks are a vital component of a comprehensive maintenance program that will meet the formal requirements of EPA's Phase II Stormwater regulations. This year was the first year of renting a sweeper and contracting out catch basin cleaning. But after two years of renting a sweeper, we have found that it is unsustainable. Authorization was granted to buy a new sweeper with the Town of Preston proportionally sharing the expense in meeting the needs of both towns.

Drainage Repairs and Improvements

As is typical every year, several catch basins were reconstructed or replaced, with associated piping work, which represented the essential annual needs. As was started the previous year, we undertook significantly more drainage preparation work in support of resurfacing efforts. The Department also completed a number of significant drainage improvements, including underdrain installation to resolve longstanding icing problems in the winter. Of particular note were the major improvements accomplished at Lambtown Road.

Road Resurfacing/Preservation

Paving continued in accordance with the Pavement Management Program capital plan. The specific efforts accomplished included just over a mile of resurfacing, including roads in the Garden Drive and

Gonch Farm subdivisions, Goulart Road, and Cider Hill Pentway. In addition, 5 miles of road were microsurfaced, comprising Mathewson Mill and Vinegar Hill Roads, and a significant length of Gallup Hill Road. Including the crack sealing efforts applied to 12.5 miles of roadway, road surface management expenditures were more than \$750K.

Curbing/Driveway Aprons

The below-average winter plowing needs resulted in a low total of curbing repairs of less than 700 linear feet.

Guiderail Placement/Replacement

Guiderail installation, except for minor maintenance, is contracted out, and only a minor amount was needed in 2024. But the big story of 2024 regarding guiderail was the replacement of the 7,700 feet of dilapidated cable-rail along Sandy Hollow Road.

Roadside Vegetation Control

- *Spraying*: The Department uses a contracted guiderail weed-control spraying program. This has been highly effective in reducing the overgrowth of vegetation near guiderails, and thus increasing the efficiency of mowing efforts.
- *Mowing*: In conjunction with road right-of-way clearing efforts, roadside mowing has been very thorough and effective, but it has been difficult to meet the town-wide needs as quickly as regrowth overtakes progress, especially in a wetter than normal early summer. In 2024 we applied two to three mowing passes to main roads as well as a single pass to all subdivisions. The Department again made limited use of the supplemental capacity of a small Kubota tractor with sickle bar to assist in keeping pace with mowing needs.
- *Brush/Tree Trimming*: Road right-of-way clearing touch-up efforts were intensively applied to several main roads as we continue with our annual plan in keeping up. Systematic tree canopy clearing continued with efforts at Sandy Hollow Road. With that, we have completed the initial canopy clearing on more than 90% of our main roads.

Sign Maintenance and Installation

The Highway Division manages miscellaneous sign repairs and replacements. We met essential needs in 2024 as they arose. The B & G Division handles stop bar painting, as well as crosswalks. The needs in this area were accomplished according to the systematic plan in place.

Snow Removal

Winter weather demands for the 2023/2024 season were well below average. In addition to the operational cost savings, this mitigated breakdown and wear of snow removal equipment, though the stretching of the life cycles of the larger trucks will likely require certain major refurbishment actions going forward.

Buildings and Grounds Maintenance

With the proactive attention that has been applied to the Town's facilities for the last several years, in addition to keeping pace with essential duties and emergent conditions, the B & G Division completed the major upgrade project at Town Hall, exterior repair and painting of the Ledyard Firehouse and Bill Library, reroofing at the Senior Center, and comprehensive floor resurfacing at the Highway Garage and ACO facility. The full list and status of facilities needs is provided in the Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Capital Needs Report. A wide array of other improvements is being undertaken through the general fund, as well.

EQUIPMENT

The Public Works Department utilizes reserve funds for appropriations for its vehicle and equipment needs. It is essential that the reserve funds continue to be funded in accordance with the long-range plan to avoid the difficulties associated with a peak and valley approach to capital equipment rotation and improvements. Intermediate refurbishment is being utilized to help extend life expectancy.

Heavy Equipment. In 2023 the realignment of our heavy equipment fleet was advanced with the arrival of a rubber-tired excavator, which has greatly enhanced our in-house capacity for major drainage work, and a mulcher head was acquired in 2024 that has greatly improved the effectiveness and efficiency of our roadside clearing efforts. We also ordered a new roadside mower in 2024. As noted earlier, a sweeper was ordered to meet our road sweeping needs starting in 2025. Refurbishment will continue to be used extensively to extend the life of certain major assets; this has allowed us to defer replacement of several pieces of equipment.

Large Trucks. Historic capital funding for Large Trucks was adjusted to return from a 25-year replacement cycle to a 20-year cycle. We are still at the beginning of a period of several years it will take to slide into this arrangement. A 20-year replacement interval still stretches the standard envelope, so we continue to rely on targeted refurbishment. One new truck was acquired in 2024 and another is presently on order.

Small Trucks. The reserve fund for small trucks covers a wider variety of vehicles. Though standard replacement cycles form the foundational basis for the funding plan, flexibility has been (and will continue to be) employed to best align the fleet with needs. This has involved repurposing lower-use assets in conjunction with replacement. A pick-up truck was replaced in 2024.

PUBLIC WORKS FACILITIES

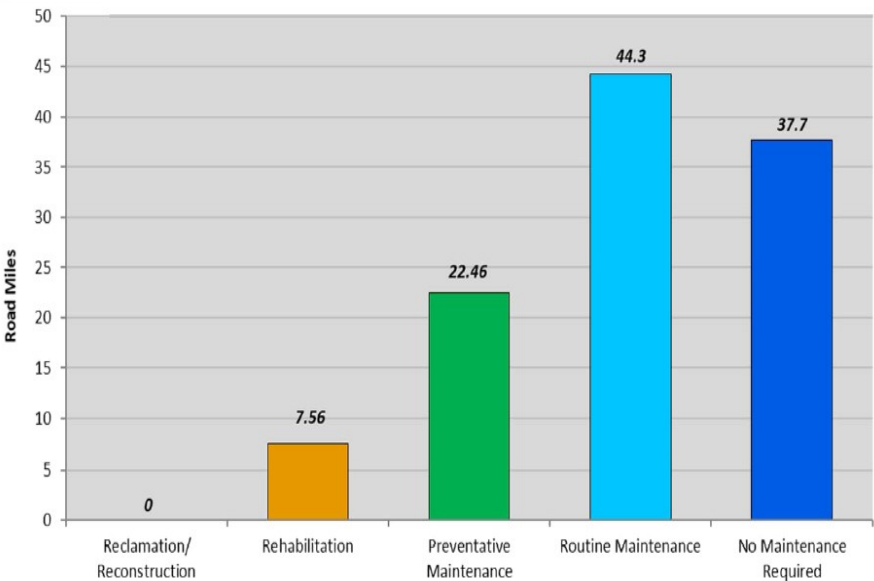
The concerted efforts to keep pace with aging-related refurbishment continued, with the reflooring of the Highway Garage and also heating system improvements. Though the major capital needs at the Highway Garage from a facilities' standpoint have largely been addressed, there remain wear and deterioration issues with the original pavement at the facility and Transfer Station areas. This is addressed in the Comprehensive Municipal Facilities Capital Needs Report, but completion is dependent on funding.

OUTLOOK

Even as road miles have increased more than 20 miles since the mid-1980's, while manning has decreased by roughly a third during the same period. With improved facilities and equipment, the Department has been able to keep pace with essential routine infrastructure maintenance. And progress continues in chipping away at the backlog of more major work, including drainage improvements that have lingered for many years.

Pavement Management

An annual capital budget amount of about \$1.1M is needed to maintain the status quo road conditions in Ledyard. This level of funding has increased and will generally trend upward according to inflation. The required amount of capital road funding has rarely met annual needs. Efforts continue to leverage other funding sources and intermediate treatment methods to render annual funding as effectual as possible. There has been an understandable reliance on State grant funding, which will always bear a measure of uncertainty.



As seen in the adjacent chart, the Town’s road network, by repair needs, is in very good shape, with only 7.6 miles out of 112 (or less than 7%) in need of structural repair (i.e., major resurfacing).

Recent operational budget and TAR funding have continued to be adequate to meet routine infrastructure needs. This has been largely based on stable TAR funding at recent historical levels. Absent TAR funding, several vital annual infrastructure maintenance

efforts will either be curtailed or must find alternative local or other funding. In the long run, the absence or reduction of TAR funding will severely hamper annual maintenance initiatives. Such shortfalls would have to be made up in other ways to meet essential infrastructure needs.

Department Manning

It is apparent at times that Public Works manpower resources are stretched thin at times; it is a challenge in some areas to keep up with essential maintenance demands, considering the increased and growing roadway infrastructure and the increasingly complex buildings and grounds needs. The manning level of 18 employees remains considerably down from its peak in the 1980’s of around 25. Though this gap has been somewhat bridged with organizational streamlining, improved equipment and facilities, and structural advances in infrastructure, there are areas and times where gaining further ground must be deferred to simply keeping up with essential needs. In 2024 the Department added a Mechanic through a shared services agreement with the Town of Preston. This has clearly benefitted both towns.

Contracting Out

Where workload conditions allow, the Department seeks to accomplish as much work, including larger projects, in-house. This has been most evident of the last several years with taking on several large drainage jobs. But to meet certain road infrastructure and buildings maintenance demands, contract services have been routinely used, if funding permits, simply based on scope/nature of work versus Department resources and capacity. Such tasks have included large tree removal, guiderail installation, roadside spraying, road line striping, catch basin cleaning, various road resurfacing efforts from road crack sealing to paving, and various facilities and fleet renovation and maintenance tasks.

Sanitation Services

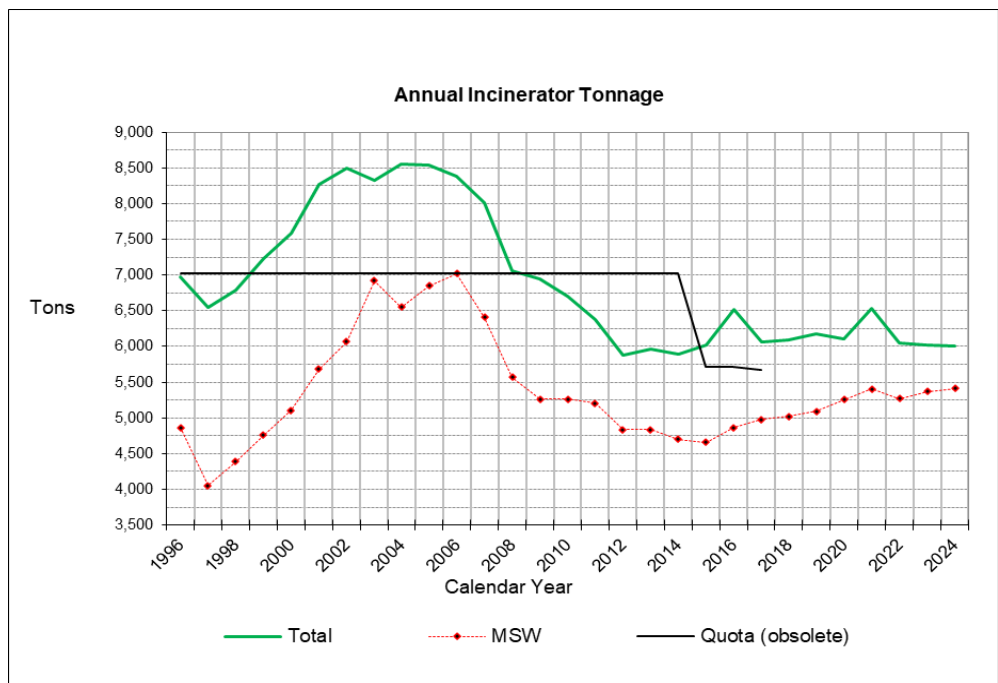
SCRRRA continues to substantially subsidize disposal costs for Incinerator waste and many other items. Because of this, we have benefited from the stability of costs in the area of sanitation services. This has started to change as SCRRRA's revenue stream has been significantly reduced, facilities close, fees in various areas increase, and agreements expire and are renegotiated.

Because of present policy and legal obligations, this area of the budget is least discretionary—any cost increases have been absorbed on a compulsory basis. The Town can control certain aspects of cost associated with local contracts, e.g., curbside collection, the present contract for which extends this June. A significant increase in the cost of these services is possible starting FY26.

The contract for recyclables disposal was renegotiated and renewed in 2020 by SCRRRA with Casella for Single Stream recycling. The terms of the contract involve a substantial increase in cost, which SCRRRA has been fully subsidizing. This subsidy is subject to change or elimination.

Through careful management and present SCRRRA subsidies, expenses associated with the Transfer Station operations have remained stable, but this also is subject to the shifting dynamics in waste stream management and associated cost increases. Because of the constantly shifting/ changing conditions in the realm of waste stream management, our local practices must remain open to review and change.

Ledyard's incinerator MSW waste stream trends are depicted here. Favorable gains related to commercial tonnage backcharging and securing better curbside collection contract terms had been realized through 2015. But a notable upward trend in residential MSW has been seen from this point forward.



As mentioned above, the Town is benefiting substantially from the

subsidizing of several Transfer Station/waste collection services. For years this has included hazardous waste collection with progressive addition of collection and disposal of tires, ewaste, fluorescent light bulbs, mattresses, waste oil, antifreeze, and small propane tanks, as well as Freon evacuation and the grinding of bulk brush. The net savings (cost avoidance plus revenue) to Ledyard has increased to more than \$60K annually.

Transfer of non-hazardous paint is also free to the Town through a direct agreement with PaintCare. Additionally, through an arrangement with the neighboring farm, leaf disposal costs the Town nothing. This represents an annual savings of at least \$20K. So, without the above arrangements, disposal costs for the Transfer Station would add at least \$80K to the tax levy. A pilot food waste collection provision was added at the Transfer Station in 2024. This has not resulted in financial savings and is not structured to do so. The net increased cost through 5 months was nearly \$800.

Regulatory Compliance and Administrative Services

The Town's Public Works administrative and engineering needs require selected consulting support in meeting essential program requirements. Meeting engineering needs will continue to be a matter for consideration of balance between in-house resources and consulting services.

Consulting costs increased significantly starting in FY18 to address increased MS4 program requirements. The Town has made great strides in meeting our compliance goals, but the costs remain substantial. These costs have been uneven year-to-year, and have declined on balance, but we are still in the relatively early stages of accomplishing the necessary structural aspects of the foundation of our local program. It cannot be overemphasized how sprawling and expensive MS4 compliance has become.