



Road Commission Prepares For Hammond Road Construction, River/Garfield Bridge Projects, Fall Millage Vote

By Beth Milligan | Sept. 8, 2020

The Grand Traverse County Road Commission is gearing up for a busy fall, with road construction projects planned for Hammond, Garfield, and River roads and a millage renewal on the ballot – a proposal that’s generated opposition from some local citizens and township leaders.

Road commissioners recently awarded two separate contracts for a project to reconstruct Hammond Road. Part one of the project extends from LaFranier Road to Garfield Road, while part two extends from Garfield Road to Townline Road. Both are crush-and-shape projects that involve grinding down the existing asphalt and then regrading and covering

the road with hot-mix asphalt. The LaFranier-Garfield stretch is being partially funded with federal dollars, with \$330,000 dedicated from the Surface Transportation Program (STP).

Both projects are slated to take place this fall and be complete by late October, with South Airport Road used as a traffic detour for both. Engineering Manager Wayne Schoonover told road commissioners at their recent meeting that “conflicts between the two adjacent projects” will be minimized by Garfield Road, which will remain open and divide the two work zones.

Two paving companies with extensive local experience went head-to-head in bidding for both projects and ultimately split the results, each winning one bid – a process that generated heated debate at a recent road commission meeting. Elmer’s Crane and Dozer won the LaFranier-Garfield contract in early August with a \$577,505 bid, coming in nearly 21 percent below the engineering estimate of \$728,998. Rieth-Riley Construction Company also came in under budget, but only by 5.9 percent.

For the Garfield-Townline project – a longer segment of Hammond and thus a more valuable contract, initially estimated at \$1.65 million – Rieth-Riley beat out Elmer’s by just \$7,000, bidding \$1.391 million to Elmer’s \$1.398 million. Both bids were more than 15 percent under budget. While government practice in a sealed-bid process is to award the contract to the lowest qualified bidder, road commissioners had an extensive debate about giving the contract to Elmer’s anyway, with commissioner Marc McKellar arguing it would create continuity between the two projects and allow for a single point of contact during construction work.

Chair Carl Brown and Vice Chair Bill Mouser both defended what Mouser described as “the sanctity” of the bidding process, however, citing concerns the road commission would get a bad reputation and drive away bidders if it deviated from the norm. One company beating another by a slim margin is a common occurrence in the industry and how the process works, according to commissioners, who also discussed the risk of being perceived as picking “winners and losers.” Said Mouser: “There has to be some super compelling reason why we would (deviate from the process)...I don’t see the justification of ignoring the low bid.” The rest of the board eventually agreed, voting 4-1 to award the contract to Rieth-Riley, with McKellar opposed.

Hammond Road isn’t the only significant project on the docket for the road commission this fall. The board recently awarded a \$2.7 million contract to Davis Construction to replace or rehabilitate three road bridges over the Boardman River: two on River Road and one on Garfield Road. The road commission tried to bid out the River Road bridges

earlier this year and only received two bids, both significantly over budget (<https://www.traverseticker.com/news/road-commission-projects-on-deck-environmental-study-for-possible-bypass-2020-bridge-replacements-over-boardman/>). Staff then went back and bundled the project with the Garfield Road bridge project to make the package more enticing to contractors.

This time around, four bidders submitted offers. While Davis Construction's low bid was still more than 24 percent over budget, the bid margins were more favorable than the first round. Nearly \$1 million in state and federal funding is being contributed to the project, with work planned to start this fall and continue through 2021. The three bridges are expected to be finished by October of next year. Due to Garfield Road's importance as one of the area's major north-south corridors, the road will remain open to traffic using a signalized flagging device to keep one lane operational. The partial closure is similar to an approach used by the Michigan Department of Transportation when it repaired the Murchie Bridge on Grandview Parkway in 2017 – a process that resulted in delays, but avoided a complete shutdown of the corridor.

Road commissioners will also go to voters this fall to seek renewal of a local one-mill road millage that generates approximately \$4 million annually for area road projects. Some funds are also distributed from the millage to the villages of Fife Lake and Kingsley and the City of Traverse City, with city leaders expressing strong support for its continuation. Road commission manager Brad Kluczynski previously told The Ticker the millage has been crucial to improving the quality of local roads (<https://www.traverseticker.com/news/local-governments-schools-brace-for-budget-blows-from-pandemic/>), with 45 percent of primary roads now in good condition, compared to a statewide average of 21 percent. If the millage is renewed, according to Kluczynski, approximately 80 percent of primary roads will be in good condition by the end of another four years.

However, the millage proposal faces some opposition – particularly among Peninsula Township officials and residents, many of whom are unhappy about the road commission's management of Old Mission roads, including Bluff Road. A portion of Bluff is closed indefinitely due to erosion issues that have made the stretch unpassable; an August 20 memo from Kluczynski indicates fixing the road could cost at least \$2.5 million. Kluczynski said that the road commission can't use nearly 62 percent of its annual millage dollars on a "very small stretch of road that provides very limited benefits to the county road system." While Kluczynski said the road commission was committed to working with the township on a solution, he indicated the most realistic scenario would be to dead-end the road at both ends of its closed section.

Peninsula Township officials listed Bluff Road as one of several complaints they have about the road commission's handling of Old Mission roads in their proposed resolution to oppose the millage renewal, also criticizing tree-cutting projects along Peninsula Drive and the transfer of M-37 from the state to the road commission (<https://www.traverseticker.com/news/the-future-of-peninsula-drivem-37/>). A group of residents including Grant Parsons, TJ Andrews, Dave Murphy, Monnie Peters, and Amanda Igra have also launched the Citizens for Accountable Road Spending (CARS) to oppose the millage renewal (<https://www.wrongwayroads.com>). That group has cited concerns over how road commission funds are spent, such as on the East-West Corridor Study (<https://www.traverseticker.com/news/road-commission-prepares-for-next-phase-of-east-west-corridor-study-takeover-of-m-137-in-interlochen/>), and are calling for greater transparency from the road commission in its financial dealings.

f Comment (<https://www.facebook.com/TraverseCityTicker/>)

Share (<https://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=250&username=xa-4ced48bd42d9b2f6>) |

 (</news/rss/>)

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.



Custom Mens Embroidered Handkerchief

Ad Personalization Mall

Grand Traverse County Declares State Of...

[traverseticker.com](#)

Traverse City-Ann Arbor Train Service Could Generate...

[traverseticker.com](#)

Long-Time Local Businesses Change Hands

[traverseticker.com](#)

The Ripple Effects Of High Water Around Traverse...

[traverseticker.com](#)

Casey Cowell Is Putting His (Considerable)...

[traverseticker.com](#)

Local Restaurateur Buys Apache Trout Grill

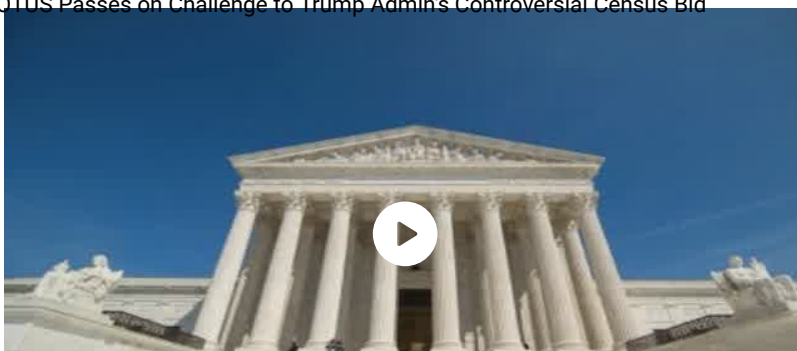
[traverseticker.com](#)

What's Ne Traverse C South (Ori

[traverseticker.com](#)

FEATURED VIDEOS

SCOTUS Passes on Challenge to Trump Admin's Controversial Census Bid



NOW PLAYING

