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Bristol town leaders take a road trip, visit gravel pit

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By Christopher Ross



DURING A TOUR of town roads Thursday, Bristol selectboard members, along with Town Administrator Valerie Capels and Public Works Foreman Eric Cota, visited the town gravel pit and discussed strategies for getting the most out of it. Pictured, clockwise from front left, are Peter Coffey, Ted Lylis, Joel Bouvier, Capels, Cota and John "Peeker" Heffernan. Independent photo/Christopher Ross

BRISTOL — Late Thursday afternoon, aboard a yellow Bet-Cha Transit bus traveling 35 mph in the northbound lane of Burpee Road, with George Michael singing "Wake me up until you go-go" over someone's cellphone speaker, the Bristol selectboard approved a request to alter the route of the June 29 Gran Fondo bicycling event.

It was the only recordable piece of business the selectboard accomplished at its June 13 special meeting.

The rest of the three-hour bus tour was dedicated to checking out the town's roads — and some of what Public Works Foreman Eric Cota has gotten up to on them.

No itinerary was specified. No maps were distributed. Ever sporting, driver Lucy Kimball simply fielded whatever boisterous directions were lobbed at her from various seats. Sometimes those directions were tied to specific (but not always recent) events — an excavating mishap here or some private property enhancement there — which were known only to one or two passengers. In those cases, more conventional left/right directions were substituted.

Accompanied by Bristol Town Administrator Valerie Capels and a fascinated reporter from the *Addison Independent* the troupe drove up North Street, where they stopped and examined a tree that had been devastated by emerald ash borers.

They visited a nonfunctioning culvert on Choinere Road and debated who owned what where, then turned onto Lower Hardscrabble Road and discussed guardrails.



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urpee Road to Stoney Hill Road to the town gravel pit, where they estimated — in years — the capacity that remains. (Three-ish? Perhaps more with expansion.)

On Lovers Lane they stopped in front of the Bristol Family Center to discuss the area's potential future water line needs.

Farther along, Cota pointed out a bridge that needed shimming.

They drove through Cartersville and a place that used to be known as Lynn Hill.

On Notch Road they discussed the upcoming paving project, which Cota and his team are getting ready for. (The ditching, stoning, hydroseeding and culvert replacement scheduled for this summer will probably take a couple of weeks, Cota said.)

On Upper Notch Road they pulled over and discussed the future of a retaining wall that needs addressing.

They turned onto Baslow Road, encountered a fallen tree, and backed out again.



A THREE-HOUR bus tour took members of the Bristol select board, Bristol Town Administrator Valerie Capels and a fascinated reporter from the *Addison Independent* around Bristol's roads to see what Public Works Foreman Eric Cota has gotten up to on them.

Independent photo/Christopher Ross

Later, the roads had become so rough and the bus was bouncing so vigorously that Cota had to raise his voice to be heard.

"Wow," he said. "This road really needs some work."

It turned out they had crossed into New Haven.

(Just kidding. New Haven of course has wonderful roads.)

On the other side of town they stopped and surveyed the ditching and stoning in progress on Lincoln Road near Bartlett Falls. (That project, which will extend nearly a mile up from Route 116, will take another four to six weeks to complete, Cota said, but crews won't be working up there every day.)

At the end of the tour the group — which included all the selectboard members but Michelle Perlee, who was absent — stopped by the town garage and brainstormed ideas for addressing the settled and now vastly uneven concrete floor. After many years of decline the floor has achieved the impressive overall slope of 8 inches. They also brainstormed ways to redirect the rainwater that flows in under the door, forming a pond.

In the salt shed, some part of the travelers' eight-year-old selves emerged while they stood around a tall green John Deere tractor with a mowing attachment.

Somehow, though, the trip was about more than just looking at roads, setting priorities or making mental notes to call so-and-so or investigate such-and-such.

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among some of the most beautiful places known to mankind, where Nature was just reaching the height of her seasonal powers.

They spoke of people and places with the easy humor and affection of the deeply rooted.

They spoke of materials and processes with the expertise of the deeply learned.

They planned one or two steps ahead, knowing that no matter what they do, Nature is going to push hard from one side and residents will raise hell on the other.

From the gravel pit they peered up at the tree line behind Mount Abraham Union Middle/High School, which sparked both personal and institutional memories.

From Lincoln Road they peered down steep ravines into the exquisite New Haven River, recognizing (and remembering) its awesome destructive powers.

Do this here and people will only drive faster.

Do that there and the phone in the town garage will start ringing off the hook.

Put guardrails in where there have never been any accidents and accidents will happen there.

Don't mow too little. Don't mow too much.

A big field of hemp is going in over there.

I remember when so-and-so used to live there. I remember when so-and-so passed away. I remember when that used to be all trees. I remember that time with the snow plow, that time with the rocks, that time when—

I remember.

Perhaps, too, the roads remember.

GIVE 'EM A BRAKE

Eric Cota and his team will be working along Lincoln Road this summer, and Notch Road, too. They'll likely also find themselves busy with routine projects elsewhere in the town.

If you encounter them while you're behind the wheel, please:

Slow down.

Reach Christopher Ross at christopherr@addisonindependent.com.

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