

How Our “Sister Towns” Staff their Highway Departments

(Among Tompkins County’s Similarly-Situated Rural Towns)

I. NEWFIELD

Contact: Deputy Highway Superintendent Matt Watros; Sept. 17, 2020
(with Highway Supt. Kevin Berggren sitting beside him in truck to verify and affirm his comments)

Advice to Enfield: **“Ulysses is not a good comparison” to Enfield’s operation because:**

- **Ulysses has embedded within it the Village of Trumansburg, whose own Highway Department assumes a “huge chunk” of road maintenance;**
- **Ulysses uses all salt on its roads; Enfield, like Newfield, employs a salt/sand mix;**
- **“Ulysses has no dirt roads.”**

Newfield Population: 5,179 – 2010 Census (147% of Enfield)

Highway Staff: **Full-time: 8 in total**

(1 of the 8 is assigned to the Town’s water and Sewer Dept.; leaving 7 for road maintenance; 1 position of this total currently remains open.

H.S. Berggren counts himself and Dept. Supt. Watros in addition to the above-stated total. He considers his Department’s full complement of workers as 10.

Staffing Adequacy [No concerns were expressed.]

Miles of maintained roads: “90-ish”

Dirt/Gravel Roads Less than one-quarter of the total.

Number of Snow Routes: 5 Snow Routes + the Highway Superintendent’s pickup.
5 trucks are generally out for winter plowing (plus that of the H.S.)

Winter Materials used: Salt/Sand mix where applicable.
Sand-only on dirt roads.

Maintenance work: Yes. Maintenance is performed in-house, though given equipment’s increased complexity, Deputy H.S. Watros admitted “You can’t do it all anymore.”

General Remarks: One difference noted is that Newfield, despite its Highway Department’s staffing levels, supplies no clean-up days.

II. DANBY

Contact: Highway Superintendent Carl Seamon; Sept. 17, 2020

Advice to Enfield: *"I wouldn't be cuttin'"* (referring to Highway Dept. staff levels)

Danby Population: 3,329 – 2010 Census (95% of Enfield)

Highway Staff: **Full-time: 7 in total**

Staffing Adequacy Yes.

Miles of maintained roads: 72 miles; Town and County; no State highways

Dirt/Gravel Roads 22 miles

Number of Snow Routes: 5 Snow Routes
7 trucks are generally out for winter plowing.

Winter Materials used: Salt/Sand mix where applicable.
Sand used exclusively on dirt roads.

Maintenance work: Yes. One of Danby's Highway Dept. staff is a full-time mechanic. Another person from his road crew is pulled off the road to assist when two-person service is required. Trucks are limped back to the shop when possible, rather than calling a wrecker.

General Remarks: Supt. Seamon does not believe Enfield's use of the Ulysses' Highway Dept. constitutes a fair comparison. He says most particularly Ulysses uses all salt on its roads, a less labor-intensive treatment.

III. CAROLINE

Contact: Highway Superintendent Robert Spencer; Sept. 18, 2020

Advice to Enfield: ***“Five is a good number. Leave your group where they’re at and avoid a lot of problems.”***

Caroline Population: 3.282 – 2010 Census (93% of Enfield)

Highway Staff: **Full-time: 5 in total**
Part-time: 1 (used in winter)

Staffing Adequacy **Spencer: “I think we’re a man short.”**
(Department used to have 6 employees.)

Miles of maintained roads: Approx. 70 (140 lane miles)

Dirt/Gravel Roads Approx. 1/3 of total

Number of Snow Routes: 6 Snow Routes
6 Trucks in use, plus Superintendent’s pickup for minor plowing

Winter Materials used: Salt (only) on all paved roads [The public demands it.]
Sand used exclusively on dirt roads.

Maintenance work: We perform our own routine maintenance, “as much as we can.”
Brakes will be repaired in-shop; more elaborate “spring-type” repairs will be farmed out to outside mechanics.

General Remarks: Spencer: “My employees put everything they have into their jobs.”
Highway employees are on-call 24/7. That fact gets lost in the Town’s budgeting and operational process. Road maintenance gets “taken for granted.”

“Times have changed,” says Spencer. “Now people call me because they have a stick in the road.”

Spencer says Caroline’s 1970’s-era Highway Garage needs replacing. “It’s junk,” he says.

Spencer would also support more shared services among Town Highway departments; one town assisting another with summer work.