

**TOWN OF CHATHAM  
488 State Route 295  
Chatham, New York**

**Special Town Board Meeting  
Thursday, May 05, 2016, 7 PM  
At the  
East Chatham Fire Department  
14 Frisbee Street  
East Chatham, NY 12075**

**Presentation by Thomas C. Baird, P.E., Barton & Loguidice, Engineers, on the Albany Turnpike traffic signal and Route 295 intersection.**

**PRESENT:** Supervisor Maria Lull, Councilman Bob Balcom, Councilman Henry Swartz, Councilman John Wapner, Town Clerk Beth Anne Rippel, Highway Superintendent Joseph Rickert. M  
Members of the public were also present.

**ABSENT:** Councilwoman Landra Haber

**CALL TO ORDER:** Lull called the meeting to order at 7PM and Councilman John Wapner led the pledge to the flag.

**INFORMATIONAL HEARING:** Lull read her regular statement regarding public comments. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was for the Town Board to gather input from the public about the Albany Turnpike traffic signal and Route 295 Intersection in East Chatham. Lull turned the meeting over to Tom Baird.

**Presentation by Thomas Baird and Peter Cristiano from Barton & Loguidice:** Baird explained the background of the bridge project, particularly why it only had one lane and some information about the negotiation process with CSX. He emphasized that the Town sought to improve the traffic situation and would be raising funds to complete the project. Baird explained the different aspects of the intersection plans with several available maps and diagrams including mentioning vehicle safety, traffic patterns, pedestrian options, and more.

**Questions and Answers:**

A male resident asked how much traffic went over the bridge and if it was possible that drivers now find alternative routes. Baird replied that it was possible but traffic patterns have been consistent for the past three years.

Mary Blass from Albany Turnpike, resident for 70 years, agreed that statistics from 2014 were the same as from 2009 since it is a very heavily traveled road. She suggested that the right-hand turn be made into a permanent one-way lane, and many others in the room agreed with her idea.

Mike Hart asked more details about the traffic light installation and CSX negotiations. Baird explained about the funding and grants situation and how the Town's discussions with CSX resulted in the option to have a one-lane bridge or no bridge.

Matthew Pirrone asked about any available accident data and asked why the Town was considering putting in a dangerous t-intersection. Baird explained that the intent was to make a dangerous intersection less hazardous for drivers.

A Haddock Hill Road resident asked for clarification about the funding and Baird explained about the grant and other financial options.

Leona Scarpinato asked about the bridge size and the pedestrian walk way. Baird explained what vehicles could technically fit on the bridge opposed to the legal specifications set by the DOT and that the pedestrian walkway had not completely determined but that there were several options as shown from the diagrams.

A Blueberry Hill resident asked why the bridge could not have a simpler design with stop signs at either end of bridge. Baird said that would not work since the major problem was one of visibility. There was some discussion about options to give drivers confidence in the safety of crossing the bridge.

Ted Miner from Old Chatham suggested putting a loop in the traffic light that would give both drivers confidence. Baird agreed that it would be an option for the traffic light system, if both lights had the same exact system.

Doris Myer shared that she was looking forward to having a light for safety reasons since she lived near the bridge. She asked what the timing pattern would be on the light since she needs to prepare how much time she will need to go to work. Baird talked about the traffic patterns based upon a two-hour observation from the previous day and how the light system would affect it. There was also discussion about the options of parking on the road in that general vicinity.

Matthew and Jolene Pirrone expressed their opinions at length about the danger of traffic light systems and how the Town was creating more of a problem than solving the bridge issue, primarily because there was no accident data and research showed that most accidents occur at lights. Baird replied that how the bridge was constructed was out of the Town's control but they were seeking to solve a problematic situation.

Melissa Blass, a resident for 44 years, explained that the current bridge situation is extremely dangerous. She related how she almost got into an accident the first night the bridge was open and expressed her safety concerns based on her experience with the disabled. She expressed her support for a change, particularly with making the right-hand turn a one-way lane.

Councilman Henry Swartz asked Baird to explain why the Town was stuck with the current bridge situation based on CSX's decisions. Baird related how federal standards required the bridge to be a one-way street and that CSX originally was going to leave the bridge shut down until they were required to rebuild it. Swartz reiterated that the Board was simply trying to give residents an opportunity to speak so that the best and safest solution could be reached for the community.

Councilman Bob Balcom also spoke about the history of the bridge being red-flagged, options on the width of the bridge with or without the pedestrian walkway, CSX's height preferences, and the weight limits. Baird added that the bridge foundation would have had to be expanded if it was to be two-lane, which would have been a much more expensive endeavor.

Councilman John Wapner asked about the timeframe of putting the plans into effect, particularly in changing the patterns slowly in order to reduce problems. Baird explained the steps to reduce traffic speed and set up temporary structures that would also be helped by the various traffic studies.

Leona Scarpinato asked about the possibility of cars being backed up on Route 295, particular if the speed was lowered and warning signs were installed. Baird replied that he would love to have the speed lowered, but it was a major undertaking with the DOT to do so, yet he could definitely see a warning sign for the intersection being justified for them to install one. There was also discussion between Scarpinato and the Board about the funds that CSX required for the Town to be involved in the initial construction project, which could have resulted in CSX not building the bridge higher if the Town had provided \$750,000. Baird noted that CSX also had its own federal standards to abide by, which included a lot of bureaucratic details, and that the bridge ended up being between the minimum height

requirement and the desired height. A male resident also mentioned a bridge construction error, resulting in it being made of both stone and concrete.

Ed, property owner of the East Chatham Liquor Store, noted that in his travels through New Zealand and Europe he has seen many bridges with traffic lights and that they work very well even though he was initially skeptical. He encouraged the Town in its efforts to slow down traffic and provide a safer solution to a problem, and added that he would love to have a sidewalk that people can go across instead of walking into an electric pole. Baird noted that the electric company would need to move the pole.

A male resident suggested that the Town explore the possibility of putting up a stop sign or yield sign on one side of the bridge. Baird explained that the vehicle would not be able to see who it was stopping for or yielding to. The resident also asked about options for bicycles. Baird explained several options on the diagram, including walking on the pedestrian walkway.

Fee Brown stated that she was happy to see the Town moving in the direction of getting something changed and asked about what residents should expect in terms of road closure time. Baird replied that the work would be done during off-peak hours and flaggers would keep the road open so there would be no detour and very minimal construction, and the project would take five days at the most.

Matthew Pirrone began talking about firetrucks and other emergency vehicles and asked if the local fire chiefs had been consulted about any of the details or if their drivers would be informed about the situation. Baird replied that the Town had not arrived at the point of explaining the geometry of the intersection to the fire departments.

Gary Wemple, in response to Pirrone, explained that the local fire chief had been called three times about the meeting, but there had been no response. Wemple also spoke in support of the light plan, particularly because of his experience with driving a large vehicle with a backhoe and watching other large vehicles crossing the bridge and all of them needing to back down to allow other drives to cross.

Ira Levine stated that while it is unfortunate that the bridge was constructed in the fashion it was, he agreed that the biggest issue is visibility since he had to back up about half of the time he has tried to cross the bridge. He thanked the Town for doing something about the problem before a serious accident occurred.

A female resident thanked the Town for its efforts in dealing with the intersection and asked about the evidence that the Town had that led to changes. Baird explained that the Town's evidence was primarily the input of residents. The resident suggested that the Town go forward with a phased approach.

**MOTION TO ADJOURN:** Lull thanked Baird and spoke to recognize the efforts of Joe Rickert, Kathy Marchione, and Adelle Kleiman-Levine. She also mentioned that an email had been received from the Chatham Country Store. Lull emphasized that everyone in the Town was working together on the issue so residents should contact the Board with any questions or concerns. The meeting was adjourned at 8:45PM.

Respectfully submitted by,

Beth Anne Rippel, RMC  
Town Clerk/Collector