



Grove/Route 67 project's finally under way

By Lynda Wellman
STAFF WRITER

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"This project is happening."

Those were the words of state Department of Transportation Commissioner Joseph Marie Tuesday morning as he kicked off the official ground-breaking ceremony for the Grove Street/Route 67 project in New Milford.

The project has been discussed for decades and design work began in 1993.

"It's been a long time getting shovels in the ground," the commissioner said.

Under sunny skies, more than 75 residents and officials finally saw those shovels make the dirt fly in the lot between the Water Witch Hose Company No. 2 firehouse and the Berkshire Lighting Gallery along Route 67.

"It's pretty special for us to be here today," said Governor M. Jodi Rell, who noted she has often been in one of the 17,000 cars that daily pass through the intersection.

"[The project] will make such a difference in the lives of people who travel through this intersection," remarked the governor, a resident of Brookfield.

She said the project -- the realignment of Route 67 and relocation of Grove Street to a new signalized four-way intersection with Route 67 and Route 202 -- is addressing a number of traffic and safety issues.

Gov. Rell praised the teamwork that brought the project forward, noting "it demonstrates what we can really do when we work together for a common goal."

The DOT continues to make sure the state works with communities so projects fit the character of the town, the governor said.

Commissioner Marie praised Mayor Pat Murphy for her "dogged determination" to get the project moving forward.

"Wow, did you ever think this would happen?" Mayor Murphy said to the crowd.

The town's chief executive praised the governor for making the safety of the community a top priority.

"I'm anxious to see the work begin; it's a long awaited project," said the mayor, who added, "I think it will really improve the traffic flow and safety for the travelling public."

Long-time resident Paul Hulton, who sold 2.5 acres of his property between the firehouse and his building housing the Berkshire Lighting Gallery for the project, said he had a good rapport with the people he worked with from the DOT.

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The site was once a Chevrolet dealership. Part of the building was demolished for the project, and Mr. Hulton had the side of the building left standing painted to be sure it looked nice for the ground-breaking ceremony.

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Susan Tuz contributed to this story

Mr. Hulton still owns about seven acres in the meadow behind the property he sold to the state. He said he is in discussion with Water Witch officials regarding a possible sale of some of that land to help compensate for property the firehouse is losing due to the project.

Construction is expected to last through two full construction seasons to December 2010.

"It will be worth it when it's done," said George Poirier, an engineer and assistant division administrator with the Federal Highway Administration.

The project realigns Grove Street, from 275 feet south of Mill Street, north behind the firehouse to a new four-way intersection with Route 67 and 202. In addition, 650 feet of Bridge Street will be reconstructed and the current Grove Street will be terminated in a cul-de-sac at Route 67.

Route 67 will also be realigned from a point uphill of Old Grove Street to a point approximately 75 feet north of the existing bridge over Great Brook. Old Grove Street will be reconstructed, widened and dead ended at Route 67.

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