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Wednesday, July 26, 2006

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Robotic camera probes sinkhole, reveals extensive Broadway damage

By BETTY JESPERSEN
Staff Writer

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FARMINGTON -- The underground aluminum storm drain that runs down the center of Broadway is corroded so badly it is no longer safe to withstand heavy traffic, the town's public works director told selectmen in an emergency meeting late Tuesday afternoon.

Beginning today and lasting until a repair or replacement is made, barricades will keep traffic off the center of Broadway. but the street will remain open to all but heavy trucks.

"I'm worried that the next big rain storm, dirt will start eroding those pipes" and cause another section to fail, said public works director Mitch Boulette.

The 10 parking spaces on the north side of the street will be converted into a



Alan Langburd, M.D., a cardiologist, has been appointed to the Central Maine Medical Center Medical Staff. He is practicing at the Central Maine Heart and Vascular Institute in Lewiston.
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Maylene Claire I. Peralta, M.D., an endocrinologist, has been appointed to the Central Maine Medical Center Medical Staff.
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travel lane and signs will warn delivery vans and logging trucks to use alternate routes to Main Street. The diagonal parking on the south side of the street will become parallel parking and there will be enough room for another lane of traffic.

As a visual reminder of what could happen to an unwary vehicle that may venture over a pipe that fails are two sinkholes that suddenly opened Friday and Monday on lower Broadway by Front Street.

No one was injured when they collapsed, and they have been temporarily repaired, but a robotic camera on sturdy wheels sent in to inspect the line Tuesday showed extensive damage all the way up the street.

The time frame and cost for a repair won't be known until the project is drawn up by an engineer and put out to bid, but Boulette estimates it will cost at least \$200,000.

The money would come from the town's undesignated fund balance account, which has about \$1.5 million, with town meeting approval. In the meantime, selectmen said they are sensitive to keeping the impact on downtown businesses to a minimum but that parking and traffic flow has to be curtailed.

"Safety is what counts," said board chairman Mary Wright. The little robot, owned by Ted Berry Co. Inc. of Livermore, was manipulated from inside an electronics-filled van by Kevin Taylor.

He watched on two monitors



Staff photo by Betty Jespersen
[enlarge](#)

Kevin Taylor of the Ted Berry Co. Inc. of Livermore manipulates a robotic video camera on wheels to inspect the underground stormwater drainage pipe on lower Broadway to see the extent of corrosion. Many areas of the 17-year-old system showed signs of rust and heavy corrosion.

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that also recorded and charted the machines observations as it rolled over debris, rocks and through water.

The 360-degree lens showed the top and sides of the aluminum pipe were in worse shape than the bottom, likely a result of the dirt and rocks that tumble through at great velocity during heavy rains.

Town Manager Richard Davis, who was called back from vacation, said he wants a lab to examine the pipe material to determine what caused the extensive oxidation or if the product was defective.

Davis said once the manufacturer of the pipe is identified, the town can see if there is a history of product failure and the possibility of a liability lawsuit to recoup the town's costs..

"Aluminum pipe is supposed to last a lot longer than 16 years," Davis said.

Downtown businessman Ernie Scholl, who owns Everyday Music on Broadway, said the repair needs to be done and he just hopes the disruption is kept to a minimum.

"My biggest worry is that a vehicle would drive over another sinkhole," he said. "Safety is my biggest concern."

He is a great believer in walking and said the road project could end up encouraging more people to walk to stores. "There are several parking lots around downtown that are not being utilized. This might get more people walking."

Alan Danforth, co-owner of the Homestead Bakery and Restaurant, said his busiest time is now through December.

"It all will depend on how well the traffic is managed. The last thing we need is to have them digging up the street during our busy season."

Boulette plans to meet today with an engineer from Carroll Taylor Associates, the firm that designed the system in 1987 for part of the downtown revitalization project. Funds for the reconstruction came from the Maine Department of Transportation and a state Community Development Block Grant and the project replaced streets, sidewalks, utilities and stormwater drains. The now-suspect aluminum storm drains were installed under High Street from the Court and North streets and down Broadway to Front Street. The system turns toward the Narrow Gauge Cinema parking lot, extends below the University of Maine at Farmington's Prescott Field and empties out into the Sandy River.

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