

Questions regarding the Sawyer Street Removal and Spurwink Marsh Restoration Project

1. Was Sawyer Street designed to flood?

No documentation has been provided to show that Sawyer Street was intentionally designed to flood. The Town reached out to the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) for clarification, and their response is included in Attachment A.

2. Can the Sawyer Street culvert be replaced with the same sized culvert that is currently there?

Unlikely. The current culvert is a tidal restriction. Given the location of the culvert in a Focus Area of Statewide Ecological Significance, Maine's climate resilience policies, and the State's minimum stream crossing requirements, it is unlikely the Towns will receive necessary permits from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers to replace the culvert with the same size structure. Current stream crossing rules require crossing like the Sawyer Street culvert to be 1.2 times wider than the stream channel, and a "climate resilient design" would require an even larger culvert. The new culvert will most likely be a large concrete box with an open bottom to simulate the natural stream channel.

In addition, the Town invested in a Vulnerability Assessment that provides additional information that supports a higher standard for tidal culvert crossings. The Assessment indicates that a significantly larger culvert is needed at Sawyer Street, if the road removal and marsh restoration project does not move forward.

3. What is the cost of a culvert replacement?

In 2019, the Towns received a grant to complete an engineering study of the Sawyer Street culvert to design a crossing that does not restrict tidal flows. The study estimated that replacing the culvert would cost between \$2 million and \$5 million. These cost estimates are in line with similar tidal crossing projects in MaineDOT's 3-year workplan for 2025, 2026, and 2027. The 2019 study did not consider road removal.

4. What impact will the road removal have on upstream properties?

Sawyer Street does not protect inland properties from flooding. The road currently floods during astronomical high tides and coastal storms, such as those in January 2024. Residents of upstream properties have indicated that they also experienced flooding during these storms. The inland areas that flooded are in a mapped FEMA AE flood zone, which means they are high-risk areas with a 1% annual chance of flooding. The upstream properties continue to be at risk of flooding, whether the road remains in place or is removed.

Removing the road may decrease rainfall flooding on upstream properties. The Sawyer Street culvert also restricts flow in the Spurwink River. During large rain events, water backs up behind the Sawyer Street culvert, causing flooding upstream. Removing the culvert and road will allow rainwater to more easily move through the system.

5. Why don't you just close the road but leave it in place?

We propose Sawyer Street be removed to help the marsh remain intact and continue to protect property, control flooding, absorb pollution, and provide wildlife habitat. To provide all of these functions, it needs to be able to adapt to sea level rise. During normal high tides, the road and undersized culvert restrict water from moving upstream, which also limits the amount of sediment carried upstream. Depriving the system of sediment means the marsh is not able to build elevation in response to sea level rise. Eventually, the marsh may transition to a mudflat or similar system because the marsh vegetation will remain underwater too long and will not be able to survive.

6. What happens if this project doesn't move forward?

The Sawyer Street culvert will need to be replaced within the next 5-10 years. As noted above, the Towns will be required to install a culvert that is significantly larger than the one that is currently in place. The larger culvert will result in increased tidal flow upstream into the marsh during normal high tides, but the road will still flood during astronomical high tides and coastal storms.

7. If the culvert and road are in poor shape, why isn't there a posted weight limit for Sawyer Street?

Posting a weight limit on Sawyer Street will require an update to Scarborough Chapter 601, Traffic Control Ordinance. The Town will begin the process to establish a weight limit at the November Ordinance Committee meeting.

ATTACHMENT A



Jami Fitch <jfitch@scarboroughmaine.org>

Fwd: Sawyer St

Angela Blanchette <ablanchette@scarboroughmaine.org>
To: Jami Fitch <jfitch@scarboroughmaine.org>

Wed, Sep 24, 2025 at 3:01 PM

Thank you,
Angela Blanchette, PE
Town Engineer
Town of Scarborough
P.O. Box 360
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Scarborough, Maine 04070-0360
207.730.4043

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Coughlan, Peter** <Peter.Coughlan@maine.gov>

Date: Wed, Sep 24, 2025 at 2:58 PM

Subject: RE: Sawyer St

To: Angela Blanchette <ablanchette@scarboroughmaine.org>, Pulver, William <William.Pulver@maine.gov>, Taylor, Ron <Ron.Taylor@maine.gov>, Skelley, John <John.Skelley@maine.gov>

Yes DOT did replace the old structure with this pipe around 1964. At the time, it was a state aid road. Plans show the grade across the causeway was raised by several feet and increased going towards Cape side. That's not saying it was "designed to flood".....or not flood. The note does mention an "extreme high tide over road of elevation 51.0", so the final grades appear to be designed to be above that.

I would go back to what Ron said yesterday: "*I was confirming that his understanding of the elevations on the plans appears to be correct – not that that Sawyer Road/Street was specifically designed by MDOT to flood.*"

Pete

From: Angela Blanchette <ablanchette@scarboroughmaine.org>

Sent: Wednesday, September 24, 2025 1:02 PM

To: Pulver, William <William.Pulver@maine.gov>; Taylor, Ron <Ron.Taylor@maine.gov>; Coughlan, Peter <Peter.Coughlan@maine.gov>; Skelley, John <John.Skelley@maine.gov>

Subject: Sawyer St

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All -

Thank you for your assistance and providing factual information related to Sawyer St in Scarborough.

I have attached a document that was sent to our staff today, ahead of our public meeting tonight. I may be asked to address the comments outlined in this document. The first section is related to the Engineering design of Sawyer St by MaineDOT. Mr. McColl is providing statements from DOT in this that appear to be false from the conversations I have had with you all. Does DOT have any responses to these first few items on his list?

Thank you,
Angela Blanchette, PE
Town Engineer
Town of Scarborough
P.O. Box 360

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