

Items to Consider Before Creating a Local Highway Department

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Learn from other communities

Check with communities in Maine who have created their own highway department within the past few years. They have already asked many of your questions and are probably willing to help you.

Some Maine towns that have recently created their own departments are:

- Sebago
- Veazie
- New Portland (still thinking about it)
- Long Island
- Frye Island

Also check with the MMA website (<http://www.memun.org/>) to gain budgetary info for similar sized town. You'll need to go to the Member Resources section and then Public Works section to find many road resources.

Operations

1. What are the positions to be created? Typically, there will be a foreman and then equipment operators and/or laborers. Will the foreman be a "working" foreman?
2. What are the needs or demands to be met with this department? Some activities include: grading, snowplowing, ditching, etc. It is important to have reasonable expectations. For example, will the crew be asked to reconstruct roads as well as maintain roads on a daily basis?
3. Will there be a supervisor? No matter what size the department, there is always a need to have a supervisor. In a small group this can be difficult, but the supervisor is needed to make sure jobs get done (accountability) and employees have direction. Ultimately, this person is responsible for the quality of work and day to day operations as well as conducting annual evaluations. In a small dept., the foreman may be the working supervisor.
4. Who will give direction to the supervisor? For example, if a Town Manager is in town, he or she would be the one to contact the supervisor to ask a job get done.
5. How will the municipality handle public concerns (communications) or can the public contact the highway department directly? Answering machine available?
6. Qualifications of highway personnel? Will Commercial Driver Licenses's be needed?
7. Are job descriptions available? (Use examples from other towns or MDOT)
8. Has a personnel policy been adopted by the Selectmen? If so, review it. If not, check with other municipalities to see where you could get started.
9. What equipment is needed? Here are some pieces used often with departments:
 - o One Ton Truck: Most used, day in and day out, year round
 - o Dump Truck: Various sizes, used for hauling lots of materials, plowing
 - o Grader: Gravel roads maintenance, shoulder work, plowing
 - o Tractor/Loader/Backhoe: Ditching, setting culverts, construction applications
 - o Loader: Loading trucks, clean-up, etc.
 - o Sidewalk Plow: For example, tractor plow/sander or Trackless
10. What is the number of paved vs. gravel roads? Considerations should be given to type of roads maintained. Sounds easy.but, physical road characteristics are important. Such as,

steep hills may require certain features on trucks (like automatic transmission or rear lock differential).or wide stretches of roads that could benefit from an additional plow wing.

11. Will certain activities still be contracted? For example, it may make sense to contract out grading versus purchasing a grader.
12. What size/type of facilities will be used? Will you have to build a garage? Based on number of employees, pieces of equipment, etc.
13. Where will garage be located? In central location? Close to sand/salt supply? How will this be financed? Will you have to create a sand/salt pile and register it with DEP?
14. How is overhead being figured? Wages are not typically very high in the public sector and even lower for those in public works. It is important to offer benefits that will attract and retain good and qualified employees.
15. Municipalities will pick up the following costs in most cases:
 - o Health Insurance
 - o Life Insurance
 - o Social Security
 - o Holiday Pay
 - o Sick Leave
 - o Retirement (state or other)
16. What will the hours of operation be? 7AM to 3:30PM? Will summer hours go to a 4 day work week?
17. Overtime----should be automatically added to general payroll line item for budget. After a few years, the town will become comfortable with a percent to use. It could range from 5% to 15% of the standard work week costs.
18. How will radio communications be handled? Will there be a channel established with an existing frequency or do you need to establish a new one?
19. Will a computer be used by the crew? It is a valuable tool for keeping track of expenses, planning road improvements, communications, etc. Every town garage should have one.
20. Has the town considered a training program for its new staff? Maine Local Roads Center offers classes throughout the year on a variety of road issues. Plus, it is extremely important to address safety training and needs, such as providing the proper safety equipment.
21. Has a winter plow route been determined? What truck will go where?

Budgets.

Here's an example of what expenses a local highway dept. may have.

- Labor wages (Year round)
- FICA/Taxes/Unemployment
- Health Insurance
- Life Insurance
- Retirement
- Training
- Phone/Fax
- Pager
- Computer
- Heat
- Lawn Maintenance
- Winter Sand supply
- Winter Salt
- Bridge Maintenance
- Traffic Signals
- Sidewalk Maintenance
- Capital Improvements
- Catch Basin Cleaning
- Emergency Road Repairs
- Equipment Savings/Purchase

- Electricity
- Sewer/Water Utilities
- Building Maintenance/repairs
- Uniforms
- Radio Communications
- Property and Casualty Liability Insurance
- Culverts
- Signs/Posts
- Dust Control/Calcium
- Geotextiles
- Grading
- Brush Removal
- Ditching
- Vehicle Maintenance Expense
- Emergency Vehicle Repairs
- Winter Plow Equipment and supplies
- Fuel, diesel, unleaded
- Oil, filters
- Contract Work---Special Projects
- Paving/Resurfacing
- Cold Patch
- Crack Sealing
- Small equipment Purchase
- Tools and Miscellaneous

Resources to have on-site

- Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)
- MDOT's "Working with MDOT -- A guide for Municipal Officials"
- Labor Laws Posted (can get from Maine Municipal Association)
- Road Map
- Annual Road Plan
- Records (work orders, repair history, roadwork)
- MDOT Spec Book and highway standards
- Maine Local Roads Manuals
- MMA's "Municipal Roads Manual"