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New Location for Fourth of July Parade

One of the most beloved and nostalgic events of the summer is the annual Colchester Fourth of July Parade. An opportunity to celebrate our country, shamelessly coordinate in red, white and blue and feel like a kid (no matter your age) watching the parade pass. For 37 years this benchmark of the season was held on Main Street in the “Village” of Colchester, an area rich in historic landmarks and heritage of its own.

For its 40th year, the parade will be permanently moving to Blakely Road, where it has been re-homed for the past two summers. This is not a decision that was made lightly, as you will soon learn. There were many factors taken into consideration, most significantly being safety and accessibility for all involved, spectators and participants alike. As difficult as change can be and as much as we wanted to bring the parade back “home” to Main Street, we were presented with indisputable data and anecdotes from those we rely on to keep us safe that we could not in good conscious ignore.

Due to a major VTrans construction project at the intersection of Main Street and U.S Route 7 during the summers of 2017 and 2018, it was determined that the parade could not take place as usual. This construction not only impacted the parade route, but also the parade staging area at Creek Farm Plaza. Instead of canceling the parade, the parade organizers chose to relocate the parade for the first time in nearly four decades.

As July 4th of 2017 approached, Parks & Rec, Colchester Police, Rescue and Fire Departments worked together in preparation to create a safe and accessible event as they had for many years in this new location. But this year was a little different. It was quickly discovered that this parade route did not have a major multi-state travel route cutting through it, as it did in its original location (U.S. Route 7, which begins in southern Connecticut) making it easier to alter travel and traffic patterns. It was also realized that this route could better accommodate the thousands of spectators that view the parade with plenty of off-street parking on quiet side streets as well as parking in various school and municipal lots along the stretch. Furthermore, parade organizers discovered more safety benefits including several large buildings available to host spectators and closer access to vehicles in the event of unexpected severe weather causing the need to seek shelter immediately. This route also allowed for a larger parade staging area at Colchester High School, with ample parking and a safer dismounting area for floats and parade participants at the conclusion of the event. Lastly, this parade route aided the Police Department in their efforts

to keep our parade safe from threats or other violence. In light of national and international recent events, road point-of-entry precautions are taken to ensure all pedestrian and parade participant safety in a way that was costly, overwhelming and deemed impossible on the Main Street route.

As predicted, these factors allowed for a lower stress, safer and more accessible experience for all in 2017 and 2018. After two of the smoothest parade seasons on record, and the construction on Main Street concluded, Police, Fire and Rescue, as well as the Parks and Recreation Department, met in the spring of 2019 to determine the best location for the Fourth of July Parade moving forward.

The following information and data compiled as a result of this discussion has led us to the decision to relocate the parade permanently:

- There are more sidewalks connecting the parking areas to parade route that ensure safe transportation for participants, including more handicap accessible spots. The Main Street location proves challenging to park and walk safely with limited off-street parking in the Village and the crossing of route 7 (approximately 220 off street parking spots in Village, 800+ on Blakely Road using Google Earth Photos)
- When we close Main Street for the parade we impact over 440 residences and 10 companies, which would experience a delay in response from our emergency response professionals (police, fire and rescue) in the chance an emergency occurs during the parade. On Blakely Road the impact is 21 residences and 2 companies.
- Close proximity to more municipal buildings and schools in case of inclement weather for shelter.
- Police can more effectively prepare and protect vulnerable corridors from unwanted and threatening actions, whereas in the Village there are more restrictions resulting in gaps in coverage.
- The parade route on Blakely allows a better staging area at the Colchester High School vs. Creek Farm Plaza in terms of parking for participants and ability to visualize all the parade zones at time of set up.
- The dismount at the end of the parade on Lavigne Road is safer compared to the extremely challenging Mill Pond/East Road intersections.
- Traffic is more effectively cleared on Blakely Road vs. Main Street. Traffic is able to continue via Bay Road when Blakely Road is closed as opposed to stopping traffic on Route 7 on the Main Street route.

As the organizer of the Fourth of July Parade, it is the responsibility of the Town and the emergency services that serve the Town to make the event as safe and accessible to the community as possible. To ignore the safety of participants and spectators based on tradition

would be negligent now that we know there is a better location for the parade. That is why the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Department, Colchester Police Department, Colchester Rescue, Malletts Bay Fire Dept. and Colchester Center Fire Dept. agree that the Blakely Road location is the best venue for the Fourth of July Parade. As our populations grows, and the world we live in changes, we have to align with the times and take appropriate precautions.

You may be asking yourself: what would this situation look like had that major road construction project never taken place, thus displacing the parade? What if we didn't know that a safer alternative existed and kept the parade on Main Street like we always have? The simplest and most truthful answer is that I'm glad we didn't have to find out and that we have the opportunity to be proactive in protecting our community.

Now what? Let's talk about the fun stuff. You officially have about a month to plan your pre- or post-parade activities. Perhaps your tradition includes the 5K Fun Run at Union Memorial School, bike rides along the bike path or Causeway, swimming at Bayside, a family hike at Niquette Bay State Park or Colchester Pond, creemees at the Village Scoop or Broadacres, time spent in our world class parks and open areas... the opportunities to relish the best time to live in Vermont are endless. And don't forget about the fireworks!

Sincerely,

Adriane Martin

Chair, Recreation Advisory Board

On behalf of the Colchester Recreation Advisory Board and Colchester Parks and Recreation