

# Sewall's Bridge replacement to start this summer

*Improvements to Sewall's Bridge will aim to preserve its historic appearance*



Webster Ropke, left, and Don Neumann of the York Water District stand near historic Sewall's Bridge where they will be replacing a pipe running along the bridge with one running in a trench underwater, as they did on Route 103 when the state replaced that bridge. (Deb Cram photo)

By **Susan Morse**

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The \$3.5 million renovation of the historic Sewall's Bridge is expected to begin by early summer and to be completed by the end of 2013, according to the project manager for the state Department of Transportation.

While the work is being done, the wooden bridge over the York River that connects Organug and Seabury roads will be closed.

Since Samuel Sewall built the bridge in 1761, Sewall's Bridge has undergone numerous renovations, including the removal of its drawbridge and a threat by the state in the 1930s to convert it to concrete. By town vote, the bridge remained wooden.

The latest rehabilitation is designed to keep the bridge's current appearance, including wood timbers above the water line, while strengthening the structure to allow for larger loads, according to Project Manager Nate Benoit. Currently, fire engines and larger trucks are banned from the bridge.

"It will look identical to what it is now. We're trying to replicate it," Benoit said Feb. 9. "We wanted to have a bridge to last 75 years that won't require load posting."

The project is being paid for with 80 percent federal and 20 percent state funds.

Before the state can start its work, the York Water District needs to move water pipes attached to the bridge to an underwater trench. At the end of February, Prock Marine is expected to move in a 40-by-120-foot barge with crane to the York River site to begin the work of digging the trench for 640 feet of new, high density, polyethylene pipe, according to Water District Superintendent Don Neumann.

Work is expected to be done in April, just prior to the state beginning its work, he said.

Current eight inch pipes along the bridge will be replaced with 14-inch lines. The larger size will allow aid the water district's goal of improved water flow for customers and for fire fighting capabilities, Neumann said.

"By having this new line across the river, it's not an instant fix to give us more fire fighting flows, it's not increased immediately," Neumann said Feb. 8. "In time we're going to replace the line from Organug (Road) down to the bridge; we need to replace a line on Seabury (Road) ... This is just one key piece."

Neumann alerted area residents to the work in a letter sent Feb. 2

The relocation of the water lines will shut down water service to area customers only for one or two half-days, Neumann said. Area residents will be notified.

There will not be any water rate increase related to the work, Neumann said. The estimated \$275,000 capital improvement project was included in the district's 2012 budget.

The water district also moved lines underwater prior to the state renovating the Route 103 bridge over the York River — that project began in late 2009.

The rebuilding Sewall's Bridge is expected to start by spring or early summer and last up to 16 months, with a completion date of Dec. 1, 2013, according to Benoit.

Because of historical considerations, there will be no change in the bridge width, no special lane for pedestrians, bicyclists or fishermen, according to Benoit.

The change in the estimated 255-foot-long and 23-foot-wide bridge will be in the material used below the water surface. The pilings and structure just above the waterline will be a composite fiber reinforced polymer filled with concrete that resembles wood, according to Benoit.

Above the pier cap, the bridge will be all timber, he said. This includes the deck, which will be paved as it is today.

"The existing bridge is very weathered," Benoit said. "We expect that same kind of marine growth."

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