



TOWN OF ERVING

SELECT BOARD

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May 12, 2022

A Statement from the Select Board Chair Regarding the Town Moderator's Comment at the Annual Town Meeting

On the evening of Wednesday, May 11, 2022 the Town of Erving held their Annual Town Meeting. Towards the conclusion of the meeting a voter asked for a representative of the Town to discuss the status of the anticipated construction of safety barriers for the French King Bridge. As I was waiting for the microphone to turn on to allow me to answer the citizen's question, the Town Moderator made a comment about the safety barrier project that I found to be extremely offensive and beyond inappropriate. In that moment I was shocked, appalled, and at a loss for words. I stumbled through a weak admonishment when I should have responded clearly disavowing the comment then and there and demanded an apology. The Town Moderator's remark was beyond poor taste and insensitive. The remark is out of touch with what the Town, its employees and residents, local and regional public safety, families and so many others have lost and endured at the French King Bridge. There is nothing humorous about this. Nothing excuses that comment ever, for anyone, but especially for the Town Moderator who is representing the Town of Erving and should set the standard and example of decorum, respect, and professionalism in his execution of his elected duties. As the Chairman of the Select Board, let me be unequivocally clear that the Town Moderator's remark does NOT reflect the position or sentiment of the Town of Erving, its employees, or any of the other Elected Officials.

On behalf of the Town of Erving I would like to sincerely apologize to everyone who has experienced trauma related to the bridge, the surviving families, local and regional public safety professionals and their families, and the Erving residents for the actions of the Town Moderator.

To be clear, the members of the Erving Select Board have worked with our colleagues in the Town of Gill, our public safety professionals, our State legislative representatives, and the team at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to address the need for the barriers for many years. The grief and pain that is felt every time a life is tragically lost at the Bridge and the trauma that is felt every time our public safety professionals are called to respond to the potential incident is real, significant, and permanently impacts them and their lives. In the last few years, the support for the proposed barriers increased in large part to the advocacy of survivors and allies of those impacted by the loss at the Bridge. Because of their advocacy, born from their tragedy, this project is nearly a reality. The Town stands in solidarity with those advocating for the barriers and is committed to seeing this project through to fruition.

Jacob A. Smith, Chairman