

Letter: Easton's Emerging 'Village Districts' and Commercialization



To the Editor:

The evolution of the Easton sidewalk project is sketchy. This all started several years ago when Justin Giorlando, currently Easton's part-time land use consultant, served on our town planning and zoning commission. From his experience at the state Department of Transportation Justin was aware of some federal funds available via the state Transportation Alternative Program. Hence the sidewalk project was born.

Collaborating with MetroCOG (Easton's regional planning authority) the grant application was developed originally at a price tag of approximately \$600+K. Via assorted edits and state requirements the cost escalated to over \$1.2 million. An advisory question was included in a recent ballot vote regarding \$250+K for a sidewalk, which was supported by a slim majority.

Some Eastonites did a deep dive into this grant application and determined that (a) this is a reimbursable project, so the town must front the \$1.2mil, (b) less costly alternative pathways are an option that were not presented to the town, (c) misleading information regarding the pathway was shared with the town such as no pole vs.pole removal; no stone wall vs. stone wall removal; no soil contamination vs. potential soil contamination ; no easements necessary vs. seven easements necessary; town liability vs. no town

liability. (d) this sidewalk is justified to support the town “Village District.”

Where in the Zoning Regulations is there any reference to “Village Districts?” The Village District (commercial concept) is the most controversial element of the Town Plan (POCD) and 95% of the public spoke against it at the public hearings. The application also stated that the grant was **already** approved by the town Board of Finance — When was this done? Where are the minutes? What was the vote outcome?

Suddenly, we learned this week that the Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) has numerous proposed amendments. Among the changes is the ADDITION of **Section 6.6 “Sport Hill Road Transportation Concept Plan,”** submitted this week to the Board of Selectmen, to be followed by a July Public Hearing. So, we’re updating our Town Plan for a hypothetical sidewalk, whose design and funding has yet to be reviewed and approved. Our 2019 Town Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) that drives the zoning regulations, speaks ONLY to a pathway off Old Oak Road, not a Sport Hill Road sidewalk. So which comes first, the chicken or the egg?

Help me understand what is going on? It’s clear this is about a heck of a lot more than a sidewalk. While we Eastonites are looking to the left and debating the sidewalks, there’s something else going on to our right.

Pay attention folks because several of our planning and zoning members are in real estate, others are commercial developers, and our chair is a major landowner whose property abuts the proposed “Village District” area. In the meantime, our Board of Selectmen are pontificating over what to do with our Code of Ethics.

The time has come to create two separate boards — a planning board and a zoning board — then, rather than looking left and right, we can focus on looking straight ahead.

NOTE: To read the Town POCD and Zoning Regulations, visit the town website

(eastonct.gov) and click on Government/Planning & Zoning/ Town Plan & Maps (for POCD) or Regulations (for Zoning Regulations).

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Easton