

Referendum Results Confirmed; Pathway's Future Still Uncertain



A larger than expected turnout among animated Easton voters produced two results that oddsmakers might well have missed. The first three measures were without any significant controversy and the margins in favor were wide.

The decision to join the Westport Weston Health District demonstrated a clear preference by a margin of 204 votes in favor. This result will mean the year-long trial period will now become a long-term commitment.

The hotly debated multi-use pathway also garnered a majority of 104 votes. The affirmative vote was advisory only, and the question was added to the referendum ballot by the Board of Selectmen after the Board of Finance voted 3-3 to deny the appropriation of \$249,400 for the local match requirement of 20% of the total cost of the \$1,247,000 project.

After the unofficial referendum results were released Tuesday evening, Selectman Bob Lessler said, "Now what is left to do is for the Board of Finance to honor the voice of the people by quickly voting to authorize a special appropriation."

In a letter submitted to the Courier, Planning and Zoning Commission Vice Chairman Raymond Martin also interpreted the referendum results as a decisive statement of support from Easton voters, and urged the Board of Finance to expedite approval of the

funds. "To all BOF members," Martin wrote, "please vote with the will of people. Vote to fund the Town's share of this much needed project."

Board of Finance Chairman Andrew Kachele—who cast the deciding vote to deny the proposal—did not immediately indicate that the referendum results would cause him to change his position on the pathway project. "The vote on the sidewalk showed a divided electorate after what was probably the nastiest campaign I have seen in all my time in office," said Kachele. "I still feel no final decision should be made until a proper investigation of alternatives is put before the public." Kachele added that he will be "meeting with the Lands Committee that controls the watershed property next week as a first step."

It is unclear if any further delay will negate the current offer from the state to contribute \$997,600 (or 80%) of the total cost to build the pathway.

The official tally was completed and announced at 5:34 p.m. and is included below.

1. Shall the Town of Easton appropriate the sum of \$49,770 for the purchase of body and dash cam cameras for the Easton Police Department as mandated by state law?

YES: 1131 NO: 183

2. Shall the Town of Easton approve an ordinance revision increasing the stipend for our volunteer Firefighters and Emergency Medical Service volunteers?

YES: 1137 NO: 173

3. Shall the Town of Easton approve the Tax Relief for the Elderly Ordinance as

recommended by the 2021 Senior Tax Relief for the Elderly Committee?

YES: 1104 **NO: 207**

4. Shall the Town of Easton join the Westport Weston Health District?

YES: 755 **NO: 551**

5. As an advisory question, should the Town of Easton appropriate \$249,400 for the local match requirement (20% of the total project cost of \$1,247,000) for the costs associated with constructing a multi-use/pedestrian path along Sport Hill Road from the entrance of Helen Keller Middle School to the crosswalk at Silverman’s Farm pursuant to the Town’s “transportation alternatives set-aside” application submitted to the Connecticut Department of Transportation on August 29, 2019?

YES: 708 **NO: 604**