



TOWN OF PLAINVILLE

ONE CENTRAL SQUARE, PLAINVILLE, CONNECTICUT

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TO: Robert E. Lee, Town Manager

FROM: Mark DeVoe, Director of Planning and Economic Development

SUBJECT: Review of Public Statement to the Town Council, November 20th, 2017, Katherine LaBella

DATE: November 30, 2017

You requested that our office respond to Ms. LaBella's Public Statement (Statement).

The Statement first mentions a lack of compliance with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (PoCD). Specifically, it states that environmentally sensitive areas, areas of historic significance, open space, and areas of natural beauty should be protected. The Statement also claims that the PoCD recommends preserving and managing residential neighborhoods. The statement then goes to describe how the trail will adversely affect these attributes.

- A thoughtful trail design can enhance both public and natural spaces.
- It can highlight areas where scenic overlooks and nature can be enjoyed without causing harmful adverse impacts.
- Historic features can be showcased and protected for generations in lieu of allowing them to continue to slowly decay.
- Neighborhoods can be improved through safety enhancements, aesthetic improvements, and traffic calming, a common sibling to trail design.
- As the principal staff member and Director of Planning during this Plans formulation, it is my professional opinion that in more respects than not, an appropriate trail design will help further the recommendations of the PoCD. There are fourteen (14) pages within the Plan (some with multiple mentions per page), where the trail is encouraged as a vital resource the Town should pursue. The PoCD clearly recommends construction of the trail as a priority. A thoughtful review of the Plan will reveal this to any reader.

The Statement implies there will be impacts to environmentally sensitive areas.

- Will there be impacts? Yes. The design will make every effort to mitigate them along every foot of the proposed trail.
- The Town of Plainville and the State of CT are not exempt from strict environmental permitting criteria and permitting laws. The law requires that measures be taken to use all reasonable and prudent measures to avoid impact, and where impacts cannot be avoided, to minimize those impacts to the greatest extent feasible.
- In terms of floodplain impacts, Plainville Zoning Regulations and FEMA guidelines and Flood Prevention Regulations can [and must] effectively be adhered to through proper design. The trail is not a building, it is a recreational platform that is permitted within floodplains when designed and engineered correctly.

The Statement speaks to the historic significance of the canal and associated haul road.

- The State Historic Preservation Office has been consulted regarding the use of the Haul Trail. No significant concerns have been raised.
- The Bristol Press article referenced in Ms. LaBella's letter correctly points to the canal and associated haul trail as an historic amenity that should be saved. We agree. The multi-use trail design process has accomplished just that in other CT communities.

- Ms. Ruth Hummel, former president of the Plainville Historic Center, fought to have a trail constructed alongside the remnants of the Farmington Canal at the Pine Meadows Condominium Project in a manner that respected the canal and highlighted its historic significance. The future design phase will accomplish the same, but to a greater degree. There is no doubt that awareness of the historic canal will be raised while helping to preserve it from the slow erosion of time.

The Statement, specifically referring to Pierce Street, states that the PoCD recommends that the Town consider a Village or Historic District (that could qualify owners for certain tax exemptions) as well as advance policies that preserve scenic streetscapes. It also holds that commercial vs residential conflicts should be held to a minimum. Safety was also seen as being compromised by the plan and confusion regarding town preference for a one way or two-way street was cited.

- The Town of Plainville can consider establishing a Village District, which includes appointing and staffing a new commission by statute. There are no tax benefits in this model, although one can be established anywhere the local jurisdiction sees fit. Village Districts are typically confined to a narrow Town Center, or Main Street corridor.
- By contrast, the establishment of an Historic District is replete with state and federal requirements. Merely having an aging housing stock is not sufficient criteria to establish an Historic District. A new appointed Commission and staff would also be responsible to administer the regulations governing such a district.
- The PZC has, through the implementation of new zoning regulations as recommended in the PoCD, sought to mitigate zoning conflicts where they exist with the knowledge that they cannot be legally removed. The best example would be increased buffers between commercial and residential development for new plans and when site revisions are made.
- The first and foremost consideration of the trail design is safety. Trails have been designed and constructed in neighborhoods (we viewed many examples during the presentation). Appropriate design can make an effective and sometimes stark improvement to the appearance of the street.
- Town of Plainville representatives have repeatedly stated that Pierce Street will not be made into a one-way street.

Finally, the plan is conceptual only. The Statement is premature in its assessment of how the trail will affect the environment in all the forms stated. The final design will be chosen based upon how it best marries safety with aesthetics.

The PoCD clearly places construction of the trail near the top of its list of priorities. It is the purpose of the design, not the planning phase, to ensure that measures to mitigate or remove impacts are implemented.