

In Focus

Marlborough's plans are finally becoming a reality

Village Center design will bring town together

by Jan Tormay
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Construction will soon be sprouting up around Marlborough. When it's done, Marlborough officials hope residents will find it easier to walk about and feel more connected to the town. They're also hopeful residents and entrepreneurs will be attracted to Marlborough's planned Village Center District, which will offer retail, office space and residential land.

"Right now, we're building the sidewalks on School Drive using a STEAP grant for \$275,000," said Peter Hughes, Marlborough's town planning and development director.

The town is also applying for a new \$500,000 STEAP grant this legislative session to complete this project and extend the sidewalks down to the Marlborough Congregational Church and then connect to School Drive.

Additionally, Mr. Hughes said, "We have a \$500,000 STEAP grant for moving the road (Jones Hollow Road) and building the green and we've got a \$98,000 grant to build the trails behind the (Elmer Thienes-Mary Hall Elementary) school. We have another \$48,000 in grants to build a trail down by the Blackledge Soccer Field."

Marlborough Economic Development Commission member Jane Boston is excited about the proposed nature trails. As avid hikers and outdoor enthusiasts, she said she and her family are always leaving town to go to the Air Line Trail and Gay City State Park in Hebron.

Sewer project begins

Now that the town has received its first state allocation of \$5 million, the approved sewer project will begin this month, Mr. Hughes said.

The state will give Marlborough another \$4 million in the fall and after that the town will borrow \$1.9 million with the goal of finishing the project by September 2009.

He said town officials are trying to utilize up to 80 percent grant money and contributing 20 to 30 percent local funds.

Master plan put into action

Construction of Marlborough Village Center's new green at the intersection of Route 66 and North Main/South Main streets is currently being designed by architects. Construction will start this summer.

The Village Land Use and Economic Enhancement Plan also includes 76 acres purchased by the town that are located behind Marlborough Common's 40 acres of retail property on Route 66. The next step is to hire an architect to design the town property. Mr. Hughes said the town purchased the hillside to maintain the town's character and small town charm.

Another 22 acres are behind the Commons and next to the town's new property.

Town officials are considering changing the zoning from residential to commercial for the properties.

Mr. Hughes hopes that the consulting work will be completed by December.

"Then, January or February 2009, the town will decide what the next steps are."

As a way of maintaining the character and charm of Marlborough, Mr. Hughes said that above and beyond zoning regulations, there will be “D” covenants requiring strict design standards and limit building sizes.

“People will only be able to increase their building sizes by getting us a better design.”

Additionally, he said, there will be limited parking in front of these buildings. Most of it will be on the side and in the rear.

“What we want to do is move the buildings to the property line. Right now, we have a 50-to-75-foot setback. We’re going to get rid of that, so it’s zero.”

By bringing the buildings to the street and putting sidewalks in front of them, he said they hope to “make it more pedestrian-friendly.”

This is important because 40 percent of the population and housing are within one mile of the town’s major intersection, he said.

“If we can get sidewalks out, so people can walk in who already live here, that’ll help.”

Additionally, Mr. Hughes said the nature trail system behind the Marlborough elementary school currently in the works, will tie into the sidewalk system.

“It’s going to be an interpretive nature trail, so the school can utilize it for science classes and we can use it for recreation.”

Working with Marlborough School Superintendent Sal Menzo, Mr. Hughes said, “The long-term goal is ... to make this, if we can, somehow a regional outdoor education facility ... and asset for education ... Right now, the kids go out (of the area) for their nature classrooms and spend two or three nights in Rhode Island or some other part of Connecticut. We could make this a day destination.”

Need water

The other goal is to bring public water to town, Mr. Hughes said.

“We’re working with the Connecticut Water Company to try to develop a public water system. People need water to build bigger buildings. They’ve done some test drilling. They need to do some more. We’re offering some of our land to investigate, so we’re actively pursuing it, but it’s going to take a little bit (of time).”

Attracting new business people

Like most towns, Marlborough officials are courting businesses.

Besides their plan for a business park, they’re also approaching economic growth through various forms of marketing. After a four-month contest one year ago, “Tradition with Vision – Marlborough, CT” was chosen by the Marlborough Economic Development Commission as its themed-slogan.

Additionally, commission member Brian Fentress is heading up the town’s web site enhancement project, with input and feedback from the economic commission.

“A lot of people, who are looking for a location for their business, will just go on your web site. You might never get to talk to them in person,” Ms. Boston said.

The town is also promoting itself on the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism web site as a filming location. If a film-related business chooses to move in permanently or build – all the better, Mr. Hughes said.

The economic development commission knows the town needs to grow, but like other town officials, Ms. Boston said, its eight-member economic commission wants to see it occur without the town losing its small town charm.

She said people are counting on her to both represent them and keep them informed.

She and many others live in the sewer district, where much activity is planned and traffic issues and growth are more of a concern. “We want to make sure that it (development) happens at a reasonable pace.”

Even though residents want to increase the tax base, Ms. Boston said, “I want to make sure we do it in a way that is best for the town.”

She moved from East Hartford to Marlborough 23 years ago. “We came here for wide open spaces, the country, unique charm and character and the lake ... We want to make sure we still have some of that ... It’s a balancing act.” **HML**

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