

## **Marlborough moves forward with town green park, more sidewalks**

Written by Jan Tormay

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### *Town edges closer to final plans*

Marlborough is edging closer to drafting town center and business park plans with the help of a \$100,000 market/traffic analysis and layout by Milone and MacBroom, an engineering and landscape architecture firm with offices in Connecticut.

In the meantime, Marlborough has received \$900,000 in state grants to continue building its sidewalk system from the town hall to Route 66 in the center of town and from town hall to Marlborough Congregational Church on South Main Street. Sidewalks are already being built from Elmer Thienes – Mary Hall Elementary School to Richmond Memorial Library on School Drive. The state money will also be used to relocate Jones Hollow Road to create a larger town green park with 17 parking spaces near it. Additionally, all the trees on \_\_\_\_ will be removed and new ones planted. A memorial in front of town hall will be moved to the town green park. Another memorial will be added, as well as a new town event board. Additionally, a public platform will be placed on the green for gatherings. Peter Hughes, town planning and development director, said the work will begin soon and be completed by May.

“You will not have Memorial Day here. Bill (Black, first selectman) is figuring out multiple potential parade routes. But in 2010, you will have a very fine Memorial Day celebration here and gathering on the new public green area outside of town hall.”

With additional parking available, including space at Middlesex Hospital Marlborough Medical Center, the hope is that many more activities will be held on the green in the future, Mr. Hughes said.

“Between the green and Blish Park, people can hold multiple events at once, or alternate between locations.”

### **Next steps to town center and business park projects**

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The first step is to create the town green and sidewalks to set the standard, Mr. Hughes said. “We’re pretty confident that once the sewer comes on line next September, we’re going to see some demolition ... They’re going to put back similar type of landscaping and stone walls and lighting that we’ve done.”

He added Marlborough Commons can begin its project if it wishes to, once its sewer system has been installed. Thirty-six of the town’s 76 acres are being used for the town center project at the intersection of Route 66 and North/South Main streets. “We want to get this set, decide what to do with this design and at that point, go seek partners and sell,” Mr. Hughes said. Each section is between one and six acres; although, sections could be combined. The other portions of the 140-acre town center and business park projects include 22 acres owned by Marlborough Associates and 42 acres owned by Marlborough Commons.

Showing charts that reflected local market studies for both the town center project and business park projects, Vince McDermott of Milone and MacBroom said, “Along Route 66, you wanted to have some commercial, more intense commercial close to the interchange. You wanted to not have a lot of curb cuts. If there was going to be development along the road, you wanted small retail services ... were looking to see a mix of office incubator and light industrial types of uses to the interior of the property.” Mr. Hughes said once Milone and MacBroom gives him a draft set, the planning and development department will finalize the draft and a public hearing would most likely be scheduled sometime between June and September. New zoning regulations will be

announced in September or October for the town-owned property in the center of Marlborough, as well as Marlborough Commons.

“This sets the stage and the standards for the town and for future development. Clearly, sewers will permit us to get into condominiums, age-targeted homes, multiple-family dwellings,” as well as structures with businesses on the first floor and residential living on upper floors, said Marlborough First Selectman Bill Black during an all board meeting.

“So, by having a center (park), by putting in sidewalks everywhere and having our sewer/water systems in place, we now develop the village district.”

Greg Servodidio, chairman of the planning and development commission, said, “We on the commission have been talking about the business park for a number of years and have been working with consultants for a number of months. With their expert help, to actually see it now starting to take a concrete form that we’re looking at on these drawings is very exciting ... as far as how we can envision development of this entire area.” He said the town has done a very good job in planning for future development, particularly by installing sewers.

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The theme and the style of the projects will focus on its roots, which go back to the 1800s, Mr. Black said. “Stone walls, wooden-rail fences. We’re not a picket-fence town. We are a horse-rail or three-rail town, not split ... We’re not a period from the colonial days.”

Mr. Black said the town hopes to attract a small hotel and small restaurants in the future, which would be a natural link to a business park. “It is 17 minutes to Hartford, to the convention center ... You can go to Rentschler Stadium Park. The town is less than 25 minutes from Mohegan Sun casino.”

There are other reasons the town needs hotel services, he said. “If you have a family guest and they need a place, there isn’t any. I think there is also a need for small meeting spaces.”

Also, because the town is home to Middlesex Hospital Marlborough Medical Center and the health-care industry is a growing field, Mr. Black said businesses offering medical services would be an area of logical growth for Marlborough. Next year, the town will submit to the state a request to change the state plan and conservation development to designate all of it as a rural community center and then do an income survey of the neighborhood. If 51 percent is below the HUD income level, Mr. Hughes said the town can tap into some other community funds other than the state Department of Environmental protection, and “hopefully be over there in one and a half to two years.”

Mr. Hughes said the town would continue to work with Marlborough Associates and Marlborough Commons “to see if we could come to an understanding of potential land transfers and trade.”

At the same time, he said the board of selectmen, economic development commission and board of finance will have to talk about the town’s level of financial commitment in the first quarter of 2009. “We have to decide what the next step is. Do we do marketing? If we can come up to an agreement, do we engineer all these roads? Do we just get the funds and engineer our road. And if we do, that definitely goes to a town meeting or (becomes) part of the town’s annual budget, which will be more than \$10,000.”

Mr. Hughes said there is another development option. “We can go to the state and lose total control. They could give us all the money for infrastructure, but they own this for 40 years. They make all the decisions: Resale, sale, how much, who. Those are the decisions we have to look

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at ... We can always seek additional STEAP grants if we decide to move forward. That's what Hebron did to do their design. We would fill out an informal application to the state traffic commission ... sit down with them and get a real idea of what we're looking at and then file a formal application."

As Mr. McDermott has suggested, Mr. Hughes said the town of Marlborough should also know the maximum costs of state highway improvements (traffic lights, additional lanes) to build on, "because we need to know those costs before we can go out and market this to someone else."

Mr. Servodidio said, "We always felt it was important to make sure we were ready, so that when new businesses and developers show up at our doorstep, we as a community have decided what we want, what types of uses, how big and what they look like. "Therefore, the developers will have to abide by our wishes as a community ... Certainly the goal of this project has always been to try to increase the commercial tax base to help alleviate some of the burden on the homeowner."

Mr. Hughes believes there will a "consumer-impact" on the town because of Marlborough Barn's closing. However, property owner Carl Zirkenbach, Jr. is still planning to open the building again within one to two months with numerous small stores.

One thing seems certain. Neither the poor economy nor the loss of Marlborough Barn and Thatcher's Pharmacy has deterred the town from going ahead with its project. "We think there is going to be an up-cycle. We're going to be ready for the up-cycle. That's our goal," said Mr. Hughes, who believes the economy will turn around within two years.

**HML**

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