

**19 MARCH 2024**

**Regarding: Request for Public Hearing, 190 Sharon Turnpike, Goshen CT, Public Works Development Proposal**

Dear Planning & Zoning Commission,

I am writing first to thank you for your work on the commission, for your attention to detail in upholding your official duties, for your role in administering statutory requirements and for working to protect the rural character of Goshen in relation to current land use issues.

My purpose in writing is to inform the commission of a proposal for a public works facility at 190 Sharon Turnpike and to state my opposition to this proposal.

In accordance with Article 10 of the Town of Goshen Planning and Zoning Commission by-laws, as well as is permitted by the State Statutes, Chapter 124 and 126, and other pertinent regulations, I am further requesting that a public hearing be held, should this matter be presented to your commission, as it is in the greater public interest to hold such a hearing.

It is in the greater public interest to hold such a hearing, as there is significant public interest and opposition to the proposal for this property. Alternatives to this location have been overlooked. There are significant concerns among the residents of Goshen, that development of the property is unnecessary. Significant questions about the proposed storage building and development of 190 Sharon Turnpike have not been answered, and a non-biased needs assessment has never been conducted, prior to plans being created. Town of Goshen residents would like a more transparent process and to be part of the decision-making process, in order to create a win/win for the town and its residents.

Furthermore, sufficient data on alternatives, cost, engineering feasibility and formal engineered site and building plans by a licensed engineer have not been made publicly available. I have been advised at the 20 February 2024 Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting, that a new building proposal will be presented for the land on RT 4, 190 Sharon Turnpike at the next BOS and Planning and Zoning meetings. I have also confirmed with the Selectmen that as of 22 February 2024, no needs assessment for public works has been conducted. How can another proposal be put forth, if we have not even determined that new infrastructure is needed?

As a taxpayer of this town, I remain extremely concerned about the lack of effective strategic planning and the lack of transparency in public expenditures held by the First Selectmen in relation to public infrastructure. How much of a tax increase will the taxpayers of Goshen be burdened with because of another building and its associated long-term maintenance?

I am equally concerned with the First Selectman's proposals for excessive expenditures, not only on the proposal for a public works facility and its associated long-term maintenance, but also

committing the town to a particular match amount for a STEAP grant related to the public works proposal. The amount of the match was far above what was required, and far above what other comparable municipalities have committed to for similar projects. All without adequate transparency with the town boards, or the taxpayers of this town.

The following is a list of additional concerns:

- Initially, a piece of equipment was borrowed from the Council of Governments (COG), that was too big to fit in the existing public works building – that was reportedly where the idea for a facility initiated. Poor planning is not a justification for spending hard-earned taxpayer dollars and committing the town to a development it does not want, at a location it wants protected. Is the First Selectman and Public Works seriously considering new permanent infrastructure to house equipment that is not even owned by the town? Such a proposal will waste substantial taxpayer dollars.
- The population in Goshen is stable and has not shown significant growth over many decades. From 2000-2021, Goshen had an annual population growth rate of 0.81% - Neilberg.com Spending taxpayer dollars on an additional public works building based on the assumption that the population of Goshen “might one day” increase dramatically, is not justifiable.
- It is permissible to store many pieces of equipment outside & it is questionable whether a building is needed.
- Developing the land at 190 Sharon Turnpike is in direct conflict with the Goshen Open Space Plan approved in the Plan of Conservation and Development for the following reasons:
  - 190 Sharon Turnpike is land abutting protected land
  - Is land along stream corridor
  - Is land along watershed
  - Contains significant wetland resources
  - Contains scenic vistas
  - Is part of large unfragmented block of land
  - Abuts Goshen Land Trust property. The Land Trust has stated interest in the property
  - Site is prime for passive recreation & agricultural use
  - Site contains endangered species & wildlife habitat. In addition to the potential 3 endangered species, including the bog willow, sedge wren and hard-stemmed bulrush, 190 Sharon Turnpike also contains an abundance of wildlife resources. Sightings include ground nesting birds such as woodcock, bobcat, fox, deer, bear, eastern cottontail, over 75 recorded bird species, turtles, small mammals and more. Destruction of this habitat will negatively impact the natural resources of the town.
- Developing on undeveloped land is more costly than locating a development in existing footprints, such as the existing public works site.

- On page 25 of the existing Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), it states the following: “It appears there is considerable satisfaction with the current town facilities and services” ...

The Plan of Conservation and Development further states: “Accordingly, any decision to change or improve a municipal service or facility will involve considerable public discussion prior to a formal proposal.” There has been a consistent lack of transparency from the First Selectman and Public Works regarding the public works proposals, which is in direct conflict with the recommendations of the POCD.

Additionally, page 28 of the POCD states the following for both Public Works and Fire Department existing locations: “Room for expansion is available”, and “The property has area available for additional expansion if necessary.” Purchasing and proposing infrastructure at 190 Sharon Turnpike was, and is in direct conflict with the recommendations of the approved POCD.

A public hearing is requested for the following reasons and to address the following concerns:

- A significant number of residents feel that this proposal is in direct conflict with the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD).
- The monetary and environmental cost of adding new infrastructure to a virgin site is presumed to be exponentially more expensive, compared to adding on to an existing footprint where existing utilities are already available at the existing Public Works buildings.
- Why has there been a consistent lack of transparency in process and no notification made to interested parties and adjacent landholders regarding this proposal? Townspeople were promised that needs assessments would be conducted, and that multiple meetings and informational sessions would be held, yet another building proposal is being put forth with no such action taking place.
- Why have no resource inventories been conducted at this site?
- Why have alternative sites and proposals not been investigated fully and made available for examination by the public, and quotes sought from at least 3, non-biased contractors for an upgrade and additional storage space (either attached or stand-alone) at the existing Public Works location, if additional space is in fact needed? Taxpayers were not even shown one quote from one contractor, or any alternate plans.
- Why was the initial meeting to purchase the land heavily stacked with supporters, while the rest of the town had little to no idea the meeting was taking place? This is in direct conflict with the POCD.
- Why were no initial meetings to discuss all options, quotes, plans etc. held with the public, prior to the vote at the public meeting to purchase the land? The public feels they were not given adequate information to make informed decisions.
- Townspeople were told that one reason for the new building proposal was that the town borrowed a piece of equipment and discovered it did not fit in their existing storage, and that is why a new building was being proposed. Is it wise to spend taxpayer money to

put up an entire new 9,600 sq ft building on virgin land, in order to fit one piece of equipment that is not even owned by the town? Though storing equipment inside is ideal, do we really need that much additional storage, and can't it be accommodated at the existing Public Works facility, if an upgrade was made?

- Why was I told by the First Selectman prior to the start of the initial meeting to purchase the land that “This is a done deal, this is going to happen” before anything was voted on?
- In the initial town meeting, there were roughly only 100 people voting. This is clearly not an adequate representation of the townspeople who are concerned about this project and want to see the land protected as open space. For instance, I have received over 200 signatures on an informational petition to protect the land as open space.
- How can the First Selectman propose to build a huge facility directly behind a taxpayer's home? Construction here will not only destroy the rural character of Goshen and some of its critical resources, but also negatively impact adjacent property values.
- This development will also negatively impact local businesses, both during and after development, including the Mary Stuart House Bed and Breakfast. Guests to this location expect a rural, quiet stay away from noise and light pollution.
- Light pollution from this development will contaminate the neighborhood and negatively impact wildlife.
- Noise pollution will change the character of the neighborhood and create disturbances to local businesses, as well as wildlife resources.
- What kinds of chemicals will be stored onsite? Will equipment maintenance where oil and gas spills may occur, be conducted onsite? What are the plans for spill response and containment, given that there is a vital wetland and watershed onsite which could become contaminated?
- The excessive amount of impervious surface that will be added to the area near a vital wetland will negatively impact the watershed, even if the proposal claims there will be no work within the regulated area.
- What is the mowing schedule of the site, given that ground nesting bird species use this area? Three endangered and threatened species are likely to occur in this area, as identified in a Natural Diversity Database assessment. Building at this site will destroy habitat and natural resources.
- When will the proposed work take place and will there be anti-tracking mats placed at the egress of the site to prevent debris going onto a state highway and causing a hazard?
- What type of erosion control and seed mix will be used to re-seed the area after it is disturbed?
- What measures will be taken to prevent negative wetland and water quality impacts to the site?
- Are all zoning laws and ordinances being followed in relation to the property directly next to the proposed development? Will variances be sought for setbacks?
- How much will the proposed building cost in both construction and long-term maintenance?

- From assessments of FEMA maps, it is likely that the proposed location will fall within the 100 year-flood zone. Maps of this area also show poorly drained and verily poorly drained soils, not likely suitable for development.
- A website with further information about this issue has been created to raise public awareness: [www.gogoshen.org](http://www.gogoshen.org)

Given the significant public opposition to this proposal, and the negative impact it will have on both the natural resources and rural character of Goshen, I respectfully request the application be denied, and that a public hearing be scheduled, and adequate notice of said hearing be made available to all residents of the Town of Goshen, including formal notification to adjacent property owners.

I further respectfully request that you use extra caution and scrutiny with any further requests made to this committee, given the circumstances under which the public works situation has been handled.

Please enter this letter into public record.

Respectfully submitted,

Marissa L. Wright  
226 Sharon Turnpike  
Goshen, CT 06756