

Concerned Medfield Residents Against a Public Roadway Connecting the Pine Needle Park Neighborhood and Woodcliff Hills

We the undersigned petition the Medfield Planning Board to vote against a proposed public roadway connecting Quarry Road in Woodcliff Hills and Morse Drive in the Pine Needle Park development.

1 Description of the Opposed Solution

Medfield officials requested that a new roadway be constructed as part of a proposed development extending the Woodcliff Hills area. The builder has subsequently presented plans to the Planning Board that showed a southward extension of Quarry Road towards Morse Drive – currently a cul-de-sac in Pine Needle Park. Today, Pine Needle Park is only accessible from Pine Street and Medfield Center. Woodcliff Hills is only accessible from Route 109.

We submit that the claimed benefits of a cut-through -- a reduction in certain emergency response times and a reduction in Brook Street traffic volume -- are implausible. We further submit that any such benefits will be far outweighed by certain reductions in public safety, local traffic congestion, compromised neighborhood quality of life, and substantial incremental direct and indirect costs to the Town of Medfield and its taxpayers. We further believe that there exists substantial historical precedent in prior actions of Town officials to support our objections to the cut-through proposal.

2 Scenarios

It is difficult to predict the impact of the proposed road on current traffic patterns. All who either spoke in favor or against the solution at one of the Planning Board hearings agreed that there will be an increase in traffic through Woodcliff Hills and Pine Needle Park. In theory, the connection represents an attractive option for Pine Needle Park residents to reach Route 109. The same can be assumed for residents of Pine Street, residents of the Northern and Western parts of Medfield, and also for residents of the adjacent towns of Dover and Sherborn. In addition, the proposed roadway can be considered a bypass for the often-congested section of Route 109 between Shaw's Market and Route 27. How much traffic one should expect in practice depends on the details of the plan's implementation – such as accompanying measures to control or restrict traffic flow. In our view, the spectrum of potential outcomes ranges from a moderate increase in the number of vehicles passing through our neighborhoods to an increase by an order of magnitude that will lead to new traffic problems within and along the perimeter of the area in question.

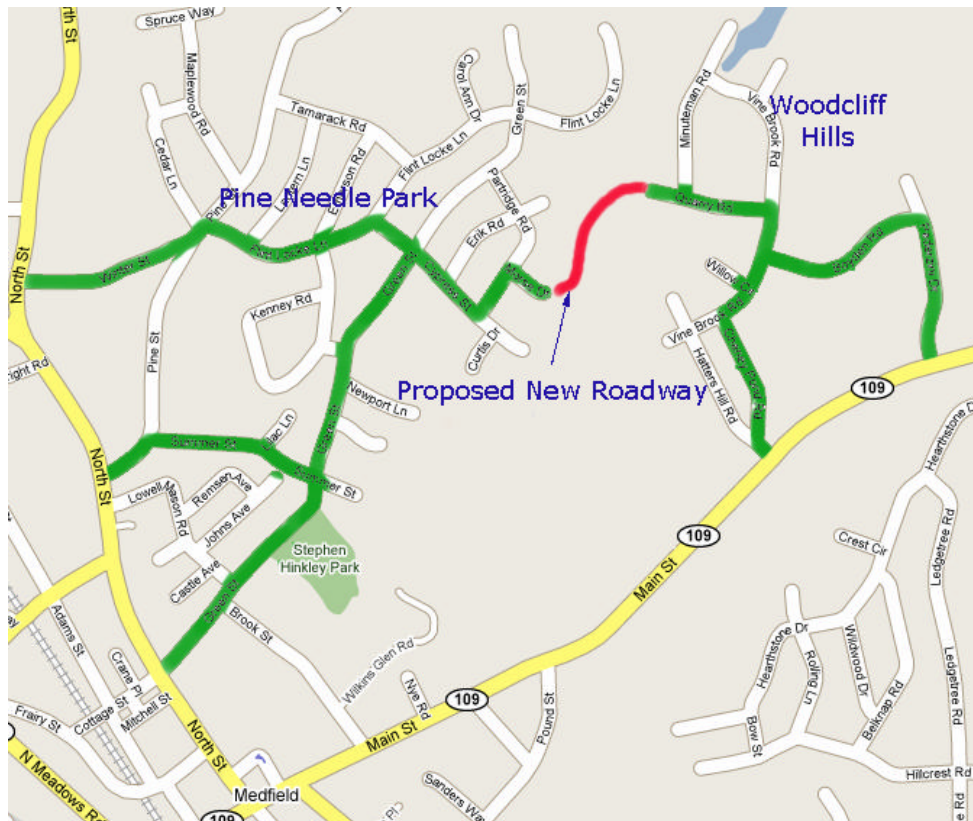
We believe, however, that it is not necessary to know the exact amount of traffic increase that affected residents will experience under this proposal. We believe that even a small increase is not justified by the likely modest, or possibly nonexistent, benefits from the proposal. This document was prepared to detail our point of view.

3 Claimed Benefits

Proponents of the cut-through have argued that it will reduce the emergency response time for the Northern part of Town, particularly during rush hours when traffic on Route 109 is congested. In addition, residents of Brook Street have argued that the cut-through will bring traffic relief to them. We believe that neither argument is plausible.

3.1 Benefit 1 -- Public Safety and Emergency Response Time

Town officials argued in favor of the cut-through by suggesting that it would substantially reduce emergency response time for certain areas of the Town. Emergency response time is not only a function of distance, but also of road conditions, maximum safe speeds, and traffic volume. In order to predict the reduction of emergency response time, other factors must be considered, and those factors argue against the proposal. A map of the area (below) shows that the roads through these neighborhoods are narrow, curvy, and require many 90-degree turns. When Route 109 is congested, traffic on these streets will be heavier than normal, potentially congested, and thus emergency response times will be unpredictable.



We are satisfied with the emergency response times that we experience today. We question whether the cut-through will substantially decrease these times, and one can make a plausible argument that response times would actually *increase*. We do not want to trade a certain reduction in the quality of life of so many residents for an uncertain benefit.

3.2 Benefit 2 -- Traffic Reduction on Brook Street

Brook Street residents have argued that they would expect a substantial traffic reduction on their street, because Pine Needle Park residents will no longer have to drive on Brook Street in order to get to Route 109. Someone reported close to 500 vehicles per hour during morning rush hour. We recognize that Brook Street serves as a cut-through from North Street to Route 109 and that most Brook Street traffic does not come from Pine Needle Park residents. We believe that the cut-through will attract additional Route 109 traffic into our neighborhoods and that it will not bring a substantial traffic reduction on Brook Street.

4 Safety Concerns

4.1 Children

Residents and Town officials presented different values for the number of children impacted by the proposal. We do not know the exact number of infants, toddlers, and school-aged children that live in Pine Needle Park and Woodcliff Hills. Surely, several hundred children will be affected. We don't think the exact number matters. What matters is the fact that Medfield is the town with the highest number of children per capita in Massachusetts. The town is rightly taking pride in its school system and for being especially attractive to families with children. We believe that this appropriate positioning and characterization of the Town of Medfield brings with it the responsibility for preventing developments that can harm these very children.

4.2 Residential Character

Both Pine Needle Park and Woodcliff Hills are attractive, relatively safe residential areas. The roadways today are used not only by children but by residents of all ages for recreational purposes. Owing to the quiet nature of these areas, their residents have adopted certain behavioral patterns that would not be appropriate or safe for an area with significant through-traffic. There would certainly be an extended period of re-learning required to watch out for traffic that previously was not there. During this period of re-learning, residents will be put in harms way, and particularly children and senior citizens will be at risk. We believe that the enhanced risks to the populations of these areas are far greater than the speculative benefits of the proposed cut-through.

5 Traffic Concerns

5.1 Roadway Capacity

We believe that traffic cannot be safely routed through the Woodcliff Hills and Pine Needle Park neighborhoods without ensuring that the affected roadways have enough capacity to handle the traffic. This is a safety concern for both the drivers of vehicles and the residents of the areas alike. A perfect example is lower Green Street, which has several narrow passages (some without curbs) that are difficult to navigate even with today's traffic volume.

5.2 Traffic Congestion

Brook Street is one of the access routes to Route 109 for residents of Pine Needle Park today, and Pederzini Drive is the main access route to Route 109 from Woodcliff Hills. On both roads, traffic backs up frequently during rush hours for cars trying to enter Route 109. An increase in

traffic volume will make this problem much more severe. At times when Route 109 is backed up from the Medfield Center to the Shaw's Plaza area, e.g. during rush hours or inclement weather conditions, it is likely that knowledgeable drivers will attempt to get around the congestion by passing through these neighborhoods, resulting in increased traffic volume and congestion and associated increases in noise and pollution and safety risks for their residents.

6 Direct and Indirect Costs

We urge the Planning Board to recognize that the proposed cut-through has undetermined and potentially large indirect costs that must be accounted and planned for.

It has been acknowledged that a cut-through cannot be implemented without conducting a thorough traffic study. Such a traffic study must account for regional traffic streams, not just local traffic, and will therefore be complex and costly. If this study fails to consider regional traffic patterns, it will not yield any useful results.

The traffic study will in turn likely make recommendations for how to implement the cut-through, and what accompanying measures will be required. Such measures can be as simple as posting speed limits, installing traffic lights, or installing stop signs. Securing the dilapidated sidewalks and installing curbs on Green Street will be more costly. If accompanying traffic measures for restricting traffic flow are implemented without enforcement, they will not be effective. The Medfield Police Department will have to devote resources to enforcing these new restrictions.

7 Alternative solutions

The Planning Board has made attempts to point out a possible compromise, namely to create a cut-through that will be available only to emergency vehicles, but not to general traffic. There are a number of options available and some were discussed, such as an easement on one of the properties on the Erik Road development that will consist of a paved roadway and a gate. We believe that such a solution might be acceptable, but that it is unclear how it would be implemented, since two builders would have to work together, and the plans for Erik Road were already approved and the permit awarded. Our reservations regarding the necessity of this easement remain valid and, in any case, further study of an "easement solution" would be required.

Other alternatives, such as temporary driving restrictions during rush hours, or a "No Thru-Traffic" sign posted on both ends of the cut-through, are not acceptable. They simply don't work. Examples from other towns show that such restrictions are difficult to enforce and do not prevent many drivers from cutting through these neighborhoods.

8 An Historical Perspective

A litany of opinions and decisions over the course of the past 20 years documents that Town officials, planning boards, residents, and developers worked together on keeping Pine Needle Park a quiet neighborhood by preventing another road connection to Route 109 north of Brook Street. For instance, on September 25, 1995 the Planning Board approved a preliminary plan for the Erik Road Extension development subject to several conditions. The first condition was

“that there be no further connection to any other subdivision.”¹ Arguably, because it was the first condition listed, it also was an important one, and this tells us that the question of a cut-through was just as much of a concern more than a decade ago as it is today. We urge the Planning Board to vote against the cut-through again today.

9 Conclusion

We believe that the proposed cut-through would negatively impact the Town of Medfield and its residents in many ways:

- By reducing the safety and quality of life for affected residents
- By failing to yield significant benefits for the Town and its residents
- By incurring substantial direct and indirect costs with obvious budgetary implications

The cut-through proposal will exact a substantial qualitative and quantitative price, yet its benefits will be insignificant at best. Because it has not been demonstrated that the cut-through is *needed*, because it has not been demonstrated that the resulting changes in Medfield traffic would be *under control*, and because it has not been shown that the cut-through will provide a *measurable benefit*, we urge the Planning Board to consider this cost/benefit imbalance and to vote in favor of the cul-de-sac version of the proposed development in Woodcliff Hills.

Medfield, Massachusetts, January 2007

Sincerely,

The Undersigned

¹ Suffolk County Land Court, Docket No.: 00-P-67, Parties: EDWARD MUSTO & another(1) vs. PLANNING BOARD OF MEDFIELD.

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