



Town of Haddam

Land Use Office

30 Field Park Drive
Haddam, CT 06438
860-345-8531

I would like to address the issue of the POCD as it relates to the Town Garage and why I am recommending the Rossi property, subject to all appropriate due diligence.

Regarding the POCD

It is first important to note that the POCD is an important but advisory ten (10) year plan. The current Commission and future Commissions are not bound by the recommendations contained therein for the next ten (10) years. The plan recognizes - circumstances change.

The POCD contains an entire section regarding Higganum Center. That section includes recommendations which are designed to enhance the Center. Nowhere in that section of the plan is there a mention of the need for a new town garage or where a new town garage should be located.

The goals are as follows:

Goals

- 1. Enhance the visual appearance and economic vitality of Higganum.***
- 2. Make Higganum a place where residents and visitors alike gather and meet.***
- 3. Improve mobility within Higganum and connections between the center of Higganum and nearby destinations.***

At the very end of the POCD in the "Action Agenda" there is an "Action Item" as follows:

- Investigate new sites for a town garage in order to move the existing town garage outside of the Village.***

My search certainly respected this Action Item. I searched the entire town and identified the Ruddy Ferry Road property as a viable option.

But understand, this Action Item is in no way binding on the Commission. The "Action Agenda" in the POCD specifically recognizes the need for flexibility:

"It is understood that goals and strategies will evolve over time as implementation or new situations provide insight into desirable policy directions."

Regarding a Location for New Town Garage

The town garage has been in the Center since 1934 alongside a lumber company and various factories. At that time, the Center was thriving. This begs the question, *Why move it out of the Center?* The POCD is silent on this issue. The goal shouldn't be a sterile, upscale village. It should be a working Center for Haddam residents to congregate and enjoy.

As some members of the public were quick to point out, removing another "employer" from the Center doesn't seem to make sense. Public Works currently has ten (10) employees and they certainly patronize businesses in the Center. Would they do the same if located on Ruddy Ferry Road? Also, does it make sense to create another vacancy in the Center. The current town garage property has potential for re-use, but it is limited if the Rossi property remains in its current condition.

Based on my experience and training I questioned –

- *Is Ruddy Ferry Road the best location for a new town garage? Is it the best place to spend \$6 million of public funds?*

Regarding the Rossi Property

The Rossi's moved their business, and over 100 employees, out of town in the mid 1990's. For twenty five (25) years the Rossi property has sat in its current condition. To think it will change by market forces alone is wrong. The Rossi's are businessmen, not developers, and they receive a good income from the property. As they have stated to me, there is simply no incentive to change. If the town moves out of its rental space they would simply rent to other contractors for heavy equipment and materials storage.

Using public investment as a stimulus to leverage other opportunities and achieve town goals is certainly a well understood principal. A well know example is the Police Station in Middletown. In 1993 there was no one interested in investing in downtown Middletown. A new police station was desperately needed and many argued for a suburban location outside of the downtown. The Mayor rightfully made the stimulus argument and the voters supported a carefully designed police station on Main Street. The amount of investment that followed was staggering.

An investment in a new town garage on a portion of the Rossi property would represent a stimulus towards revitalization. To eliminate a legal non-conforming use, which could legally get much worse, would be very beneficial for the Center.

Upgrading the existing buildings on the Rossi site for use as a town garage with new siding, paint, adding windows, doors, cupolas and landscaping would make them attractive elements in the Center. It would bring better definition to Dublin Hill Road with curbing, street trees and perhaps a multi-use trail leading from the Center to the Cove and on to the former rail line and the river, another goal in the POCD.

Equally important is the town's control of the front two (2) acres on Saybrook Road. To get rid of all the construction equipment strewn all over the front half of the Rossi property, grade it, seed it and make it attractive would be the first step. The property includes two (2) historic brick buildings. As revitalization proceeds, new uses will develop in the two existing buildings. Eventually new construction will occur along Saybrook Road. This will help enclose the streetscape between Rossi and HES. Then, as developers realize Higganum Center can support new construction, more new construction will occur.

Some have argued we need all five (5) acres for development. They say - "We shouldn't waste 3 acres for a town garage." Higganum Center is a very small and hasn't had any new development in many years. To think there will be new development to fill five (5) acres, even in the long term, is mis-guided.

On a more practical note, as thirty (30) years of stalled revitalization efforts have shown, there is not sufficient on-site septic capacity to support five (5) acres of new development at the village scale and density the town desires.

But no doubt the Center needs new development that adds density. What does exist are the adjacent soils at HES. Those soils can support new development at a village scale and density on the front two (2) acres and still leave capacity for other development in the Center.

Conclusion

Placement of the new Town Garage on the Rossi property is clearly consistent with and will help achieve the goals in the POCD and this conclusion in the POCD:

"Higganum Center is a historic and symbolic focal point of the town, and future development and infrastructure investments need to maintain and improve the vitality of the village.