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**Subject:** Feedback on Kelley's Corner proposal

To the Acton 20/20 committee:

Thanks for holding the public forum on the Kelley's Corner redevelopment idea. I wanted to expand further on my public remarks last night.

After listening to the many comments, I agree that one could imagine a scenario where this type of work would make sense and I would favor proceeding. Here are some examples:

1. We have a large plot of land (public or private) that is a blight and needs to be torn down and redeveloped. What should we do? (think West Hartford project)
2. We have a large piece of public land that we could turn into something special. What should we do with it, and should it be part of something bigger? (Think Morrison Farm reuse)
3. We have decided to purchase private land and have a huge pot of money specifically for this purpose. Now where do we want to invest this and what land could we buy to redevelop or preserve? (think Simeone-Caouette land)

I do not believe any of these scenarios now exist with the present proposal for Kelley's Corner. Instead, we have a well-developed intersection of two major roads and private land-ownership, mostly developed, all around.

We seem to have no idea if redevelopment would work in this specific location. There is a lot of traffic which is either moving fast or gridlocked, and there are no funds to purchase private land. We don't know if the roads are wide enough to accommodate significant expansion for sidewalks and parking. And as several speakers pointed out, you are trying to create a solution when the problem you want to solve has not been defined. I heard one panelist say that the changes would mostly be cosmetic and zoning, and another say we should not rule out trying to recreate a town center, like in downtown Concord. These two visions are simply not compatible.

The idea of citizen participation in creating a design only makes sense in one of the scenarios above. As our town planner pointed out, citizens will be making suggestions that the experts will turn down for various technical reasons. This will waste months of public input and meetings and prove very frustrating. Brainstorming is excellent when you have a blank canvas, but it won't work in this situation.

My major concern is that if you don't present a possible solution, you can't test it against better or worse alternatives and decide if the solution, even as presented, makes sense. There has to be an overarching goal or plan, a particular vision that people buy into and are working toward. To commit significant funds without such a vision will probably mean wasted money.

For example, there needs to be a significant buffer between vehicular moving traffic and people using sidewalks. Are the roads wide enough, and are the landowners willing, to create an additional **30 or 40 feet** of width on all the roads in the area to accommodate parking and a bike lane? If not, then we may have an insurmountable problem. And if commuting traffic is negatively affected, then the solution might make things worse for many residents and travelers.

Another issue is parking. There are several businesses in the area with severe parking constraints right now. An expansion will not create economic growth if people can't park to shop. Again, there needs to be at least one possible solution presented for this problem before we start spending real money.

I also feel that you asked the last Town Meeting to approve the concept of redeveloping Kelley's Corner. You were given that limited mandate. Now, you should be coming back with a possible plan, and not a request for a lot more money for further study and engineering designs (!) but no specific vision of the outcome. Having specific engineering drawings like those presented last night when there is no overall plan is ludicrous.

But my main concern is that I simply don't think it is realistic to have a solution for this intersection at a reasonable price. Until we know the full cost and scope of the possible work, it doesn't make sense to proceed with significant expenditures. What if the vision we want is going to cost \$25 million? Or \$50 million? Will taxpayers want to commit that level of funding for this project?

As several speakers pointed out, the town already has significant knowledge of this intersection. We also have professional planners on staff and many enthusiastic volunteers. We have motivated private developers. My suggestion is that this group of experts first decide if our limited resources should be focused on this intersection when there are many others in town that might offer much better potential for a "town gathering space" and many fewer constraints.

And if Kelley's Corner again rises to the top of the list, then let this group of experts put together a proposal and get some rough cost estimates. There may be some things that can be changed without major cost; there may be some costs that will need to be considered (like purchasing private property), but all of this can be rolled into one potential vision. Then let people see, comment, review the budget, and vote on that vision. If the vision ends up changing in response to feedback, fine. But then voters have a plan and a budget. And if taxpayers decide that they want to go down the path towards a (say) \$25 million redevelopment plan, then so be it. Town Meeting should be voting to spend \$300,000 towards a \$25 m or \$50 m goal, not \$300,000 with no idea what lies ahead.

It is my belief that a proposed development plan for Kelley's Corner would have significant flaws and that the final costs would be prohibitive. Shouldn't voters know that before we spend \$300,000 to get started?

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Acton Forum