

## Town Manager's Report March 21, 2022

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### Excerpt:

#### **Annual Town Meeting – Article 8 – Fire Station – Land Acquisition**

Town staff continue to field questions from residents regarding the proposed Fire Station land acquisition, relative to the historic value of 139 The Great Road.

It is troubling to see the Historic District Commission (HDC) pre-judge a project which is not yet before them. HDC members continue to cite misinformation, share thoughts on other properties to be considered (an action outside their jurisdiction), and display outward and open hostility towards the overall project proposal.

At the Monday HDC meeting, a member of the Board suggested – in direct contradiction of previous arguments around demolition of properties in the Historic District being a last resort – that the Town purchase 30 North Road (Bedford Motel) by eminent domain and demolish that property instead. I should note, 30 North Road is within the Historic District

As you all know, land acquisition of the property at 30 North Road (Bedford Motel) would require eminent domain, and likely be as costly, if not more so, than 175 The Great Road (TD Bank.) Bedford Motel is just outside the response time radius, lowering the Fire Department's ability to quickly respond to East Bedford/Rt. 3. Additionally, the Bedford Motel was purchased in 2019 by real estate developers with the goal of building a mixed-income housing development. Bedford Motel current serves as home to several unhoused Bedford families, and individuals.

The language in the motion for Article 8 for Town Meeting makes clear that the Town is acquiring 139 The Great Road for the sole purpose of building a Fire Station. The unique property acquisition designation, and legal procurement path, was based solely on the proposal to acquire the property for purposes of building a Fire Station. The Town is not buying 139 the Great Road to stop future development, and/or to allow direct abutters, or the Historic District Commission, to control private development.

I remain hopeful that three members of an appointed, volunteer Board do not end up delaying a desperately needed project, resulting in profound impacts to Fire Department staffing and recruitment, while also costing the Town an additional \$10 million dollars in land acquisition costs.

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Comments based upon the results of my research::

The “open hostility” throughout this report is hard to miss. The concern over demolishing a building only nominally part of the Historic District (by virtue of having been built behind the Pollard Tavern, which was condemned for safety reasons) in favor of tearing down one of the District's most visible sites is strange.

Whether or not the Bedford Motel would require eminent domain was never discussed in public, so it is unclear why she stated that it would. But the statement that it would “likely be as costly, if not more so, than 175 The Great Road (TD Bank.) is farfetched.

She added that the “Bedford Motel is just outside the response time radius” but the response time *radius* refers to the consultant driven *circle* that marks the areas beyond 55 Great Road that would not add more than one minute in response time to any part of Bedford.” And 30 North Road is inside that circle. The term does not refer to the arbitrary Loomis Street to Willson Park.

More than three years later, the remarks regarding the 2019 real estate developers appear to be speculation, but the fact that Bill Moonan visited the management of the motel the weekend before Town Meeting is not. He was told that the Town had never approached them and that they would be interested in discussing the possibilities of a sale.

“Bedford Motel current serves as home to several unhoused Bedford families, and individuals.” The need to find other accommodations is hardly justification for tearing down a prominent part of the Historic District instead.

The next statement nicely summarizes her intent to strongarm the HDC: “I remain hopeful that three members of an appointed, volunteer Board (*an apparent attempt to threaten the commissioners’ re-appointment*) do not end up delaying a desperately needed project, resulting in profound impacts to Fire Department staffing and recruitment (*due only to the irresponsible solution she was forcing on the town*) while also costing the Town an additional \$10 million dollars (*transparently disingenuous*) in land acquisition costs.”

“I encourage you all to watch the most recent Bedford Historic District Commission meeting.”

The Zoom link is inactive, but a report in *The Bedford Citizen* on March 3, 2022, shows not hostility, but rather, a clear intention on the commissioners’ part to uphold their sworn duty to protect the Bedford Historic District from depredation. She may have been overreacting due to the excellent reasons the commissioners cited for considering 30 North Road as she perhaps saw her spurious rationale crumbling. It is important to note that prefacing the statement with “as you all know” is a further indication that information was being discussed and deliberated without ever making it to an open meeting.