

Proposed Bike Path is our own mini Big Dig

The Standard-Times on May 16, 2002

As a member of the Mattapoissett Bicycle Path Study Committee, I have investigated the project at length, and I want to take this opportunity to share with my fellow taxpayers what I have found about the proposed path and its effects on the town.

I will not argue whether the bike path will be good for the town, or whether there will be increased criminal and deviant activity because of it; those subjects have been discussed at length with each side clearly stating their case. In my opinion, the deciding issue about the bike path is simple: "Can the taxpayers afford it?"

There are some basic numbers that have been circulated for years now about the costs of the bike path, and the main problem with them is simply that: they have been around for years. These numbers were inaccurate when they were calculated, and now they are out of date too!

The Bicycle Path Study Committee has stated over and over that the majority of the costs to the taxpayers will be the money spent for the land takings. The federal government and the Commonwealth will take care of the rest. Although there are a number of other costs the town will be held accountable for, I will only speak about the land takings.

The figure of \$200,000 has been calculated for the combined 4 phases. This number is based on professional appraisals done on behalf of the town, but the numbers simply do not have grounds in reality.

The payments being offered to the abutting landowners as a result of those appraisals amount to just about \$10,000 per acre. My tax bill indicates my dirt is worth more than that; check yours.

Can you really buy land in Mattapoissett for \$10,000 per acre? I think not, and neither will any judge! Each landowner has the right to challenge the amount being offered to it by taking the town to court or arbitration. Any settlements or judgments rendered against the town must be paid by Mattapoissett taxpayers, no federal money for those. All lawyer fees to fight each case must be paid by Mattapoissett taxpayers.

Town Counsel assured everyone at the May 7th meeting that there was little chance of any lawsuits being filed or bearing fruit for the abutters. Didn't he say the same thing about Paul Lopes? Wasn't he involved in the decision to do the press release that the Attorney General is now investigating?

With over 75 abutting properties, it would not take long for the towns "share" to reach mini Big-Dig levels. If each owner gets awarded a paltry \$10,000 from arbitration, a small figure in today's world, suddenly the taxpayers will be burdened with a bill of nearly Three-Quarters of a Million Dollars!

In fact, the YMCA, equipped with its influence, better attorneys, and plenty of time could easily be awarded \$750,000 alone. Oh, and don't forget the attorney costs too! That sure seems like a lot of money to spend on a place to ride bikes.

Perhaps there is some logic in this: bicycles will be all we can afford for transportation by the time we get done paying for the bike path.

Or perhaps they are trying to make those bicycle seats more comfortable by making our wallets thinner for us. The genuine cost to the taxpayers is a complex calculation, but the big picture is easy to see; this project is simply too expensive for a small town with big bills to pay already.

This simply is not the right time to begin such a costly luxury. We simply cannot afford it. I urge you to seize the opportunity afforded you at town meeting: take back the money previously passed for this project, and stop this before it is too late.

GARY CUNNINGHAM
Mattapoisett Bicycle Path Study Committee