

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, April 14, 2025 5:54 PM
To: 'selectboard@needhamma.gov' <selectboard@needhamma.gov>
Subject: Concerns regarding Envision Needham

Dear Members of the Select Board,

I am writing as a resident of Needham and a strong supporter of the town's small business community to share my thoughts and concerns regarding the *Envision Needham* project.

While I appreciate and support the town's efforts to thoughtfully plan for future growth and development, I believe it is essential that we ensure the needs and voices of our small business owners are fully considered in the process. These businesses are the heart of our community—they bring character to our town, provide local jobs, and create the vibrant neighborhoods we all value.

My concerns stem from the likelihood that all aspects of the *Envision Needham* plan, particularly those related to parking and traffic congestion will significantly impact all of our small business owners. Residents already express frustration about limited parking and slow-moving traffic in the center of town; any development plan must consider how these issues, if left unaddressed or worsened, will deter customers and negatively impact our local economy.

Additionally, I noticed that the *Envision Needham* working group does not currently include a representative from the restaurant community, a small business owner or a commercial property owner based in the town center. These perspectives are essential to creating a balanced and effective plan. Without their direct input, the resulting plans overlook our small business owners' day-to-day realities and long-term needs.

I respectfully urge the Select Board to pause before moving forward with the current proposed plans, and actively engage with our small business community before blueprints are finalized. Transparent communication, inclusive decision-making, and practical support for existing local businesses must be a priority if we are to maintain the unique charm and economic health of Needham.

Thank you for your time, your commitment to our town, and your attention to this important matter. I look forward to seeing Needham grow in a way that reflects the values and needs of all its residents and stakeholders.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]



(no subject)

Mon, Apr 14, 2025 at 7:46 AM

I stand with many business owners of Needham and am asking you to amend the "Envision" plans that are underway to "pilot" in the months to come.

Business owners clearly oppose this plan. They are the stakeholders, who were only recently informed of the Envision proposal and are deeply concerned about the negative impact on regions / local traffic, safety issues as well as the viability of their businesses and community.

I stand with them, and would like to see a plan that encompasses the following:

Preserve the traffic flow based on the reality that cars are the primary mode of transportation, not bicycles or pedestrians. One lane of traffic would pose a significant bottleneck.

Preserve street side parking; this is already an issue in town as we lost spots with the last renovation.

Rectify the outdated drainage system

Enhance/improve the hazardous sidewalks and install proper crosswalks at Pickering and Comella's.

It's preposterous to create a plan that is bike-centric. This is New England, where we have cold weather for 8 months a year! Furthermore, I can't imagine our aging seniors will be riding their bikes to town center.

The "Envision Plan" is ill conceived. It doesn't matter if it's been developed by outside consultants or has been "in the works for years". Why hasn't the town gone door-to-door to our business owners for input? Where was their representation on this committee? I am mystified how we fail to let our common sense guide us. Single lanes of traffic with 18 wheelers and delivery trucks dropping off supplies for 45 minutes at a time to area businesses will surely cause traffic buildups. Has anyone considered what single lanes would pose to emergency vehicles? When I see these kinds of plans move forward, that defy logic and are void of input from the crucial stakeholders, I lose confidence in the judgement of our town leadership.

If residents AND business owners are both against reduced lanes, I simply don't see how the town can move forward with this plan. Listen to what the business owners are saying and put an end to this plan.

Sincerely,
Christine

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Thu, May 22, 2025 at 2:46 PM

Subject: Concerns Regarding the Envision Project – Request for Reconsideration

To: <ILmiller@needhamma.gov>, <selectboard@needhamma.gov>

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to respectfully express my concerns about the Envision project and to urge you to reconsider its implementation.

Based on personal experience in my hometown of Short Hills/Millburn, NJ, I witnessed a similar initiative that unfortunately had a profoundly negative impact on the local community. The town undertook changes that included widening sidewalks for pedestrian and bicycle use, reducing a two-lane main road to one lane, eliminating some parking spaces, and altering parking configurations. While well-intentioned, these changes significantly disrupted traffic flow and accessibility.

The consequences were immediate and far-reaching: foot traffic declined sharply during and after construction, emergency and delivery vehicles faced serious navigation challenges, and local businesses—particularly small, independently owned ones—suffered greatly. Many were forced to close. Ultimately, the town reversed most of the changes within two years, but not before facing community backlash and legal disputes.

Given these outcomes, I am deeply concerned that the Envision project may lead to similar unintended consequences. I also understand that cities like Boston and Cambridge have paused or halted comparable initiatives, particularly considering our region's often cold and rainy climate, which limits bicycle use for much of the year.

I appreciate the efforts to improve our community and encourage sustainable transportation, but I believe this particular plan warrants further review and community input. I sincerely hope you will take these considerations into account.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Warm regards,

Donna [REDACTED]

Hi, my name is Janet [REDACTED]. I've lived in Needham for almost 30 years and love this town.

I am not usually the vocal one in my family and public speaking is not a comfortable space for me, but this project and the direction its taken, without proper input from the real stakeholders in this town, is egregious to me.

I have followed the rules, providing feedback properly as requested by Envision Needham, but it seems to have been overlooked. I was one of the 154 folks that took the survey (less than 1/2% of our population), I attended the MPCC meeting virtually and logged into an app where I provided feedback real time and I met with a member of the selectboard to discuss my concerns. But it seems like my direct anecdotal information was not considered in any way. So here goes.

For years I have walked to Needham from my house 4-5X a week. At different times of the day, on both weekdays and weekends. A Biker passes me maybe, once a month. It is so infrequent that it in no way does it warrant narrowing our streets with a bike lane to accommodate such a tiny segment of the population. Some of the feedback, from that less than 1/2%, states that if our downtown was nicer, bikers and walkers would spend more time and money there. I take issue with that. Although some of our sidewalks are in need of repair and are not super wide, they've never been a deterrent for me shopping downtown. The folks that live here, that are waiting for change, to take advantage of our great downtown stores, are missing out now and probably will never take advantage of them.

Another premise of the group is that we have cars speeding through downtown. I have not seen that, it just doesn't happen...there are too many lights for cars to drive remotely fast in our town center.

Another major issue is how the group really digs in about the abundance of parking we have here in Needham and actually claimed that maybe the residents don't know how to read the signs correctly and if they did, they'd know that more parking existed. This is entirely incorrect. If you want to park in Needham at night, on the weekend or during the Summer there is no problem. But, During the week, during business hours it is often very much of a challenge. The CVS lot is often full. Metered parking is often full. People always want to compare us to Wellesley center or Newton Center....they both have ample parking, automated meters and most importantly some 3-hour spots. Needham does not have 3-hour spots, that is a problem. If you want people to lunch downtown and then do errands, that needs to be accounted for and we currently don't have that option.

Envision Needham is a brilliant name; It evokes a vision of flowers, trees, benches and vitality. Sadly, it seems that this is not what you all had in mind

So to be clear:

It is not my vision to hurt our businesses

It is not my vision to build bike lanes to cater to a very small segment of our population

It is not my vision, to narrow our streets so that folks from neighboring towns won't want to visit us

It is not my vision for adjacent neighborhoods to bear the brunt of the overflow traffic that will exist with a road diet

It is not my vision to ignore the banners that are hanging downtown that say "dine local shop local"..that you can see from Town Hall

Please don't make changes just for change sake. Please take to heart what works for all of our residents!

May 27, 2025

TO ENVISION COMMITTEE, MOBILITY COMMITTEE, SELECT BOARD, FINANCE COMMITTEE
AND ALL TOWN MEETING MEMBERS THROUGH LOUISE MILLER, TOWN CLERK:

While it seems that the majority of Needham taxpayers and Needham business owners are opposed to the Envision plan, it is time to take this to a town wide vote. We do not believe that any more time, energy or funds should be devoted to Envision at all.

The public meeting at town hall on May 13th, brought forth hundreds of those opposed to the plan. The meeting at the DPW admin building on Monday the 19th only allowed those on the Envision committee the opportunity to speak. We learned that six months worth of meetings had taken place without taking minutes and it was disclosed that most, if not all meetings, failed to reach a quorum. Since no minutes were taken previously, it was suggested that the summary of those meetings that had only been recently submitted should be approved by the Envision Committee. It was impossible to do so, because most committee members had never seen the summary and had not attended those six meetings. This indicates that decisions were made with only a partial vote since quorum was not met.

It became clear during Monday night's meeting that the grant for which we applied included bike lanes and single lanes for cars so when we received the grant for \$300K+, it was stipulated that bike lanes and single traffic lanes in the square were mandatory. The only way to eliminate this would be to submit a new grant request. We have already spent approximately \$100K for the Apex design from "Chapter 90" funds which were accumulated over the last several years and intended for road improvements. The scope of the Envision project could cost between \$10 and \$20 million, to be funded by Needham taxpayers, so not receiving \$330K is a drop in the bucket as compared to the cost of the entire project. Please keep in mind that we also have many millions of dollars (\$300-\$400 million or more) slated for major school and DPW projects in the near future. Proceeding with the Envision project will impose an unnecessary burden on every Needham taxpayer, including Seniors and low income families, following on the tail of tax hikes due to reassessments. As Needham businesses are finally recuperating from Covid losses, it is unbearable to those owners in the square to deal with major road upheaval for many months or years, never mind removing all parking spaces in front of several key businesses.

It appears that Apex was contracted to design plans without seeking the input from local business owners, never mind adjacent communities who have felt the negative impact of "road dieting" and lived to regret it. Were the Needham Fire and Police departments interviewed by Apex? In light of the 2 fires at Harvey's Hardware and the fire that destroyed the Kingsbury building over the years as well as emergency vehicles frequently going through the square to go to the hospital, or those leaving the public safety building on Chestnut St., how will emergency vehicles function with traffic jams caused by delivery trucks or motorists double parked? I understand that Apex has not done a parking study even though this project plans to remove parking spaces on Great Plain Avenue.

Putting the Envision plan on hold for 6 months gives the Town plenty of time to hold a special election.

This is too large of a project to jump into with both feet when we need to get the support of our businesses, our emergency personnel and our voters. All of the Envision members are not up to speed on what has transpired in the last six months and voters and businesses were blindsided by recent disclosures. Even Envision committee members admitted that they had no idea what had been going on. A few people on the Select Board are questioning the process and how the public was left out and the sheer magnitude of the project and its high costs.

We have a lot more to lose by proceeding with the Envision project than to putting it out to a town wide vote. This is affecting all of us just the way the MBTA Basic Plan did. Let's find out what people really want in OUR town. Let's VOTE!"

Respectfully,

Jean S. and James [REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
To: mcooley@needhamma.gov; KKeane@needhamma.gov; hfrail@needhamma.gov; cdowd@needhamma.gov; jlevy@needhamma.gov
Subject: Proposed Road Diet in Needham
Date: Tuesday, May 13, 2025 11:09:41 AM

My name is Jim [REDACTED] and I am a resident and business owner in West Roxbury. I am also a former resident of Needham, having lived at the corner of Warren Street and Dedham Avenue for several years. I still travel to and through Needham frequently. I am writing to share my experience of what the "road diet" has done to the West Roxbury community.

As you are probably aware, a road diet was implemented in West Roxbury a few years back. This despite the opposition of many residents and a majority of the business community.

The impact to the businesses has been significant. Most retail stores and restaurants have seen a decline in customers.

Traffic congestion on the one lane in each direction is significant, especially during the morning and afternoon commutes and when schools are dismissed.

The most significant impact is to the residential neighborhoods. Increased congestion on Centre Street has caused drivers to divert to the bordering streets.

I live on one of those streets and I can attest that the increase of vehicles speeding through my neighborhood has been dramatic.

Please understand, I am not attempting to interfere with your town's business. I just wanted to share the real circumstances that are occurring in West Roxbury.

Thank you.

Respectfully,

Jim [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Hi All,

Thanks for letting me speak tonight.

This is about the Envision project, specifically about the process.

I've attended many of the meetings in person, otherwise I attend via zoom.

In each of the meetings, the words "outreach, input and engagement are mentioned numerous times. Always in the context of the committee looking for and encouraging input and then touting the outreach efforts both past and upcoming.

From my vantage point, this is not true. I have emailed the committee with my thoughts, opinions, and anecdotal information and it has 100% not been acknowledged. I did not receive an automated response saying it was received, I do not hear from anyone on the committee that its been received, and it is not mentioned or read in the committee meetings. I can reach no other conclusion but that, they are not interested in input.

Regarding outreach, I think there is some confusion regarding what that means...outreach is bringing information to the people, not expecting people to attend events about a project that they don't even know about .

- A harvest fair with maybe 200 folks stopping by
- Open houses with 300 or so attending
- An initial questionnaire with maybe 200 participants

Is not outreach. And my guess is there is duplication of people participating in the events just mentioned.

I've been screaming from the rooftops that most of Needham's residents do not know what envision is, or they think it's a small beautification project. They do not know that this is a large capital project that will forever change the driving, walking, and shopping in our downtown, for better or worse, and they deserve to know.

In the past year, I've received 4 great examples of outreach from Needham.

- First was The water quality report alert
- Then the Watering restrictions
- Then the Potential Pollard Project
- and most recently the Schools performance report

All came via mail to my home. The first three were glossy, oversized postcards that were easy to read and were read. That's outreach

And the outreach can not just be the questionnaire without proper background information first. That's backwards. First educate the residents about the project, (with all of its variables), and then send out a questionnaire or QR code to the questionnaire.. An example of not educating residents first is..... at the Harvest fair, the committee asks residents what is most important to them and then to affix a smiley face next to that category on a chart. One of the choices on the chart was Safety.

Who wouldn't pick safety, But if you are in the know, safety to the committee means narrower streets... The general public doesn't know this yet.

Safety shouldn't even be on the chart, safety is a given. No one is anti safety.

This isn't complicated, I don't know why there is such a resistance about making our taxpayers aware of this project and its intentions.

I'm afraid that if we don't, we are going to end up in the same situation we did with the MBTA project and no one wants that.

Thank you



Good evening select board. Thank you for allowing me to speak.

My wife Caren and I moved to Needham nearly 40 years ago, and we moved our Copley Motorcars showroom from Copley Square 20 years ago. To say we love Needham is understatement, and this is why I have become alarmed at so many issues as I watch the Envision project unfold.

I am alarmed that some members of this board along with some members of the Envision committee are actually advocating to reduce non-resident traffic coming into our beautiful town. This is utterly shocking that the heads of this board and the DPW are recommending a two lane road diet in an effort to create enough downtown traffic so that Waze and Google Maps suggest drivers avoid Needham. This is an insult to every Needham business owner and resident, and all should be alarmed. These elected officials and DPW road diet proponents are hell-bent on eliminating what they term as “regional cut-through traffic.” This regional cut-through traffic is exactly why our Town of Needham is so wonderful, and these arteries are the pipeline that bring commuters, shoppers, and restaurant goers from neighboring towns. Needham has Route 135 and Highland Avenue. Wellesley has Route 135 and Route 16. Natick has Route 135 and Route 27. Newton has Center Street, Beacon Street, and Commonwealth Avenue. And what do all these cut-throughs have in common – they all handle the cars that bring the folks to town centers to keep them vibrant. We should be proud that our Town of Needham is a destination and be welcoming to all.

I am alarmed at the negative discourse emanating from some members of this board along with some members of the Envision committee who are favoring their personal road diet and bike lane agendas, and who are surprised at the push-back they are encountering from others on the board, the committee, and residents. It seems to me that certain select board members, certain Envision committee members, and the Envision consultant Apex, are all working in concert to push this project forward in their vision, and not those of business owners or the vast majority of residents, and only giving lip service to those who do not agree with their road diet and bike lane plans. The Envision committee is meant to be a collaborative effort and after watching several meetings, I see little collaboration, and get the sense that Apex and the DPW are running this project and the committee. Their lack of preparedness is alarming with their reports, studies, answers, proper survey, public engagement, all delayed to the point where I feel there is absolutely no way for this board to vote on a plan in December. Doing so would be negligent and irresponsible.

I am alarmed at the confusing, incomplete, and amateurish survey that Apex created for the Harvest Fair. I am also alarmed that Apex, certainly biased of their own work and recommendations, were the ones to create and represent the survey to residents at the Harvest Fair.

I am alarmed that certain members of the Board, Envision committee, and Mobility committee are unhappy with the Not Our Vision signs that are being shown in numerous businesses throughout town. These very signs are the result of the Board's and the Committee's lack of transparency early on in the Envision project, and are part of the reason that more and more businesses and residents are gaining a voice in the Envision discussion.

I am alarmed that certain members of this board, certain members of the Envision committee, and the consultant Apex, are not open to the idea of keeping our four lanes through the center of town. By choosing one of the two lane road diets, Apex, the Board, and the DPW will indeed get the traffic congestion that they are looking to create.

I am alarmed a project under the Mobility committee's purview is as I understand it proposing to eliminate all parking on the east side of Highland Avenue from Great Plain to the High School and replacing with a bike lane. While this is not a component of the Envision project, everything affects everything and the loss of this significant amount of parking will be a burden not only on those looking to park, but on all of our local businesses.

I am so alarmed with the entire Envision process that I feel we should halt the project altogether and hire a new and unbiased consultant, one that is not promoting the personal road diet and bike lane agendas of some on this board, the various committees and the DPW. While the project is halted, we can tend to the more immediate needs of replacing damaged sidewalks, and increasing pedestrian and crosswalk safety.

Thank you again.

Stu Carpenter

