

HALLS ROAD IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the town considering changes to Halls Road?

In 2015 community members asked for safer pedestrian passage to and from Halls Road. The Halls Road Improvements Committee (HRIC) was formed to address this issue. After several public meetings the town heard that townspeople wanted more than sidewalks and lighting. They wanted the town's commercial area to look more like Old Lyme, to have apartments for older and younger citizens, and to be a more attractive town center than the existing strip centers.

2. What is the Halls Road Master Plan and why was it developed?

A formal Master Plan is an important tool in seeking grants for work on Halls Road, for encouraging investment, and for setting broad goals designed to insure the future of Old Lyme's main shopping district. It covers two main aspects of change:

a. *Public Improvements:*

Paid for by the town with the help of grants from the state, these include creating sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, cross walks, and a new pedestrian/cycling bridge over the Lieutenant River at the old bridge abutments.

b. *Private Investments:*

Private investors created the existing Halls Road, and they will create any future Halls Road. The town's role was and is to guide private investment into the channels the town wants and needs. The Master Plan envisions a walkable, bike-able shopping street in a mixed-use neighborhood. This is the most supportive environment for 21st-century retail. It is also attractive for those who want a convenient, walkable neighborhood with smaller-scale housing. None of this is allowed under current zoning (C-30S). The town needs a new, alternative zoning to allow these changes, and to encourage the private investment that will realize the Master Plan.

3. How was this plan developed?

- a. Initially, the Yale Urban Design Workshop did valuable CAD drawings of existing conditions and held two public workshops on town planning. At their departure, it became a home-grown process of creating a vision of the best future Halls Road – one prosperous for businesses and amenities that serve the town. Mixed use, retail visibility, and attractiveness were key goals, as was a safe pedestrian connection to Lyme Street. Volunteers further adapted the “vision statement” in wide-ranging conversations around town.
- b. In an Old Lyme EDC economic development study, Advance CT conducted surveys and workshops to identify community needs across Old Lyme. The future of Halls Road figured prominently in town-wide discussions, which significantly influenced planning.
- c. The Town hired BSC Group to help create a formal master plan based on community input and town studies. The plan was presented in multiple community venues.

4. What were the main findings that informed the master plan? In order of community preference:

- a. Any new construction should reflect Old Lyme's small town character.
- b. Create a new pedestrian bridge to make a safe connection between Halls Road and the arts, historic and municipal districts on Lyme Street.
- c. Businesses would rather be up on a walkable street than be tucked away in a strip center.
- d. Older citizens want to stay in Old Lyme. Today, they must leave Old Lyme to find smaller-scale housing options.

5. How was this master plan presented?

HRIC held two open houses at Memorial Town Hall to talk with all comers about the Master Plan. HRIC published the plan on the town website, publicized it, and took the plan to the community with multiple presentations to Commissions, community organizations, and local businesses.

6. How would the public improvements be made and who pays for them?

The town is responsible for public improvements and their cost. The town has applied for grants that can cover a significant part of the costs, and will seek additional grants.

- a. The work along Halls Road requires approval from the CT Department of Transportation (DOT). In July, 2022 the town applied for a grant under the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTCIP) which is overseen by CT DOT. Their review of this application is also DOT's formal approval of the proposed improvements.
- b. The pedestrian bridge and associated trails are not covered under the LOTCIP grant. The town hired AI Engineers (AIE) to create alternative designs for public review and town approval. AIE will then handle formal design and permitting, create construction documents (CDs), and oversee the construction bid process. The town has received grants to cover AIE's work, and will seek construction grants.

7. How will Private Investment be changed from a commercial only district?

The town has proposed an alternative to the current (and unchanged) C-30S zoning. The Halls Road Overlay District (HROD) gives owners the option to follow its less restrictive rules: In exchange for building a small amount of first-floor front retail along Halls Road, they can build multi-family residential above that, or elsewhere on their property; significantly increasing return per acre.

8. Will my taxes increase if the HROD is used?

No. Development on Halls Road brings new tax *revenue* to Old Lyme.

9. How does the HROD prevent overdevelopment?

HROD has explicit size and setback limitations. Parking, surface coverage, and infrastructure requirements each pose additional limitations on building size and density. Design Guidelines based on the varied styles of Lyme Street define what is and is not acceptable in the HROD. The Design Review Board works with developers to help them create successful projects in keeping with the Guidelines.

10. How will the Private Investment be done and who pays for it?

Owners and developers along Halls Road, whether in C-30S or HROD, are wholly responsible for their own properties and projects. That includes the costs of meeting regulatory requirements of all kinds, including those for water and septic. The town has no responsibility for these private expenses.

11. How does the overlay district affect Old Lyme's housing needs?

There is a pent-up need for smaller-scale housing in the town. Halls Road is a particularly attractive place for this, as it offers easy access to shops and the main town center.

12. Is affordable Housing required?

Yes, at the request of the Affordable Housing and Zoning Commissions, a modest percentage of new residential units in the district will be "affordable," as defined in CT statutes.

13. How will changes to Halls Road effect property values?

In general, the HROD allows greater returns per acre than C-30S. Being attractive to new investment makes *property values rise*.

14. Can Halls Road stay just like it is today?

No. The world changes, even if we do nothing. Under current market conditions, C-30S zoning and easy highway access drive new investment on Halls Road into highway services (gas stations, fast food, etc.). HROD offers better returns, and thus competition for truck stop developers. We can guide our own future, but we cannot stop change.

Thank you for taking the time to read this FAQ. If you have further questions or comments please contact us at: hallsroadcommittee@oldlyme-ct.gov