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September 8, 2011

Secretary Gregory Bialecki
Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
MassWorks Infrastructure Program
One Ashburton Place, Suite 2101
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Dear Secretary Bialecki:

This letter is in support of the Town of Athol's MassWorks application for the Traverse Street Infrastructure Project. This project is a significant parking, public safety and economic development project for the town and qualifies for the MassWorks program under the heading of Community Revitalization and Sustainable Development. This project is an integral part of ongoing redevelopment that is strategic and consistent with several sustainable development principles including concentrated development, contaminated site remediation, and improved access to community services and environmental resources. This project has many positive aspects, which include:

- The project will increase the quantity of available parking from 42 spaces to 71 spaces. These spaces will be used by people shopping in the downtown stores, families visiting the Athol Area YMCA, patrons of the Athol Public Library and residents for use of their Town Hall.
- The plan increases public safety by eliminating diagonal parking currently allowed on Traverse Street, which is currently a safety concern with children exiting vehicles and crossing the street to enter the YMCA and the library.
- The plan improves handicap access to the sidewalk outside both the YMCA and Traverse Street Cafe.
- The project reclaims and repurposes a previous hazardous site, planned jointly by Community Transit Services and the YMCA.

- The redevelopment of this intersection and parking will be of significant benefit for the shared vision of a “park and ride” location. The additional parking gained through this initiative would support the goal of commuter rail service extension to Athol.

This infrastructure project will have a significant regional impact, reaching beyond Athol’s downtown area. The increased parking will not only support a number of nearby restaurants, a corner market and visitors to the public library, but also greatly benefit the individuals and families served by the Athol Area YMCA. The only community center of its kind in our region, the YMCA currently serves over 3,000 residents annually from all nine towns of the North Quabbin region. Athol has also in the process of a significant library renovation and expansion project. Almost a quarter of current patrons come from other communities to access this wonderful resource. The new facility will be almost three times larger than the current library and offer even more community services that will be available to residents of the region.

This infrastructure project will support transit-oriented development, improving accessibility, connecting residents to jobs, education and services. Improving the quality and availability of parking on this site will better connect residents to both the local and regional transit systems. The site is already home to an important access point for the G-Link bus route, connecting residents to Greenfield, Gardner and beyond. Community Transit Services, which operates out of the adjacent Depot Building, provides dial-a-ride van service that expands the reach of the bus service to provide curbside service in Athol and Orange. There is a shared vision that commuter rail service will one day be extended west from Fitchburg to Athol, better connecting residents to employment opportunities in the communities to the east. The Depot Building is well positioned to serve as an intermodal transportation site to support this vision.

The parking currently available within the proposed redevelopment site is perhaps the most utilized in all of the downtown, contributing to one of the most congested and unsafe roadways in the area. By increasing the density of available parking, this redevelopment project will have a transformative impact on the vitality of the downtown, improving access, public safety and economic opportunity for residents of this region. I fully support this application, believing this project to have significant regional impact.

Sincerely,



DENISE ANDREWS

State Representative

Second Franklin District