

Connecting the Cobleigh Street parking lot with the Village Green Area

The proposed Chester Village Green zoning district is a unique among the surrounding towns. A generous swath of green lawn, reminiscent of early settlements' common pasture is surrounded by charming painted wooden buildings with businesses that serve the daily needs of townsfolk and the vacation needs of tourists. The area is an important economic engine for Chester. The Planning Commission wants to support small businesses located there now and facilitate more businesses locating there in the future. The Village Green area is fortunate in that there are over forty parking spaces available in front of the businesses along Common Street but talks with merchants on the green indicate that more parking would be helpful.

Peter Hudkins and Cathy Hasbrouck undertook to count the number of spaces available on Common, Main, Cobleigh and School Streets and on the parcels themselves. They also counted parking required by dwelling units, business employees and projected customers and plotted likely parking requirements throughout the course of the day and night. They concluded that parking needs could be accommodated if the Cobleigh Street parking area could be connected in some manner to the Green area, with its currently existing on- and off-street parking.

This proposal could change the usual zoning bylaw parking requirements for the proposed Village Green zoning district. Zoning bylaws generally calculate parking needs for employees, residents, and business customers. The Planning Commission is concerned that such a calculation and requirement would stifle business growth. Improvements to the Cobleigh Street lot could allow us to remove the traditional zoning requirements for parking and possibly replace it with a provision that ensures spaces on Common Street are not taken up by employees and tenants during critical business hours.

The Cobleigh Street lot belongs to the Town of Chester, as do the streets surrounding the Green. While it is possible to walk down Cobleigh Street from the parking area to Main Street and follow the sidewalk along Main Street to the Green, the distance to the Green is much shorter if a person walks along the edge of the athletic field and turns left into the Main Street Parking Association lot behind Meditrina and Six Loose Ladies. There is actually an informal path there now:



The Planning Commission wants to know if the Select Board is interested in crafting a solution that involves more formally integrating the Cobleigh Street lot and athletic fields with the Green area. Topics for discussion could include:

- Placing directional municipal parking signs on Main, Cobleigh and Common Streets
- Paving the entire parking area (possibly shim coating the former rink surface to resolve a drainage issue)
- Shifting the storage shed to allow better traffic circulation and to free up parking spaces
- Striping the parking spaces to maximize capacity
- Lighting the parking lot (and removing old rink lights)
- Constructing a lighted walkway from the Cobleigh parking lot to Common Street
- Providing security cameras
- Coordinating use of the Cobleigh lot with the Recreation Department
- Considering changes to the town's parking ordinance
- Integrating the Cobleigh lot into a broader plan for Chester village as a walkable community



Ice rink surface that doesn't drain storm water



Shed to be moved



More space available in the gravel area of the lot



Abandoned light pole and electric meter