

Avon to hold referendum on Old Farms Road reconstruction

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FULL TEXT

On Dec. 14, Avon voters will decide whether or not to approve the allocation of nearly \$5.5 million of grant funding to relocate and reconstruct a portion of the north/south section of Old Farms Road.

The town clerk's office will begin distributing absentee ballots for the town referendum this Wednesday and will continue until the absentee ballot submission deadline at 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 13. Voting by machine will occur between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 14, at the Avon Senior Center on 635 West Avon Road.

The question on the ballot will read: "Shall the Resolution Appropriating \$5,459,458 Of Grant Funding For Costs Related To The Relocation And Reconstruction Of A Section Of Old Farms Road In The Town Of Avon be approved? [YES/NO]"

The proposed project, which was approved by the town's Inland Wetlands and Planning and Zoning commissions in July, would reconstruct Old Farms Road from the Thompson Road intersection to 1,700 feet north of the Scoville Road intersection.

The existing roadway would move 180 feet to the west and include a roundabout connecting Old Farms Road and Scoville Road and a new three way stop at the Thompson Road intersection.

Among other updates, the project calls for the construction of a bituminous trail for cyclists and pedestrians. The multi-use trail would start at the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail on Scoville Road and run alongside the Scoville and Old Farms roadways until reaching the Thompson road intersection.

According to a Town explainer of the project, the purpose of the change is to improve safety.

"The area experiences a large number of accidents when compared to similar corridors in the state," the explainer reads. "Of all the accidents recorded for the corridor, approximately 91% have factors associated with the conditions of the roadway. The narrow roadway combined with the roadside features confine motorists in the travel lane, thereby eliminating opportunities for accident avoidance. Larger vehicles, including school buses and fire apparatus, experience difficulties navigating the roadway due to the sharp curvature, and narrow lanes."

In order to preserve the rural feel of Old Farms Road, the speed limit would remain at 25 miles per hour, road widening, street lighting and tree removal would be minimal, and steel-backed wooden guard rails would sit flush with the road edge instead of metal beams, according to the plans.

Avon Old Farms School and the town have agreed to a land swap to complete the project with no cost for the property exchange.

To date the town has spent \$360,000 funding the project design, attorney fees and referendum costs.

The state approved two grants from the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program and Community Connectivity Grant program totaling \$5,459,458, which would fund the entirety of the project's construction.

The town referendum is required to use the state funds for the project.

If approved, Avon would start public bidding on the project in early 2023 with the hope of awarding a contract in February or March and starting construction in April or May of 2023.

During the projected 18 months of construction, the existing Old Farms roadway would remain open for drivers.

The town said it will "provide advance notice of any anticipated disturbances on its website and by placing warning signage in the area," when the new Old Farms Road is connected to the existing road at the end of the project.

Plans are also underway for a second phase of reconstruction from the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail at Thompson Road, through the Thompson Road and Old Farms Road intersection, and ending on Old Farms Road 225 feet west of the Tillotson Road and Old Farms Road intersection.

That project, which is still in the design phase and does not yet have a final cost estimate, would replace two bridges, construct wider lanes, and include another multi-use trail that would connect to the trail proposed in phase one and Avon's larger trail network in the Fisher Meadows Recreation area.

According to the town, the state has committed a \$3.6 million grant from the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program for phase two, but Avon anticipates that the town would need to provide additional funding. Phase two would require a future referendum for approval. According to the explainer, federal regulating agencies "have determined that the two projects stand alone. One does not require the other to be viable."

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