

Comment on Changing the Ordinance with regard to Number of Permitted Gas Pumps

By William Stanton: Member of the Comprehensive Planning Committee

If the restrictions on the number of gas pumps allowed is lifted, two effects could result. One result could be that a full-service gas station and convenience store is built in the village at the present gas station and country store location. Second, a full-service gas station and convenience store could be built at the I-295 Interchange.

There are a couple of concerns with putting the gas station in the village. The first is aesthetics. A multi-pump gas station with a fully-lit canopy will likely detract from the historic character and charm of the village center. Even an attractive complex like Rusty's in Topsham is likely to have a negative effect on the village. The second concern is that the village location is not good for environmental reasons due the closeness to the river. It would be located in an area that periodically floods. That, and some other kind of event that would cause gasoline to enter the river would be disastrous.

While a gas station at the I-295 Interchange seems logical and inevitable, broader concerns about the long-term future of Bowdoinham are raised. As of now, Bowdoinham is largely undeveloped. It is a "tabula rasa:" a blank slate. The town has a chance to develop on its own terms and not feel forced to accept that "formula businesses are simply part of the American way. The town could decide instead to emphasize community character, aesthetics, local economics, and self-reliance. It could start the process by prohibiting a national gas station at this location. Freeport did it! Recognizing that the interchange acted like a gateway to the town, they required McDonald's to house its restaurant in a historic colonial home.

As the reader can see, fairly large planning issues are at stake. Rather than make hurried changes to the ordinance, the wise thing may be to allow for more time for research and discussion.

Respectfully Submitted,
William Stanton