

# Town of

**P.O. Drawer 519**

**Department of Planning &  
Inland Wetlands**

*Gary A. Goeschel II, Director of Planning /  
Wetlands Enforcement Officer*



# East Lyme

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: East Lyme Planning Commission

FROM: Gary A. Goeschel II, Director of Planning

DATE: December 8, 2025

RE: Darrow Pond Trail Improvements on 16 Mostoway Road, East Lyme, Assessor's Map#40, Lot#05, Town of East Lyme Owner

### CGS §8-24

Section 8-24 Municipal improvements states "No municipal agency or legislative body shall (1) locate, accept, abandon, widen, narrow or extend any street, bridge, parkway or other public way, (2) locate, relocate, substantially improve, acquire land for, abandon, sell or lease any airport, park, playground, school or other municipally owned property or public building, (3) locate or extend any public housing, development, redevelopment or urban renewal project, or (4) locate or extend public utilities and terminals for water, sewerage, light, power, transit and other purposes, until the proposal to take such action has been referred to the commission for a report...."

As such, upon review of the above referenced referral, I offer the following report:

### Background History

The Town of East Lyme acquired 16 Mostoway Road, a 301-acre parcel of land known as the Darrow Pond Property for open space preservation, passive and active recreation, and water supply purposes (as part of the Regional Interconnection Public Water System) in July of 2021. The benefits of the acquisition to the community include the following:

- Approximately 200-acres would remain as protected open space for the conservation of its natural resources and passive recreation on the existing trails.
- A portion of the property has been considered for active recreation (Darrow Pond Master Plan)
- Approximately 100-acres of the land was used for water through the installation of the Regional Interconnection Water Supply Project.

Subsequent to the acquisition, the Town of East Lyme Parks and Recreation Commission adopted the Darrow Pond Master Plan (Figure 1) in 2023.

### Project Purpose & Need:

In implementing the Master Plan, the purpose of the above reference project is to improve existing trails and to create several new trails to improve accessibility for handicap users and expand trail use opportunities throughout the property.

Under this phase the town is proposing new trails, accessible paths, parking lot improvements, boardwalk through the wetlands, new loop trails, and existing trail maintenance and improvement to address long range accessibility and equitability goals. The major focus for the proposed improvements is to provide safety and accessibility to the pond and its nature trails for all users. The proposed upgrades to the parking lot / trail head, ADA access to the pond would mitigate impacts from uncontrolled motorized bike and ATV access to the existing trail system. Uncontrolled vehicular access has caused significant erosion and trail degradation, and this project is intended to improve or eliminate these impacts and help preserve the natural resources of the conservation area and overall amenity for the East Lyme community. Highlights for the Trail Improvement Plans include controlled use of timber guiderail, split rail fencing, bollards, and vehicular gates, an assessable path / boardwalk and educational area to Darrow Pond, selective trail maintenance improvements including selective vegetative maintenance and removal in and around the trails, a upgraded 37 car parking lot with permeable pavers parking stalls and (2) signed handicap parking spaces. An ADA accessible path and boardwalk are proposed to provide access to the pond and parking facilities for all users.

#### **Potential Impacts:**

**Boardwalk:** Work at the proposed Boardwalk, located just to the southeast of Darrow Pond, would include selective thinning of tree and sapling vegetation within the upland buffer and small portions of the wetland to facilitate viewing of the pond for trail users. Although the proposed Boardwalk is approximately 350 feet in length, vegetation would not be thinned along its entire length. Rather, only vegetation would be thinned to provide an unobstructed view of the pond. Vegetation thinning would be concentrated in the vicinity of an existing upland area which extends north towards the pond. By using this existing upland area, thinning with the wetland boundary would be minimized. The remaining vegetation along the pond would remain untouched. It is not anticipated the proposed thinning of select trees and saplings would have a negative impact on the upland buffer or wetland resources. Several invasive plant species were observed in this wetland and upland review area - multiflora rose, Japanese barberry, and Asiatic bittersweet – which will be removed according to town-approved methodology. Select removal of or taller vegetation and invasive species in the wetland would likely increase diversity of wetland types and wildlife habitat, which would be a benefit to the wetland resource and for trail user viewing.

**Timber Matt crossings:** The existing trail crosses a shallow area of historic fill at Timber Matt crossing No. 1. Over the years, stone material has been placed at this intermittent outlet to prevent erosion and stabilize the trail. The proposed Timber Matt will be placed over the existing intermittent outlet, where the trail crossing is located. The Timber Matt will be placed so there will be a minimum of 18" between the bottom of timber structure and the existing trail surface, to prevent any obstruction of the intermittent outlet and minimize contact with the ground surface. No impacts to the wetland or vegetation are anticipated to occur from the proposed Timber Matt. Timber Matt No. 2, located immediately to the west of Matt No. 1, will also be located in a portion of the trail composed of shallow fill material. Similarly, no impacts to the wetland or vegetation are anticipated to occur from the proposed Timber Matt.

**Inland Wetlands Areas:** Vegetation pruning will take place along approximately 200 linear feet of existing trail within the wetland boundary in the vicinity of Timber Matt Crossing Nos. 1 and 2. Selective pruning Area No. 1 (282.22 sf): Vegetation pruning will take place along approximately 30 linear feet of existing trail within the wetland boundary at this location. No timber matt is proposed.

**Upland Review Areas (URA):** Vegetation will be trimmed along the edge of the existing trails within the Upland review areas. Trimming will extend to four feet from the edge of each side of the trail. Most areas along the existing trails are sparsely vegetated, however, several areas existing with dense vegetation up to and into the trail. Specifically, these areas of dense vegetation are associated with the field and edge habitat southwest of Darrow Pond. Dense vegetation consisting of invasive species composed of Autumn olive, Morrow's honeysuckle, Japanese honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, multiflora rose, and Oriental bittersweet exists in these areas and will be trimmed/removed according to methods approved by the Town of East Lyme. Proposed new trails will be laid out and built in the field to avoid existing vegetation such as trees and saplings, as well as shrubs where possible. To the extent practicable, these proposed new trails will be routed and built with minimum disturbance to existing vegetation. Prior to building these proposed new trails, the applicant will conduct a field walk with the East Lyme Wetland Enforcement Officer to lay out the trail locations in a way that minimizes impacts and vegetation removal within upland review areas.

### **Alternatives Considered**

Several alternatives were investigated for wetland crossing methods along the existing and proposed trail improvement locations.

1. Permanent crossing structure: this alternative involved construction of a structure with permanent concrete footings at each end and a steel or wood structure. This alternative was not further considered due to the potential for permanent wetland impact, constructability issues, and higher costs.
2. No Action: this alternative was considered and dismissed since several of the wetland crossing areas are wet during parts of the year and erosion could occur from trail use.
3. Temporary crossing structure: This alternative was ultimately selected since it provides protection for wetland crossing areas, ease of installation/constructability, and are temporary in nature which avoids and minimizes potential wetland impacts.

### **FINDINGS:**

*The Darrow Pond Trail Improvements project is for the improvement of the existing nature trails and the construction of an ADA accessible trail on previously acquired Town owned property which, acquisition was found to be Consistent with the 2009 POCD Chapter 5 recommendations for the acquisition of open space and having also met 4 criteria in the Recommendations for Future Open Space of Appendix D (the East Lyme Lands of Unique Value Study). In addition, the acquisition was supported by Appendix B of the 2009 POCD (the 2007 Community Survey). Further, the proposed acquisition was also found to be consistent with the 2009 POCD recommendations as they relate to the Town's Municipal Water System.*

#### **2020 POCD Compatibility:**

*In following the Master Plan entitled Darrow Pond Education, Conservation & Passive Recreation Plan dated July 2023 (Figure 1), the proposed Plans (Figure 2) entitled "Darrow Pond Trail Improvements, 16 Mostowy Rd, East Lyme, Connecticut dated 12.02.2025", prepared by Joseph McDonald, P.E. of FHI Studio, 416 Asylum Street, Hartford, CT 06103 clearly demonstrate consistency with the Master Plan and the 2020 East Lyme Plan of Conservation and Development, as amended (POCD). More specifically, as the project proposes to provided an ADA accessible trail and board walk in addition to the necessary trail maintenance, the project clearly meets Goal #11 of the 2020 POCD which stated, "provide park and recreational facilities that meet the diverse needs of residents and visitors of all ages"*

*As such, based on the above findings the proposed construction of an ADA accessible trail, boardwalk, and associated trail maintenance on the municipal property referenced above is consistent with the 2020 POCD as amended. Therefore, I offer the following resolution:*

**BE IT RESOLVED:**

Pursuant to Section 8-24 of the General Statutes, I hereby MOVE the Planning Commission of the Town of East Lyme exercising its authority and having reviewed the proposal and proposed plans entitled "Darrow Pond Trail Improvements, 16 Mostoway Rd, East Lyme, Connecticut dated 12.02.2025", prepared by Joseph McDonald, P.E. of FHI Studio, 416 Asylum Street, Hartford, CT 06103, **FINDS** the aforesaid project proposal to construct new trails, an ADA accessible path, conduct general trail maintenance, and a parking lot expansion at Darrow Pond, 16 Mostoway Road, East Lyme, Assessor's Map#40, Lot 5, **CONSISTENT** with the 2020 Plan of Conservation and Development, as amended and hereby approves the aforesaid proposal.

FIGURE 1

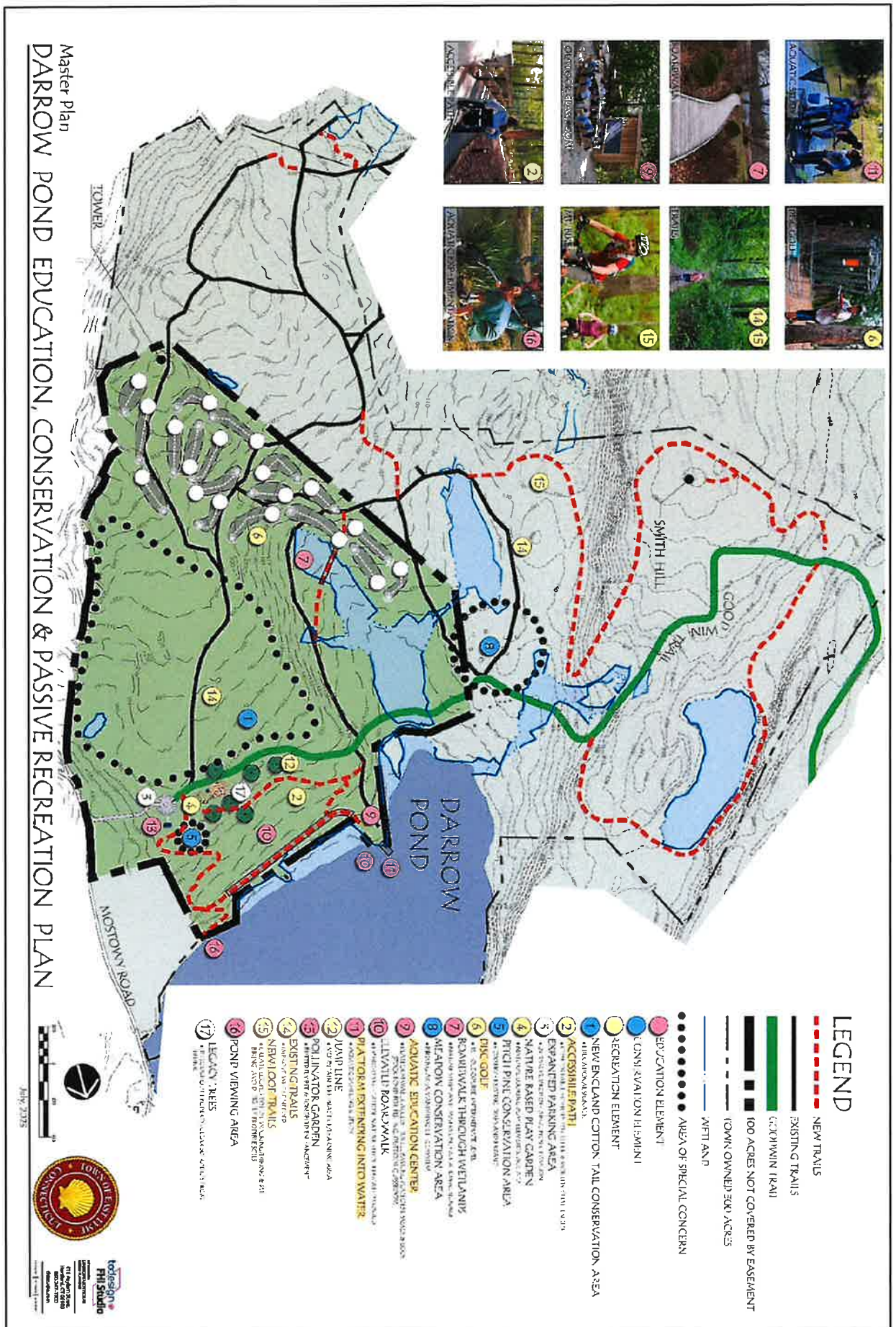


FIGURE 2

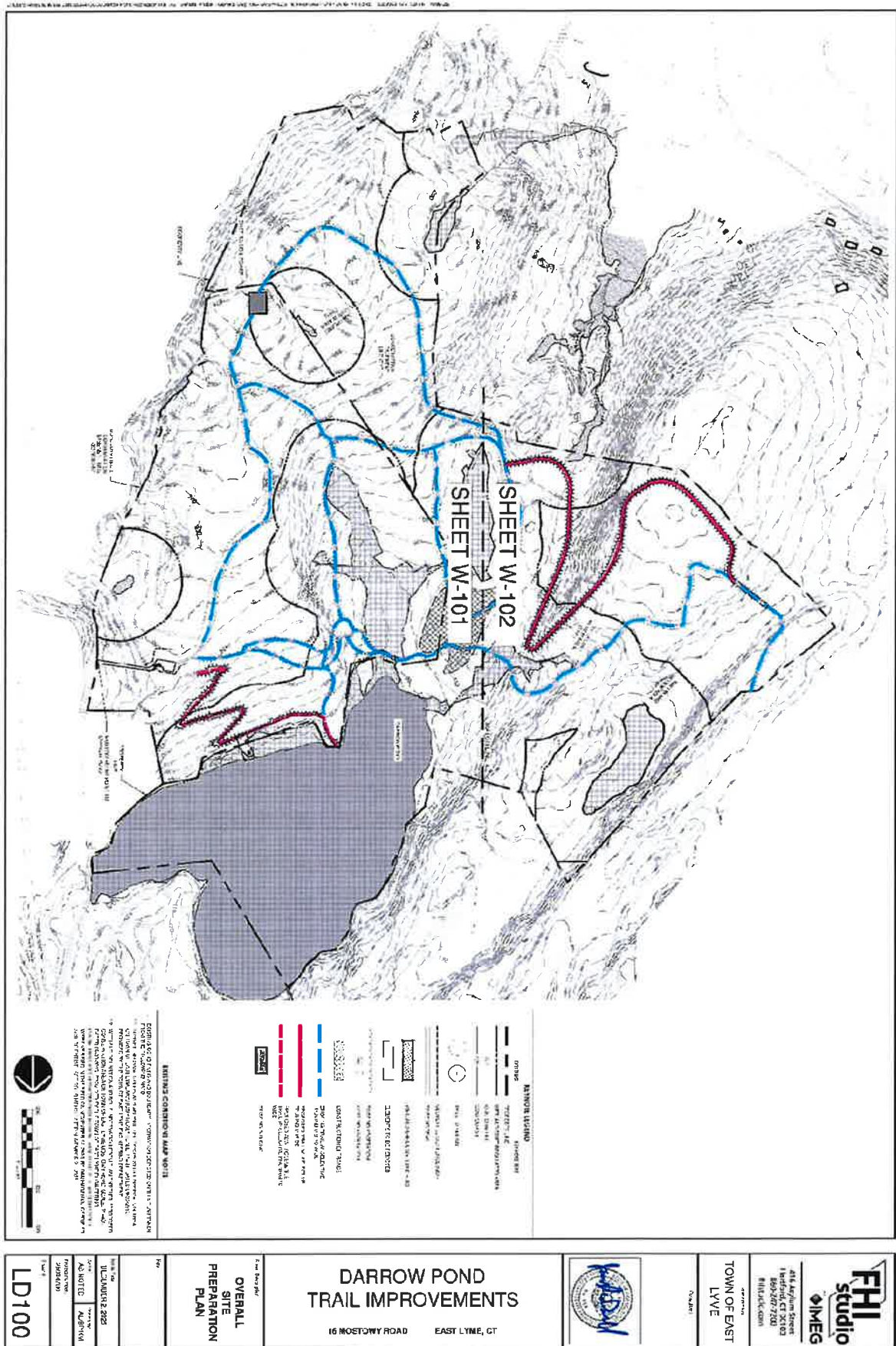
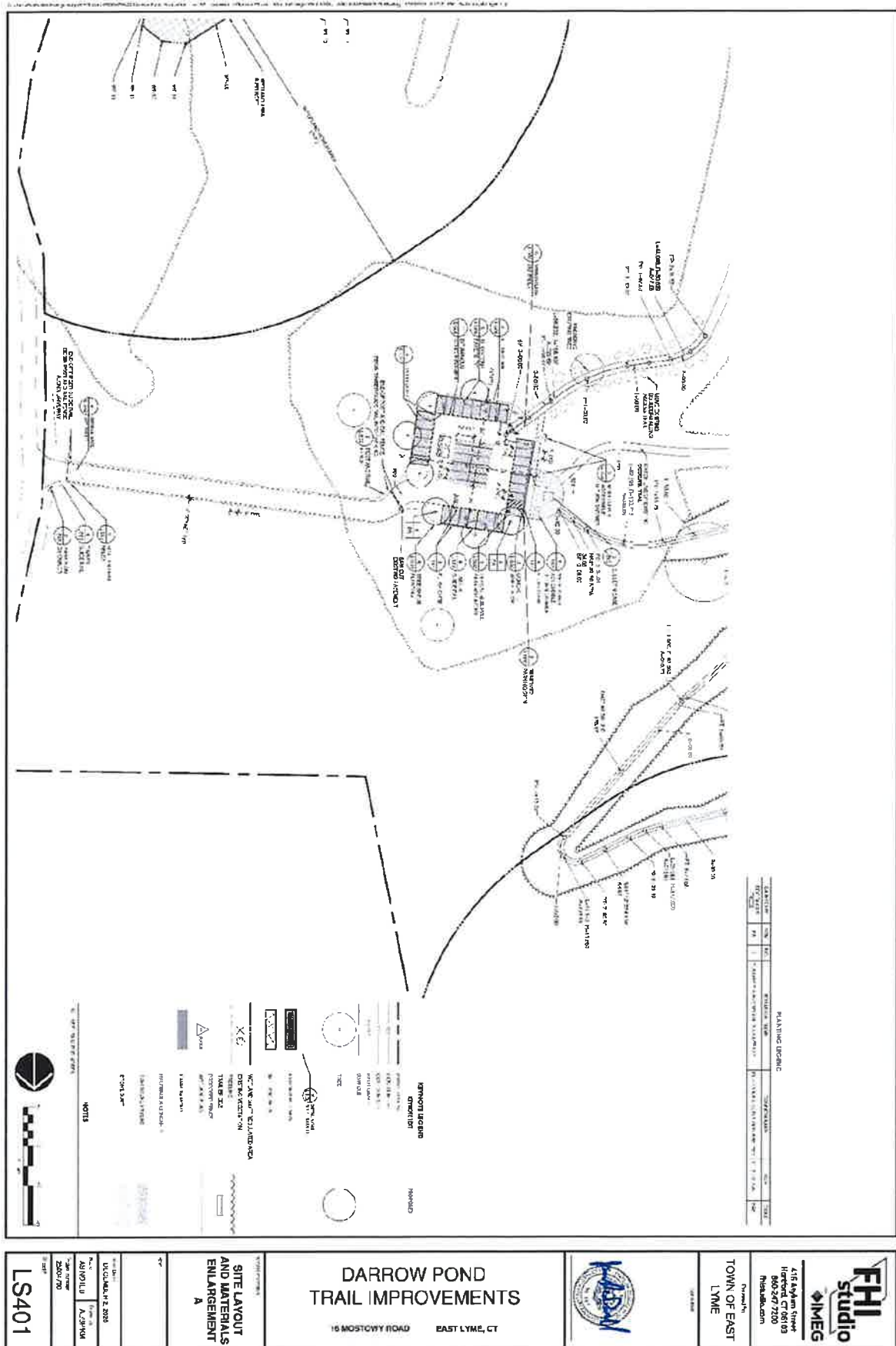


FIGURE 3



### FIGURE 4

