Lavin Property Land Use and Development Vision

Draft for Vision Workshop #2 11/18/26

Lavin Property Vision Development

The Town of South Hero appointed a Steering Committee to guide a community visioning process for the use and potential development of the Lavin Property, in addition to being used for community wastewater. The Steering Committee held a community walk in June and a visioning workshop in August. Based on feedback received in August, the Steering Committee has prepared a draft vision statement, guiding principles and concept use scenarios and is looking for feedback on these drafts at a second visioning workshop on November 18. The materials are also available for review and comment online on the project website. A final vision statement, guiding principles and one mor more concept use scenarios will be recommended to the Selectboard in the first few months of 2027.

Defining Factors



Physical Overview. The Town-owned portion of the Lavin property consists of 96 acres located off Route 2 and Lavin Lane. The property consists of eight subdivided lots, and the Town bought six of them. The Town owns lots 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8. Lot 2 is privately owned, and lot 3 is owned by CIDER. About 50 acres consists of wetland.

Community Wastewater. The Town bought the property with grant funding to develop a community wastewater system. It is a condition of this grant funding that the Lavin Property be used for a community wastewater system, although the grant does not require a deadline for construction.

Potential to Generate Revenue for Wastewater System Construction. As a condition of the grant used to purchase the property, any revenue from the sale of development lots is required to be used for the construction of the wastewater system. Given limitations on capacity and the cost of extending the system along Route 2, the Wastewater Committee is urging the Town to prioritize wastewater capacity for potential onsite development, providing an additional source of needed non-federal funding for wastewater system construction and new development opportunities for a property in the village center.

Overview of Community Wastewater Project

Individual and cluster soil-based wastewater treatment capacity in South Hero is extremely limited due to unsuitable clay soils and/or low depth to groundwater. This increases the potential for the failure of existing septic systems and limits the potential for new systems to be developed. The 2023 South Hero Town Plan notes that a lack of wastewater management in the village areas is a barrier to new and expanded businesses, housing and municipal and community facilities. In response, the Town of South Hero studied the feasibility of developing a community wastewater system to serve the village area, which led to preliminary engineering for a community system between 6,800 and 10,699 gpd at the Lavin property (*note that this figure has been updated based on new engineering since the publishing of the Lavin Property Existing Report*).

The Town of South Hero acquired the Lavin Property with grants from the State of Vermont and ARPA to develop a community wastewater system. However, as the Town progressed in planning for the system, it became apparent that the limited capacity at the Lavin Property would best serve new onsite development due to the cost of building a collection system down Route 2.

The Town has started to apply for and acquire grants for the cost of designing and constructing the wastewater system, but grants are not expected to cover the full cost of the system (preliminary estimates are several million). Revenue generation from Lavin Property lot sales and new property taxes and/or tax increment financing (TIF) is an important piece of the funding stack.

Lavin Property Vision Statement

The Lavin Property will balance South Hero's need for recreation, affordable housing and everyday services near the village center while protecting the property's valued forests, fields and wetlands. Recreation is a priority, including trails that connect Folsom School, Route 2 and the wider community trail network. A multi-use sports field could provide much-needed space for youth and adult sports programming. Land closest to the existing road frontage is appropriate for everyday services and multi-unit homes that complement, rather than compete with, the historic village center. Further back, the interior land can offer modest, attainable homes for families and seniors, helping keep South Hero a place where people can afford to live and grow older. The wetlands and forested areas will largely remain open space for wildlife habitat and passive recreation such as cross-country skiing, walking or birdwatching, alongside land reserved for the community wastewater system that makes this vision possible.

Lavin Property Guiding Principles

1) **Connect people to places.** Provide trails that link Folsom School, Route 2, the village center and the wider trail network.
2) **Fill recreation gaps.** Provide recreation that isn't otherwise available or planned in the community, starting with a multi-use field for youth and adult sports programming.
3) **Complement the village center.** Support everyday services and businesses that strengthen, rather than compete with, the historic village center.
4) **Provide a range of attainable housing.** Offer modest, attainable homes for families and seniors, including multi-unit homes near the road frontage and small-scale single unit homes on the interior land.
5) **Place the most intensive uses closest to existing roads and services,** to the extent feasible, with uses becoming less intensive farther back on the property.
6) **Protect forests, wetlands and habitat blocks,** especially in the areas farthest from existing roads, and keep them available for passive recreation such as cross-country skiing.

Lavin Property Vision Elements



Recreation and Trails. Recreation has emerged as a top community priority for the Lavin Property. A youth baseball/softball field has been identified as a community need well suited to the property, along with trails and walking paths and multi-sport indoor and outdoor recreation facilities.

The Town is developing a Community Park near the restored Meeting House, which will include a village green, pavilion and parking. The facilities being considered for the Lavin Property largely complement, rather than duplicate, plans for the new park. During planning for the park, the Recreation Committee surveyed residents about recreation needs. A baseball field was not among the survey options, but high-scoring amenities not already developed or planned in the community included pickleball, walking trails and an ice-skating rink.

Trails and walking paths are a popular idea for the Lavin Property, which residents value as a natural area. Trails would let community members enjoy the property's abundant wetlands, forest and wildlife while also connecting different parts of the community. There are several opportunities to link with adjacent trail networks and to connect the village center with Folsom School.

Trails can range in level of improvement, from mowed paths to gravel, boardwalk or paved surfaces. Boardwalks may be an option where trails cross wetlands, subject to state

wetland permitting. Cross-country skiing is a seasonal use that requires little or no improvement beyond signage.

Preliminary land use assessments indicate space for at least one multi-sport field, combining a baseball/softball diamond with a playing field for soccer, lacrosse and football, requiring roughly 5 to 6 acres. There are also numerous opportunities for trails and walking paths throughout the property.



Housing. A primary goal of the 2023 South Hero Town Plan is to guide well-managed residential growth that includes a diversity of housing types meeting the needs of residents at every stage of life. As required by state law, the 2026 Northwest Regional Plan sets a housing target for South Hero of at least 149 new units by 2050. If development trends of the last five years continue, South Hero could see about 30 new units by 2030, a pace that would only just reach the minimum target by 2050.

There is community support for housing on the Lavin Property, particularly modest, affordable homes for young families and seniors. Initial development schematics show that the Lavin Property could accommodate 20 to 40 housing units, helping the Town meet its housing target with some margin. New state wetland rules have relaxed permitting standards for housing projects, which allow infrastructure as a permitted use and reduces the wetland buffer zone to 25 feet. Because of its location, new homes on the property would be within walking distance of the village center, Folsom School and everyday services. This supports the Town's goal of focusing growth in and around the village rather than in outlying rural areas. Connection and user fees from these homes would also help support the community wastewater system.



Everyday Services. There is community interest in commercial uses on the Lavin Property, especially a grocery store, along with ideas such as a pharmacy, a market or deli, personal services and mixed-use buildings with apartments above ground-floor shops. The front of the property along Route 2 is well suited to these uses, although there are space constraints that will limit larger commercial development like a full-scale grocery store. Bot Lot 1 and Lot 2 have road frontage on either Route 2 or Lavin Lane, and zoning allows a range of commercial and multi-unit residential uses.

New businesses on the Lavin Property should complement, rather than compete with, the historic village center. They should meet every day needs not already served nearby and reinforce the village as South Hero's walkable center of commerce and community life. Mixed-use buildings would add housing close to services, and sidewalk and trail connections would let residents reach shops without driving. Because wastewater capacity on the property is limited, the type and scale of businesses will also need to be balanced against their wastewater demand.

Conservation. About 1/2 of the Lavin Property consists of wetlands, including a large wetland of over 30 acres in the far back portion of the property. These wetlands store flood water and storm runoff, protect surface and groundwater, provide wildlife habitat, and control erosion by binding and stabilizing the soil. The back portion of the property is also substantially forested and includes a vernal pool used by salamanders and wood frogs, as well as an area the draft Forest Management Plan identifies as significant wildlife habitat. The property is part of a habitat block that allows wildlife to move through the area. Leaving these wetlands and forested areas undeveloped and in their natural state fits well alongside the community wastewater system and offers opportunities for passive recreation such as walking trails and cross-country skiing.