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Section: Headlines

Lighting the way for pedestrians

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Monday, July 03 GREAT BARRINGTON — Several downtown businesses have joined a new local company's effort to buy and install wireless, solar-powered pedestrian lights in Main Street's crosswalks. GoodWorks LLC, established in Great Barrington earlier this year by Housatonic resident Joe Grochmal, is the company behind the proposal given to the Selectmen and town Public Works Superintendent Donald Chester.

"We have a company that stands for safety, and we should do something here," said Grochmal. "If we could afford it ourselves, we'd do it."

GoodWorks has sought a patent for a business plan that contributes 50 percent of its annual profits to local initiatives in education, health care and public safety. The company contributed \$4,000 earlier this year to the Berkshire Hills Fund for Excellence, a school enrichment fund.

Grochmal said the May 25 pedestrian fatality on South Main Street, which killed an elderly local resident, prompted his idea. He quickly found well-established technology through a Canadian company, Carmanah Technologies Corp.

But he said he has some concerns that town officials might try to link the pedestrian light project to a Main Street reconstruction project, which is only tentative at this point.

"Without trying to impose technical knowledge I don't have, I don't believe Great Barrington can wait that long," he said, noting the many close calls between drivers and pedestrians on Main Street. "The town should respond on a timely basis before someone else gets hurt. There's such a blur of activity on Main Street, I thought a visual contrast would be a good thing."

Meanwhile, Bill's Pharmacy, Berkshire Bank, Barnbrook Realty, Arbella Insurance Group, Housatonic Water Works and several individuals have agreed to donate funds.

"I thought it was a great cause, and I said yes," said Steve Bannon, owner of Bill's Pharmacy. "I know Joe well enough to know that if he has an idea, it's a pretty good idea."

Bill's Pharmacy will contribute \$2,600, which will pay half the cost of equipping a single crosswalk downtown, Bannon said.

Although it's not clear how many crosswalks might be involved, Grochmal said the \$5,200 cost, per intersection, is a small price for safety.

After the May 25 accident, the Selectmen and local police stepped up efforts to improve crosswalk safety. Crosswalks were repainted, and police have been stationed at crosswalks periodically to monitor traffic.

Most downtown crosswalks are marked with centrally located caution signs alerting drivers, but drivers frequently don't stop and pedestrians don't always look.

The pedestrian crosswalk lights can be installed on the curb at either end of crosswalk. The light is activated with the push of a button from a pedestrian, and a flashing signal alerts traffic in both directions.

The fixtures are wireless and last up to five years without maintenance, according to the Carmanah company Web site.

Grochmal said he was extremely pleased that other local businesses and individuals were so forthcoming.

"They were just wonderfully supportive," he said.

GoodWorks is a private company based in North Canaan, Conn., with offices in Granby, Conn., and in Great Barrington.

Grochmal has lived in Great Barrington with his family for more than six years. He intends to expand his offices throughout Western Massachusetts.

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