Select Board Approves Castle Road Redesign

Safer streets for children, pedestrians, and drivers, a rebuilt sidewalk, and a fiscally responsible design.

At a Glance

- On November 4, 2026, the Select Board voted 2 to 1 to adopt Stantec's design for Castle Road near Johnson Elementary School.
- The plan includes a continuous 4-foot-wide raised sidewalk, 10-foot-wide travel lanes, and safety improvements at the Castle Road and Gardner Road intersection to enhance safety for children, pedestrians, and drivers.
- The design stays within the existing public way, avoiding eminent domain costs and related legal fees.
- Voters will be asked to approve project funding at the May 2027 Town Meeting.

What the Board Decided

At its meeting on November 4, 2026, the Nahant Select Board voted 2 to 1 to adopt the roadway and sidewalk infrastructure design submitted by Stantec for the Castle Road corridor near the Johnson Elementary School (the former Coast Guard Housing site).

Stantec is a global engineering and design consulting firm, founded in 1954, that plans and designs roads, sidewalks, and other public infrastructure for cities and towns. The Board selected this approach because it best addresses the safety of children, pedestrians, and drivers along this stretch of road, while also considering the monetary impact on Nahant residents.

How We Got Here

The Town has discussed the proposed Castle Road redesign over the past few years in a number of formats. On August 7, 2024, the Select Board held a publicly advertised meeting that included the agenda item "Review Castle Road changes to improve sidewalks and crossings" and the Stantec plan was discussed at this meeting. On August 22, 2024, the Town held a public meeting regarding the request for proposals for the first six Coast Guard Housing properties, during which the Town Administrator discussed the proposed improvements to Castle Road. The Town also maintained a dedicated Coast Guard Housing webpage during the sale of the properties, which showed a copy of the Stantec design and described the proposed traffic-calming improvements on Castle Road, including narrowing the road, relocating the sidewalks, and improving pedestrian crossings. On September 2, 2026, the Town Administrator invited engineers from Stantec to present the Castle Road redesign plan at a Select Board meeting and was available to answer questions.

To ensure all residents have accurate information, it is important to clarify the land ownership along this corridor. The land where the former sidewalk was located along this stretch of Castle Road was sold by the Town to the new private owners as an integral part of their individual deeded lots to meet zoning requirements and maximize lot marketability and value.

Protecting public safety while safeguarding taxpayer dollars is the driving force behind the Castle Road redesign. By choosing an engineering solution that fits within the existing public right-of-way, the Town can rebuild a safe pedestrian sidewalk without the extremely high cost and years of litigation that would come with taking land back from new homeowners through eminent domain.

What the Plan Achieves

1. **Safety First:** Rebuilding a 4-foot raised sidewalk restores a safe, continuous pedestrian route along Castle Road and will be constructed entirely within the Town's right-of-way, physically separating children and pedestrians from cars.
2. **No New Taxes:** Construction costs are fully covered by the proceeds from the Coast Guard Housing lots, subject to Town Meeting approval. No tax overrides or debt exclusions are required.

3. **Proven Design Standards:** The plan implements 10-foot-wide travel lanes, a MassDOT-approved standard to naturally calm traffic speeds.
4. **Fiscal Responsibility:** The plan avoids a costly, multi-year Land Court battle, and it lets the new homeowners enjoy their homes and build in accordance with town requirements and regulations.

What's Changing on Castle Road

1. **Design.** Under the plan presented by Stantec, the sidewalk along the former Coast Guard Housing site will be rebuilt inside the town layout line and will be 4-feet wide. This section of Castle Road will feature a 10-foot travel lane in each direction with a 1-foot shoulder on either side, and the sidewalk on the opposite side of the road will remain in place. Stantec noted that these dimensions are standard widths and are in line with design guidance for a road of this size, speed, and traffic volume per the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) *Project Development and Design Guide*. 10-foot travel lanes create self-enforcing road geometry that naturally keeps speeds at 20 mph. This redesign impacts this specific corridor only. There will be no changes to the section in front of the Johnson School.
2. **Intersection improvements.** Today, Castle Road meets Gardner Road at an angle, with a sideways shift, or "jog," that lets drivers swing through the turn without slowing down. The plan will "straighten out the jog" and "square up Castle Road" so that it meets Gardner Road at closer to a right angle. This will slow drivers as they make turns and improve visibility for both drivers and pedestrians. A flush traffic island made of textured, colored pavement will guide drivers around the turn, while emergency vehicles and snowplows can still drive over it. Stop signs will also be added on both Castle Road and Gardner Road at the intersection.
3. **Safer walking routes.** A continuous raised sidewalk gives children and families a clear, protected path to and from school. The design will reconstruct part of the sidewalk on Gardner Road to connect it with the new sidewalk on Castle Road.
4. **Slower vehicle speeds.** Narrower travel lanes naturally encourage drivers to slow down.
5. **Improved accessibility.** The design supports sidewalk widths and features that meet accessibility standards for residents of all abilities.
6. **High visibility crosswalks with flashing beacons.** Wide visible colored crosswalks and signage will guide pedestrians to safe crossing points and alert drivers to yield when people are crossing.
7. **Speed monitoring & targeted enforcement.** Speed monitoring and periodic police presence, especially during school hours, will encourage drivers to observe posted limits and help the Town track whether the changes are working.

Alternatives & the Financial Picture

The Board considered two alternatives to the Stantec plan. The first was not rebuilding the sidewalk. Given the sidewalk's proximity to Johnson Elementary School, this was not a viable option, as the safety of children and pedestrians is of paramount importance. The second would have kept the road at its current width and rebuilt the sidewalk onto adjacent private property; that approach would have required the Town to acquire land or easements by eminent domain. Under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 79, the Town must pay property owners fair compensation for any land taken and any improvements within it (e.g., grass, trees, plantings, walkways, driveways, and irrigation), ***and*** severance damages for any drop in the value of the property stemming from the taking and the Town's use of the easement (e.g., a sidewalk closer to the front door would reduce privacy and result in a smaller front yard and driveway, thereby diminishing property value).

The Town sold the five lots abutting Castle Road to private buyers who bought them in good faith. Seizing portions of those lots so soon after those sales would invite litigation. Also, those owners could contest the amount of fair compensation and severance damages in court under Chapter 79, adding further expense and delay. Legal fees and independent appraisals would deplete, and could exceed, the remaining proceeds from the sale of the Coast Guard Housing lots. Under Massachusetts law, legal fees are not capital expenses and would have to be funded from the Town's operating budget, which may require a tax override.

Two of the five affected owners have said they support the Stantec plan and would oppose a taking. Two could not be reached for comment, and one neither supported nor opposed the plan.

What Happens Next

Town Meeting vote. Before the project can move forward, voters will be asked at Town Meeting in **May 2027** to appropriate funds for the work. All registered voters are encouraged to attend and take part.