Today it seems as if all the small towns of the U.S. are systematically being built up, mass marketed, and mass-produced becoming just another member of the conveyer belt that is globalization. East Longmeadow, Massachusetts seems to be just another town to jump on this “mini-city” bandwagon, but East Longmeadow has an edge that many American towns don’t, they have the town meeting system of state and local government. In “E.L.”as we like to call it, the residents have tentatively allowed in many different chain stores and bigger businesses with both positive and negative results, but this time they have found that the new threat is coming from within the town and they have decided to “put their foot down”. If globalization is inevitable, then there must be a form of checks and balances and this must come from the people directly impacted, in this case, the people of East Longmeadow, Massachusetts.

“E.L.” was established in 1894; originally it was part of its neighbor, Longmeadow, yet this didn’t last long since the section that became East Longmeadow was playfully called “Poverty Hill”. The anger between the two town groups actually began as early as the 1600’s when the now Longmeadow residents didn’t want to help pay for the children of “Poverty Hill” to attend the Longmeadow school system, inevitably this caused quite a lot of drama where “Poverty Hill” residents then decided to name their own town. The full truth to this story can be debated, but is a staple in East Longmeadow and has had an impact on the people’s loyalty. Even today there is quite a
rivalry between the two towns, and this is not only relegated to sports.

Western Massachusetts even before the 1800’s was mainly made up of quarry towns, many still are today, and the main stone mined has been brownstone. This can still be seen on the East Longmeadow town hall, and before it was rebuilt, the library that was connected to the hall. The main form of state and local governing is also quite old since it is the “Town Meeting Style”. According to the book Things I Remember About the Early Days of East Longmeadow Massachusetts, written by Clarence Burton Cooley, the town meeting gained its popularity in the “horse and buggy days”, and to many this is still a huge part of “E.L.’s” heritage. Barbara Spaulding, an East Longmeadow resident of 42 years said it gives her a sense of control, saying it is “a way to monitor the happenings of my home”, including what businesses come, go, or even stay.

The first “big business” that came to East Longmeadow was Milton Bradley named for the Springfield; Mass resident who started the company. According to the East Longmeadow Historical Commission’s records, Milton Bradley started his company in 1860, in a three-floor office building on Main St. Springfield. The building can still be seen across Court Square. This was originally a lithograph business, where there is a funny story that is associated with this business. Bradley was a staunch Republican and in 1860 Abraham Lincoln was running for President. After returning from the Republican convention in Chicago, two prominent Springfield residents persuaded Bradley to put his lithograph to use helping the campaign. Taking a picture of a clean-shaven Lincoln, he was able to make hundreds of copies of the photograph, which then sold like “hot cakes”. We know today that Abraham Lincoln won the
election, sadly there after, Lincoln grew in his beard and Bradley destroyed the left over pictures.

Later that year he then began making games, such as “The Checkered Game Of Life”, which we know today as “LIFE”. He also became involved in the Civil War effort by using his Vermont lumber mill to produce and design the new rifle used by the Union army. Then in the late 1800’s Bradley died and his company began to decline. By 1941, Milton Bradley was nearly bankrupt when James Shay became President of the company. He gained control of a company with huge debt and very angry stockholders, but he was a smart businessman, and another Springfield native. Since WWII had just begun a few months later, Shea followed in the footsteps of Bradley himself. “Shea went to Washington and solicited government contracts, and Milton Bradley started to manufacture wooden stocks for rifles and machine guns”. (The Sunday Republican, David Perlman) Feeling more economically sound, Shea then pushed for Milton Bradley to make games to be sent to the American troops over seas, yet another tactic used by Bradley himself for the Union troops in the Civil War. Shea even had a request by the Admiral “Bull”Halsey, of 35,000 game-kits in one week for his men in the Pacific Theater. Luckily for Shea he was able to have the kits ready in time, since Halsey threatened to send a Navy crew to Shea’s door if they weren’t completed.

In 1966 the company opened its first plant in East Longmeadow, today the plant is over one million square feet and employs over 1,700 people. This, after the company expanded twice; first in 1972 and second in 1979. After James Shea left his position in Milton Bradley, his son James Shea Jr. took the position in 1967. Then in 1987 the with
the merger of Rhode Island native Hasbro, Shea Jr. handed his position
over to John W. O’Donnell, who was his executive Vice President. Yet despite this
marriage of the two corporations, Milton Bradley’s headquarters are still found on Shaker
Rd. in East Longmeadow Massachusetts. According to “E.L.’s” Historical Committee
and Milton Bradley records, the company has expanded its global reach even further and
has facilities located in Ireland, England, Canada, Germany, France, Holland, and even
Australia and New Zealand. Still, to O’Donnell, Milton Bradley’s home will always be
East Longmeadow.

Globalization in a small town takes many different shapes and forms, and not all
are as positive as Milton Bradley has been. Some globalization can simply threaten the
history of the small town, and the perfect example of this in “E.L.” was the threat against
Norcross House located on 89 Maple St., the residential section of that road. The danger
came from developers who felt that any old building could become a torn down old
building. The Norcross family built Norcross House in 1870, even before East
Longmeadow existed. Through its 130-year lifespan, there have been many residents and
even businesses to make their home in this house, but in 1999 while the Springfield Day
Nursery was making use of the home during an inspection they found it was unsafe for
children, or anyone for that matter.

This opened the door for Shmidt Architects to step in a purpose that since Norcross
House was not a “historically claimed home, nor was it on the National Register for
historical homes” (The Reminder, Sarah M. Corigliano) it would be more economically
sound to tear down the house and rebuild a new structure. Shmidt’s
objective was to replace it with a 8,300 square foot facility that was more than triple the size of the 19th century farmhouse. On May 8th, 2001 the town met in the Middle School auditorium to discuss the matter with the developers, and most of the town’s people were not impressed. David Bressem also spoke to The Reminder, a local newspaper, said he felt the proposal was “too big” and that the building would be “an industrial building that destroys the character of the town.” (Corigliano, Sarah, M. The Reminder) Many others felt that the building would interrupt their daily lives since not only would the facility need lighting and signage, but it would also block their driveways, bring in more traffic, and being that there would be a kitchen this would include kitchen exhaust.

The debate over Norcross House continued for almost a year until the town’s people and the Historical Committee were able to gain enough money and support to register the house as a historical home. Today Norcross House is being refinished to revive the home and bring back the esthetic quality that it brought to Maple Street, and when ready will become the home of the East Longmeadow Historical Committee.

Some cases in small towns, the issue is not with the historic building being torn down, rather it is with this building that is to replace it. John H. Whitaker built A.W. Brown in 1888, on 55 Maple Street. The business was 25 x 40 feet in size and sold mainly coal and grain, and continued this even after his son Frank took the business. In 1913 his brother Lewis bough the business only to sell it to their biggest competitor, the Community Feed Store owned by Quaker Oats. Then in 1931 the Community Feed Store moved to the south side of Maple where it still stands today and Frank Whitaker took
back A.W. Brown.

Since then the business has had many owners, all who maintained the history and the tradition of A.W. Brown even adding in a pet store. Then in 1985 Thomas Wheeler became owner and continued to expand bringing in a “Wet Pets” section. Then in 1995 Wheeler moved the business up the next block onto Shaker rd. The town people didn’t have issue with this for the sheer fact that it wasn’t that much of a change in terms of distance, and the original building was in such great need of repair that an escaped Russian Hamster was found in the neighboring Dairy Mart, who was later adopted by my family.

The drama started in 1997, when a small article in the April issue of the Union News mentioned that the Dunkin Donuts franchise had signed a lease for that property. By June of 1997 the people of East Longmeadow began to voice their concerns. In a Union News article dated June 13 of 1997 Marsha and David Bressem of 95 Maple named just a few of their criticisms. Marsha was quoted saying “For 25 years I’ve been picking up litter from Dairy Mart”. Many other members of the town had similar fears of littering, loitering and crime. Her husband David stated “Our house has been broken into three times and our car once.” The other issue was the idea of a drive thru window being installed that would bring heavier traffic to a street that could barely handle the load it had at that time.

The Chairman of the Planning Board, Louis A. Calabrese attempted to quiet everyone’s fears by reminding them that the East Longmeadow Police Department was ready and equipped to handle the new issues that could possibly arise from the new
edition and the Board of Health would manage the trash associated with the Dunkin Donuts. Then to oblige the town’s people even more, the drive-thru was taken off the plans, which to many they felt was proof that the franchise was willing to compromise.

By fall of 1997 construction for the Dunkin Donuts went underway, and has brought both positive and negative results to the town. According to the town’s annual crime report, there has been an even greater increase in crime since 1997 in comparison to earlier years. There has also been an increase in calls from Dunkin Donuts to the East Longmeadow Police Dept. with complaints of loitering, littering and fighting on the property, according to their public police logs and Nicole who works at the establishment. Still, there have been some definite positives, including the fact that they employ over 20 high school students, the commercial property value has raised for that area of the town, students finally have a convenient place to buy breakfast in the morning, and many from the town have become very fond of their Dunkin Donuts.

In East Longmeadow one would think that since it is such a small town that it would not be associated with so many different forms of globalization, but it is, and this form just happened to spread like wild fire, it is known as the loss of small town charm and the replacement by mini-city design. Many who live in the town felt it began in 1989, when its new owner Stephen Dellaquilla demolished the Willow Glenn of 232 North Main. Originally the Willow Glenn was a home and barn built in 1946, when the DeYoung family bought it and opened it as a restaurant in the early 1960’s. According to the Historic Commission, this was the first restaurant of its size in East Longmeadow and there was a huge demand for tables, so the DeYoungs felt they needed to expand. The
space was then large enough for big parties, weddings, and any type of grand celebration.

By November of 1977 they sold the restaurant to the Melikian family who continued to operate the facility as a lavish restaurant until they sold it to the Dellaquillas in 1989. Throughout the building's history there has been quite a lot of legal drama associated with every owner, some of the town joke that Dellaquilla had enough of his own that he didn’t need to add to his plate. Those stories come from many who were angry with him for tearing down the town’s beloved restaurant, including many of my own family who were members of the band that provided the entertainment.

Then in 1994, a new building replaced the beautiful colonial home; this was the Forastiere-Smith Funeral Home. To many who live near this, including myself, it was playfully named the “Death Castle” since it stood 8 feet from the corner of N. Main and Westwood and was built mainly in gray flagstone with one huge bay window. The building is over 10,000 square feet, with one main entrance to the facility, one entrance and exit from the lower parking lot, and one exit for the funeral procession that is only five car lengths from the light at “four corners”. Most of the town felt the facility’s construction was poorly planned since there was enough property to build it further back, rather than in such an obtrusive spot.

According to East Longmeadow Police public logs, there has been a huge increase of accidents, both fender benders and serious incidents, since Forastiere-Smith began operating. The irony is that these happen most at the light connecting N. Main when there has been a funeral procession. There have also been cases where the line of standstill traffic has been long enough to span nearly into the neighboring Springfield
three miles down the road.

It seems that since Forastiere-Smith was introduced, there has been a rash of new building, but these buildings do not represent the small town the “E.L.”. Even the local middle school children have opinions on this topic, such as Chad Cordner and Bradd Richard, both 15-year-old East Longmeadow residents, who describe the new buildings as “either like mental institutions or old folks homes.”

They pointed out the construction done to two of the town’s buildings whose final results have brought much debate throughout the town. The first is being the East Longmeadow Public Library. According to the Historical Commission’s records the original building was constructed in 1957, with a budget of $5,247.13. The town at that time was in desperate need of a library since it had been housed in a room in the town hall, which didn’t leave for much room for the actual purpose of the library; to hold books. This new library was 11,000 square feet and could hold 60,000 volumes; there was also children’s center added, and a sitting area to the right of the front doors. This building was also made with the same stone used to build the town hall; this was the very brownstone that was quarried in East Longmeadow hundreds of years ago.

Then in February of two thousand, the town felt it was time to enlarge the structure, since the town’s population was expanding. According to The Reminder, the final vote was 342 for and 39 against. The library and the town were able to fund over three million dollars for their new library, and many looked forward to the expansion. According to The Sunday Republican the new facility was to have tinted windows running North to South along the brightest side of the library, two meeting rooms which
were to be the first things that patrons would see when entering the building, a sitting area for patrons to bring in food, and copper flashing on the western exterior wall. There was also quite a lot of emphasis put on the fact that the town wanted to continue with the use of brownstone, since not only would this flow from the Town Hall building, but it is also a part of East Longmeadow’s History.

The building was finally open to the public in February of 2004, and to many it was a disappointing sight. The large meeting rooms were nowhere to be seen, rather, when they entered the facility all they saw was a large staircase directly through the middle of their new library. To many this did the exact opposite of what this new building was intended to do, in fact this staircase took up more space than many had hoped. The windows that were supposed to be tinted to allow in a comfortable amount of sunlight were not tinted, which leads to near blinding brightness at times, the sitting area for patrons to eat in is still not in place, and the copper flashing on the side has already started to peal and fade. The copper flashing was one of many points that bothered Bradd and Chad; they found it pointless and ugly even without the pealing and fading. When asked what they thought the building reminded them of Bradd promptly stood up and said, “It looks like an old folks home, not a library.” Not to mention the obvious loss of space for books, since the staircase is such a prominent feature in the building.

The other building that the boys had issue with was their very own middle school. The construction on the new structure began in 2000 and ended in late summer 2003. The original building that stood in its place was built in 1951, and was named Birchland Park Middle School, and housed 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, each having their own wing.
Yet in time this became another case of the town’s population growing and the size of the school no longer being able to accommodate the new wave of students. For years they even had to employ over capacity modulars. Then in May of 2000 contractors finally broke ground on the new school. They had to build the facility closer to it’s neighboring Mapleshade Elementary School, so as to continue to house the students in the original middle school until the new school was ready for use.

The new school now has classrooms with numerous safety features, such as state of the art intercoms, two computer rooms with 24 computers each, each classroom also holding 4 computers, a television production area, and a large athletic field in the front of the building. Bradd and Chad who attend this new facility say they appreciate “the new stuff in the school”, but they also feel the have lost something since they attended the old school their 6th grade year and had their 8th grade year in the new middle school. Chad stated how he felt no connection to the “all white”, “mental institution-like” school. They both agreed there had to be some development but wished it had been done to the original school since that was where their parents had at one time attended. In a January 28th 2001 issue of the Union News, this concept of the “loss of small town charm” was the topic. East Longmeadow was one of many towns talked about in this article. Sid Starks a member of the East Longmeadow planning board stated “We don’t want East Longmeadow to become East Las Vegas.”

Globalization in small towns can also spark anger throughout the town because the residents feel they are loosing more than they are willing to give. This happened when CVS bought the zoning rights to the Four Corners area of Main St.. This was
known as the Garden Plaza, and was originally built in the 1950’s. By the 1990’s this Plaza was owned by Donald Campbell of Longmeadow and it housed 19 stores; a convenience store named Reid’s Variety, Coffee Roaster and Gifts, Starkies Music Shoppe, Style Inc. a ladies clothing shop, and others. The CVS had originally been a part of the building the houses Big Y Supermarket and Ames, but by summer of 1998 CVS began talks to built an independent sight. The owner of the CVS property, Buckingham Properties Inc. pushed for a quick relocation, even trying to bypass a traffic study. Gary Martinelli of Buckingham Properties was quoted saying “The intersection is fully traffic controlled, and we understand the town had a traffic study in the not too distant past.”

(The Union News, 10-01-99)

Many who live in East Longmeadow had quite an issue with the possible, new location for the CVS. Many of the businesses that were located at the Garden Plaza were angry because they never were able to renew their lease with Campbell. Yet Campbell sympathized with his tenants and promised to help find them new locations. The spokesmen for the CVS stated that it would “provide more excessiblity for patrons and improve the appearance of the Garden Plaza”. (The Union News, 10-01-99) Gary Martinelli even described the plaza as “a tired looking place that could do with some help”. This statement infuriated many of the town’s people, even to the point that AM radio host Dan Yorke felt this needed to be discussed publicly on his show. “Dan is a huge advocate of local businesses” (Gardner, Deb The Reminder) said Annie Keinath, Dan’s Producer. Many East Longmeadow residents felt they were loosing a part of themselves. “You loose the uniqueness of the small town…/ Its really sad.” (The Union
News, 10-01-99) said Lucy A. Brunell, an “E.L.” resident for 16 years. Sadly enough CVS and Buckingham Properties Inc. legally had every right to tear down the Garden Plaza and build their new “attractive modern building”. (The Union News, 10-01-99) Even the younger generation did not welcome the change. Lisa Bergeron, a 19 year old who has lived in “E.L.” all her life said “it was better back with Big Y, it just made more sense, now there’s this ugly thing across from this other ugly thing (Forastiere-Smith) where there used to be beautiful buildings”.

It is obvious by now that the topic of this paper is the many forms of globalization in small towns and the people’s impact. Yet there is some globalization that has a positive impact on the town and the people but indirectly destroys the fiber of that same town, especially when its outsiders stepping in. This is the case of the Heritage Plaza on N. Main St. across from the Heritage Park. Originally built in 1972 across from its competitor, Big Y Markets (today its Big Y Supermarkets). This plaza housed an A&B Supermarket, Store 451, Brooks Drugs and many others, but after nearly thirty years and a slow economy the plaza started to see more crime and less business.

Then in 1995 JRS Realty decided it was time for a change, and totally remodeled the plaza by adding in new stores like The Big Party, Strawberries Music, and what would become a Stop n Shop, along with many others. All new tenants of this plaza felt this was a perfect location to bring business, and the people of East Longmeadow were excited with the new stores being brought in as well as the jobs, since Stop n Shop itself employs over one hundred and fifty people. Linda Bergeron who has lived in East Longmeadow for nearly 22 years felt this was a needed change since the old plaza was so
crime ridden, and the local economy needed the push. In a Union News article dated July 3rd, 1997, Steve White, property manager for JRS Realty said, “You want national, as well as local, tenants. It’s a good mix.” In reference to the fact that this created a “Quality Image” which was a part of the article’s title.

Then in June of 1999 the 21-store plaza was sold to Edens and Avant of Columbia, S.C. who claimed they would continue to run the property in the same fashion as JRS did. Since Edens and Avant’s headquarters were located over 10 hours away they hired a Boston-based management group to actually run Heritage Plaza. This is where the conflict started, since neither corporation steps one foot in “E.L” more than once a year; many small local shops feel they are being bullied out by big businesses who don’t know their small town.

: Many who commented on this topic from Heritage Plaza did not want their names in this piece, and out of respect for their wishes their names will not be used, nor will their businesses’ names:

Since Edens and Avant have taken control of the Heritage Plaza there has been a very obvious increase in what are called camp fees and miscellaneous camp fees. These are usually maintenance fees for things such as lighting, cleaning of the exterior, security and foliage maintenance. One store saw an increase of $300.00 a month for miscellaneous camp fees, when the owner approached Edens and Avant’s Boston based management group, they said this increase was for foliage maintenance. The funny thing is that the foliage on the fronts of the plaza has not been altered since 1995, and the maintenance of this foliage has not increased since 1995. “These fees do not hurt the
huge chains”, said one small business owner, “but they do hurt us and inevitably close us down or move us out.”

Finally there is globalization that begins within the town. This is when one person with enough money and influence forgets where they come from and sees only a blank canvas instead of their very own home. This person’s name is James J. Faclone, the owner of Rocky’s Ace Hardware, started by his father Rocco Falcone Sr. more than seventy years ago. The location in East Longmeadow was bought in August of 1972, and has stayed a family owned business. Rocky’s has even been able to compete with the major chains such as Lowes and Home Depot, having stores also in Agawam, Hadley, Ludlow, two Springfield sites, and one in Westfield. The people of East Longmeadow even know the Falcons by their first names. In summer of 2003 Falcons began talks about building a shopping center on the 12 acres of land they own. On these 12 acres are a Health Trax Fitness Center and what is left of a Shawmut Bank. The Health Trax was originally a New England Health and Raquet, which was built nearly fifteen years ago.

The Shawmut Bank, on the other hand, was introduced to “E.L.” in 1948, where even my own grandmother, along with many women of the town, worked for a period of time. Sadly in 1996 after a merger with Fleet bank, Shawmut was closed, where it stood empty and vandalized for nearly eight years. Now Falcone is tearing it down, leaving only half of the structure standing, and the other half left in dangerous rubble.

Falcone, and the owner of the Health Trax business itself are bidding to bring in a shopping center, with a Walgreen’s and a Starbucks. The design of this new center would place the Starbucks in the open area in front of Health Trax, while the Walgreen’s
would be placed in the lot where half of Shawmut still stands. There would be two main entrance and exits, one on Maple Street, which would be the direct entrance to the Walgreen’s and one on N. Main St, which would give access to Rocky’s and the Starbucks. In a November 2003 issue of The Sunday Republican, James J. Falcone said he planned on having the project approved by the end of the year. In February of 2004 the East Longmeadow Planning Board met at Birchland Park Middle School to review Falcone’s plans. In this meeting their main concern was traffic, since the center of town is well known for it’s Rotary, which has even been documented in the book Ripley’s Believe it or Not, for the six street that intersect without the use of any lights. Falcone was asked to have a traffic study done for the planners to review.

In March of 2004 the planning board and seventy of the town’s residents met at Birchland Park again to review this $10 million project. Again the first issue voiced by the residents was traffic. Shirley Merrick asked “If you are taking a left from N. Main St. how many cars would stack up before you get to the rotary?” (Moore, Kathleen, M. The Sunday Republican) The traffic engineer hired by Falcone stated that based on his studies there is “125 feet, enough to allow at least five cars to queue up.” Many people of the town who read this in the paper were not impressed since just by viewing the rotary, the last thing it needs is five more cars. Many in the planning board feel this debate will not end as quickly as Falcone hopes. Robert J. Picknally’s quote to The Sunday Republican stated the Resident’s of “E.L.’s” feelings perfectly. “This is another example of East Longmeadow becoming a mini city and not the small town that many people moved to the town for.”
Many who live in the town plan to vote this development down, in the next town meeting scheduled in May, which will focus mainly on this possible shopping center. Even some of the local stores who asked Falcone if they could jump on board this project, are not keen to vote for it either, since they simply never got a call back. It is obvious to many who live here that James J. Falcone has forgotten what East Longmeadow is to its residents since he is blinded by dollar signs.

Hopefully the voices of the people of East Longmeadow will be louder than the sound of money when the time comes. As was said in the opening paragraph, there must be a system of local checks and balances to maintain the small towns of the US, or any country for that matter. If the people are not the loudest voices heard, then one day all that will be heard will be the fast pace life of one massive continent to continent size city.
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