

Bridge Replacement Project

Norwalk, Bridgeport, and Wethersfield

In rare instances, the loss of historic place cannot be avoided and so their loss is mitigated. Once again, however, knowledge of our state's unique cultural environment and preservation needs are critical to creating positive outcomes even when there is loss. Recently, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) with funding from the Federal Highway Administration completed mitigation agreements for the loss of a brownstone arch bridge, built in 1900, carrying West Cedar Street over the Five Mile River. Although the bridge was not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it was identified as eligible for listing. Unfortunately, a safety report identified extensive cracks, major hydraulic issues, and deficient geometry. Significant interventions would be needed to correct these defects, so avoiding impacts was not an option. With the goal of retaining historic fabric to the greatest extent possible, options were explored to retain one façade or rebuild re-using the stone. For various reasons, alternatives to try and minimize the loss were not feasible. As a result, the only way to conclude the Section 106 process was to execute a Memorandum of Agreement identifying actions to compensate for the loss of the bridge.

Connecticut brownstone is an important historic building material that was widely used throughout the region, particularly during the late 19th through early 20th centuries. Recently, SHPO has been funding projects that have struggled to find suitable brownstone for repairs or replacements, often importing replacement materials from India and China. As a result, SHPO requested that DOT salvage and store the brownstone from the bridge rather than crush it and send it to a landfill. Although it sounds like a simple request, it challenged standard DOT contracting processes and presented a small challenge. Approximately 30 cubic yards of material was recovered and put back into use for accessibility and rehabilitation projects at Trinity Episcopal Church in Wethersfield (1871; NR) and McLevy Hall in Bridgeport (1854, 1905; NR).

