

From: Judy Starr
Sent: Tuesday, June 14, 2016 3:38 PM
To: Bhardwaj, Priti S.; jmarpe@westportct.gov; Toni.Boucher@cga.ct.gov; gail.lavielle@housegop.ct.gov; jonathan.steinberg@housedems.ct.gov
Cc: info@preservewestport.com
Subject: Reasons to Preserve the Present Bridge Street Bridge

Dear Ms. Bhardwaj,

There are several solid reasons to preserve the present Bridge Street Bridge – both its present dimensions as well as the structure itself. This is not to cast aside the possibility of rehabilitation, but rather to point out serious negative side effects of a change in dimensions. For such modifications, no matter how well intended, will have side effects that could impact the nature and intensity of traffic through residential streets, and ultimately transform the character of neighborhoods on both sides of the river across which this historic bridge spans.

Please, then, consider the following:

An increase in height or even width: this will invite additional traffic down the town's residential streets during the times of traffic overflow from I-95, both predictable (rush hours) and intermittent (accidents; construction) which seem to occur with fair frequency. An increase in HEIGHT will allow 18 wheelers to travel through family neighborhoods. A town's residential streets should not be cultivated as conduits for traffic between exits (17 and 18, or 16 and 17, or 16 and 18) during peak overflow events on I-95.

Any increase in dimensions will lead to demand to widen residential streets to accommodate the traffic described above. This can only lead to more and more traffic. Think of the bottleneck which will develop when any additional lanes merge back down to fewer lanes.

An increase in dimensions also means not only an increase in the raw number of vehicles and trucks, but an increase in total tonnage barreling through local and residential streets. This means more wear and tear on the roadbed (increased need for repairs and maintenance, shorter life cycle for roads) and – the very same for the bridge as well.

An increase in dimensions can enable increasingly intense development in Saugatuck. (Such development includes contemplated project possibilities which include a commercial/residential project requiring nearly 500 parking spaces; a 150-unit housing development; and, a regional parking garage.) One or more of any such plans, if enabled, would invite increased traffic to and from and through the area, which would result in increased wear and tear on state roads, including Route 136 and I-95.

Last but not least, there is the Historic Nature of the Bridge. I invite the DOT to continue to work to preserve such irreplaceable historic structures across which we all may travel. Think, for example, of the Merritt Parkway. It would be so simple to just “modernize” it, but it remains as it is, and a treasure, both beautiful and useful. Think of the covered bridge in upstate Connecticut. Consider the age of the Cribari bridge, its recognition on the National Register of Historic Places, and its integral role interwoven in the history of Saugatuck attest to this. Let's find a way to preserve and protect this one, too.

Not only does recognizing, honoring, and preserving such an historic site honor the state's character and heritage, but it also helps to maintain the reality and project the image of CT as an attractive and unique place. It also guards the character of the streets and neighborhoods within each locality. Once gone, however, all the studies, tourist boards, grants, subsidies, and nostalgic recollections will never bring such features back. Without sensitivity to origins and history, any place, Westport included, could look the same as Stamford or White Plains, or any other city. There might be regrets, but by then it would be too late. I encourage the DOT and the town of Westport to plan for the bridge in such a way as to keep local roads in harmony with local character and history – in Westport's case, to treasure a well-claimed heritage as a New England town – and not pave over heritage with concrete and steel.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Judy Starr