



HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM, INC.

**BOX 368
65 HIGH RIDGE ROAD
STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT, 06905**

**MARSHALL MILLSAP PRESIDENT
COLIN SKIDMORE VICE PRESIDENT
RENÉE KAHN FOUNDER AND PROJECT MANAGER**

21 February 2012

Mr. Mark W. Alexander
Transportation Assistant Planning Director
Connecticut DOT
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, CT 06131

Re: Proposed Atlantic Street/Henry Street Intersection Improvements, Stamford, CT

Dear Mr. Alexander,

I write on behalf of the Historic Neighborhood Preservation Program (HNPP), Stamford's citywide historic and neighborhood preservation not for profit organization, to express our strong opposition to the proposed reconfiguration of the intersection of Atlantic and Henry Streets, Stamford, CT as presented by the City of Stamford and CT DOT and depicted on DOT Final Design Review Plan PLN-01 for project 135-320 (undated). We oppose this project because it calls for the unnecessary demolition of 745 Atlantic Street, an architecturally and historically significant building and major visual component in the South End Historic District, which will have an adverse impact on the quality of life in the historic neighborhood.

The South End Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 as the place where Stamford rose as a manufacturing center with industries of national significance – Yale & Towne locks, Blickensderfer typewriters and others – and for the resulting neighborhood that grew up near these industries, Stamford's best surviving example of a "walking city." 745 Atlantic is emblematic of this neighborhood's history as a place of newly arrived immigrants from Europe, especially Poland, many of whom remained in the city and are part of its social and cultural DNA. Constructed in 1914, the three-story mixed use building survives today with an unusual integrity of original architectural character and use. The flat-roofed building features its original curving Italian renaissance revival style pressed metal cornice. As a corner store, its two principal street-facing elevations are formally divided vertically into three parts in the manner of Beaux Arts architectural expression popular in American cities in the early twentieth century. 745 today remains fully occupied by two local businesses on the first floor and residences above.

This three story structure was originally planned with two modest retail units on the first floor and four apartments upstairs. This kind of small scale mixed-use building was once a common feature in Stamford's urban and village neighborhoods. 745 Atlantic is a remarkably well preserved example of this rapidly vanishing building type, the only one left on this stretch of Atlantic and a relatively rare survivor citywide. Pedestrian friendly because of their close proximity to the sidewalk, they are among the most vulnerable components of urban villages endangered by road widenings. Stamford needs more not less of this type of construction to succeed in its stated objectives to introduce transit oriented development around major transportation hubs.

745 Atlantic is also historically significant for the important stories it tells about the experiences of Stamford's twentieth century immigrants and their assimilation into the city's social and business life. Its storefronts, vacant for only a handful of years through its history have provided vital services to South End residents and proven to be remarkably flexible to adaptation. Shopkeepers and businesses have included neighborhood grocery stores of Harold Price, James Butler and Thomas Forbes, dry goods stores of S. Rothenberg and Stanley Shymborsky, Michael Neylan's butcher store, George Tsknopoulos' restaurant, confection stores of Mrs. E. G. Richmond and the Manhattan Cigar & Candy Co., C. G. Schwartz's sash making shop, the Czescik Electrical Co. shop, and the Rose Television and Radio Repair shop. In recent decades businesses like Your's Unisex, a hair salon, and El Mercado Food Market, the current commercial tenants, have served the neighborhood's large Latino communities. Residents of the building's four apartments comprise a similar diversity of overlapping ethnicities and cultures over time including families with Yankee, Irish, British, German, Scandinavian, Czech, Slovak, Polish, Russian and Latin American surnames. Demolishing 745 Atlantic Street will destroy this important physical record of Stamford's immigrant experience.

Losing 745 Atlantic will also greatly diminish the South End's physical sense of time and place, for the building is a major visual, place-making presence within the historic district. It protrudes gently into the long view south along Atlantic Street from the railroad underpass providing a relieving contrast to the new construction to its south and west, and it terminates the westward view from the intersection of Pacific and Henry Streets. 745 Atlantic, despite its relatively modest size, is that rare type of structure that helps orient residents and visitors within the neighborhood.

The intersection of Atlantic and Henry Streets has long been an active, pedestrian-friendly urban node serving the residents of the South End and is still so today because of the commercial activity in 745 Atlantic and the market at the northeast corner. The intersection remains popular because of the existing relatively narrow widths of the streets and the passive traffic calming resulting from the offset alignment of Henry Street. The South End, once a neighborhood characterized by small public gathering places such as this, cannot afford the continuing loss of such intrinsic urban amenities. The proposed reconfiguration, intended to speed traffic flow, will degrade its pedestrian-friendly quality by lengthening pedestrian crossings and eliminating passive traffic calming. As such, the proposed work also conflicts with Stamford's current master plan (2002) which recommends traffic calming along this stretch of Atlantic Street.

At a meeting on February 7 at the site with representatives of DOT, the City of Stamford Engineering Department, the South End Neighborhood Revitalization Zone, the CT Trust for

Historic Preservation, CT SHPO and HNPP, it was pointed out that the project has been planned to accommodate increased traffic from new development at the northwest corner, and that the realignment of Henry Street as proposed was favored over other alternatives because it would improve vehicular safety. It was additionally noted that the existing intersection has an excellent pedestrian safety record as is. Those of us concerned with preserving the historic neighborhood character and pedestrian safety left the meeting unconvinced that the proposed solution was in the best interest of the South End neighborhood. We wondered why vehicular infrastructure was being expanded so aggressively south of the transit center to serve new development there that has been promoted as "transit oriented."

We welcomed DOT's proposal to extend the period of public comment to allow the City to revisit alternatives. HNPP is currently following up on its offer to seek funding to retain a designer to consult with the City to develop a solution that respects the South End as a living neighborhood and irreplaceable historic place.

Sincerely,

Wes Haynes
Acting Director, HNPP
whaynes01@earthlink.net

cc Hon. Michael Pavia, Mayor, City of Stamford
Mani S. Poola, P.E., Traffic Engineer, City of Stamford
Ann M. Brown, P.E., Project Manager, Engineering Bureau, City of Stamford
Rep. Terry Adams, President, SENRZ
Helen Higgins, CT Trust for Historic Preservation
Susan Chandler, CT SHPO
Daniel Forrest, CT SHPO
Anthony Estanislau, CT DOT
Mandy Ranslow, CT DOT