

Outline of Comments submitted by Cynthia Reeder

August 28, 2018

Public Hearing – Operations & Land Use Committees of the BOR

Re: West Main Street Bridge

Say no to the contract.

Pedestrian vs. vehicular is an issue that must be weighed heavily based on the desires and testimony provided by the neighborhood ... and on what's best for the neighborhood.

My concerns are around 2 issues: Preservation and the financial aspects (including a no-bid contract)

Preservation:

- Should reject the contract because it does not state anywhere that one of the goals is to preserve the bridge's listing on the National Register of Historic Places and it assumes that no additional historic preservation review or oversight will be required.
- This assumption is false. Neither Stamford's Historic Preservation Advisory Commission (HPAC) nor the State Historic Preservation Office have reviewed the plans that will result from the contract before you. They reviewed earlier plans. They must review new plans and be involved along the way to ensure that the Bridge retains its National Register listing.

Finances:

- There is no justification for a no-bid contract. The City has known for nearly 18 years that the bridge needs to be repaired.
 - It has sought and secured a number of grants since 2000 from both the State and the FHWA (See 2015 timeline)
 - It has secured number contracts with design and engineering firms
 - It has developed, and paid for, plans ... for both vehicular and pedestrian bridges
 - \$223,000 was spent on design by 2004

- Now the City and Mill River Collaborative come to you and say this is an emergency and that the only viable plan is Mill River’s ... and that the only source of funding is a grant that the Mill River Collaborative received from Governor Malloy? These are gross mis-representations.
 - Among other mis-representations, Mill River has stated that its grant request to the State’s OPM was for a “re-appropriation” of a former grant. In fact, it requested a “supplemental” grant, specifically for the bridge. (See attached letter)
- Another burning question is “why is this money being funneled to the City through the Collaborative, instead of being given directly to the City?” What is the public policy reason for having these funds funneled through the Collaborative?

This bridge has been in disrepair since before the Collaborative was formed. Over the 20 years, the City has channeled tens of millions of dollars toward the park, letting the bridge crumble. (To date, in excess of \$80 million has been allocated by the City for the creation of the park, and that doesn’t even include the debt service charges related to the TIF and GO bonds issued to pay for part of the construction. This year alone the Collaborative received \$3.1 million in Operating and Capital Budget appropriations, include \$1.9 million that was re-allocated from a Federal ferry boat grant! (See attached back-up information)

Perhaps it’s time to take a closer look at fiscal priorities and put this bridge ... whatever the cost of rehabilitating it ... over other enhancements in and around Mill River Park in the short term. It’s time to take the steps necessary to put this historical and practical connection between the downtown and the West Side back in service. And to make it a priority.

It’s also time to take a longer term perspective and create a bridge that will handle emergency ... or other traffic, if that’s what’s best for the West Side neighborhood ... and not just a cheap quick fix proposed by the Collaborative.

The Main Street bridge has been standing for 130 years. The Collaborative and the City are proposing a walkway with a 20-25 year life span according to the contract before you. Let’s do it right, even if it takes a year or two longer.

Please take a longer term look at the City's needs and create a bridge whose engineering is competitively priced ... that is designed to last another 100 years... and that appropriately services both the West Side and downtown neighborhoods.

Say no to this contract.

1. It does not explicitly state that the design work must be done to ensure retention on National Register of Historic Places and to meet historic preservation review requirements.
2. There is no need for a "no bid" contract. In the past contracts for the bridge were sent out for competitive bids. This one should be too.
3. The numbers just don't add up. ... another reason to get other vendors looking at this. Five years ago WMC estimated it would cost \$3.6 million for a "least cost" pedestrian bridge option. Now, it says that it can be done for just a little over \$1 million.

Please say no to this contract and insist on a more responsible and competitively price contract.