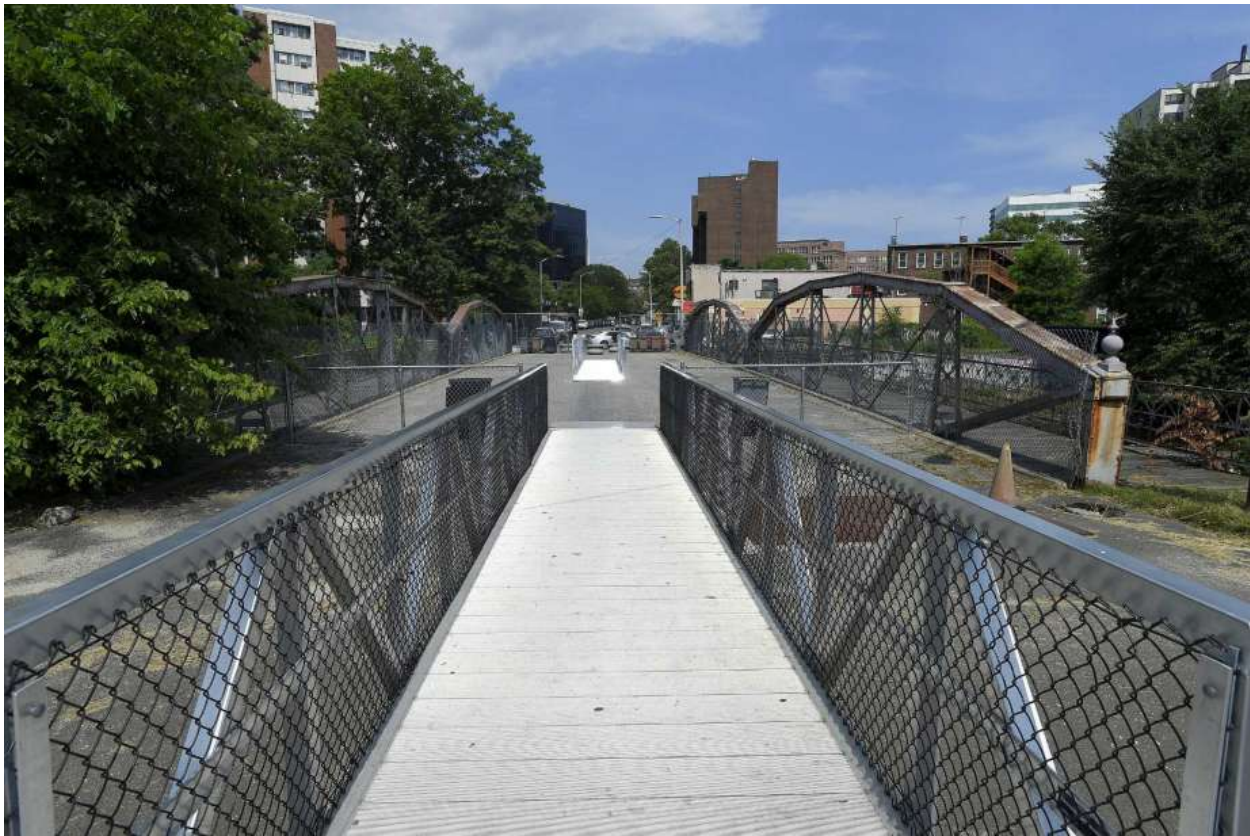


Op-ed: We've come to bridge, let's cross it

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A temporary pedestrian bridge is added to the West Main Street bridge near Mill River Street on July 13, 2018 in Stamford, Connecticut.

In the otherwise excellent recap by Angela Carella of the Main Street Bridge saga (news story, Aug. 1), the impression is left that there is a choice to be had between a pedestrian bridge and a vehicular bridge.

This is a false premise. The choice, at least for the next decade or more, is between a pedestrian bridge and no bridge. No funds — federal, state, or city — are available for a vehicular bridge. By the time those funds may be available (and there is no guarantee) the current bridge will crumble and fall into the river. That is the prediction of the professional engineers who have been monitoring the bridge for the last 16 years as the debate about cars versus people has raged. One more hurricane can do it.

Faced with this prospect, and the fact that federal and state funds that have been allocated only for a pedestrian bridge with emergency vehicle access would entail at least 4-6 more years of federal/state-mandated reviews and approvals before completion, the city approached the Mill River Park Collaborative with an alternate plan. This would entail repairing and restoring the bridge for pedestrians with emergency vehicle access at lower cost and, importantly, a much faster timeline. Under this plan, the bridge would reopen by the summer of 2020.

Because the Collaborative has always seen the bridge as a critical connection between the West Side and downtown, it agreed to work with the state to divert \$2 million that was intended for park improvements to the bridge repair. Contrary to some quotes in the article, the collaborative has always worked to connect the two neighborhoods rather than create a barrier. Today, one has only to spend an hour or so at the bridge to see how many West Siders walk down and over the bridge, safely, deliberately avoiding the traffic on Tresser or Broad.

The Collaborative has West Side representatives on its board who support our position, and we have consulted West Side residents and businesses on important park developments. The many West Side residents who enjoy the playground, the carousel, and the park programs attest to their connection to and enjoyment of the park.

Forward-thinking cities today in the United States and around the world are creating pedestrian-only zones that make cities more livable and actually improve economic activity for small local businesses. That's what we can create with a pedestrian Main Street Bridge and improvements the city plans to make to the Main Street approach to the bridge, Smith Street up to Stillwater and Boxer Square that will improve traffic flow on the West Side and make the whole area more pedestrian friendly and economically vital. Furthermore, having cars crossing a Main Street Bridge at what is now a five-street intersection which separates the children's playground and the carousel to the north would inevitably result in collisions between people and cars, perhaps causing fatalities.

In 2008 the Board of Representative accepted the URC's recommendation to make the Main Street Bridge a pedestrian only bridge with emergency vehicle access. On Aug. 6, the current Board of Representatives by approving its Operations Committee's recommendation can make that bridge a reality by the summer of 2020 or watch the next hurricane possibly wipe all of this away.

Arthur Selkowitz is chairman of the Mill River Collaborative, and Dudley Williams is the group's president.

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