

9 March 22

Stone Bridge Study Report Background

FROM: Bill Harris, Chairman, Westport, CT Historic District Commission



TO: Stone Bridge Study Committee

The Stone Bridge Study Committee chaired by HDC member Scott Springer reported out on 27 February 2020 just a couple weeks before the COVID shut down. Scott's committee had met on 25 February and recommended the preparation of a study report for eight bridges. (attached)

Specifically, the Bridge Study Committee requested, "the allocation of resources – internal or external, as deemed appropriate by the HDC – for the preparation of the study report".

The intent of the HDC as expressed in a sense of the meeting in the June 2020 virtual Zoom meeting was, and is, to seek funding to create the formal study report as required by Connecticut General Statutes Annotated. (CGSA)

Back in 2020 it was anticipated that the funding resources for the eight bridges study would exceed our \$10,000 a year budget especially once all the other yearly items were deducted. The HDC subsequently sought funding for two studies from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). The first was for the study of the possible Lee's Canal district and the second for the stone bridges study.

SHPO's response was that they first wanted the Westport HDC to establish the Certified Local Government (CLG)-required Plan of Preservation for the town. That way they felt that the Stone Bridge and Lee's Canal studies could be logically placed into a hierarchy of priorities to be funded through various sources to include Federal and State grants.

They further suggested that SHPO would likely allocate \$30,000 first to fix our woefully inadequate Historic Resource Inventory (HRI), and then to help us seek an additional \$20,000 from the Federal government for the Plan of Preservation Study as required to maintain our CLG status.

Both have now been approved thanks to Donna's amazing efforts and the HRI grant has gone out to RFP and been down selected and contracted. The second grant to create the overall plan is about to go out for bid.

In the meantime, we also looked internally to see if we had the resources in terms of expertise to meet the statutory requirements for the study report. As Scott is a professional architect himself, we thought perhaps he could do it. His response was that he does not feel qualified nor credentialed to provide a formal bridge analysis that would stand scrutiny at the state level as required by the CGSA. We have no historian in the HDC office now as you know, and before my time I understand that we have had past study reports which were written by former HDC members themselves rejected by the state.

The CGSA requirements for the Study Report are fairly specific, and the final report "shall" be submitted to the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, the parent organization of SHPO.

The four requirements are in CGSA Title 7, Chapter 97A, Part II 7-147q. must include:

“(1) An analysis of the historic significance and architectural merit of the buildings, structures, objects or sites proposed as historic properties; (2) a map showing the exact boundaries of the area to be designated as the historic property or properties; (3) a proposed ordinance or proposed ordinances designed to designate and provide for the protection of an historic property or properties in accordance with the provisions of this part; and (4) such other matters as the committee may deem necessary or advisable.”

As the intended Bridge Study report exceeds our internal capacity in the HDC both in terms of expertise and budget to hire such expertise, we are in a holding pattern until we get the Plan of Preservation done.

Eventually a public hearing will be held as well and

“(f) The historic properties study committee [read Westport HDC in our case] shall submit its report with any changes made following the public hearing, along with any comments or recommendations received pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, and such other materials as the committee may deem necessary or advisable to the legislative body of the municipality within sixty-five days after the public hearing.

Finally, of course, the owner or owners of record of each proposed historic property has the right to file a notarized objection to the proposed designation. Nick informs us that “if the owner of the bridge objects, that kills the whole designation”. The owner in this case is of course the Town of Westport.

Couple amateur observations on my part include:

Would a separate ordinance for each bridge be required as they are not contiguous?

How does one establish the “exact boundaries of the area to be designated as the historic property”? GPS coordinates perhaps?

In my conversations with Public Works Department and specifically the Director, Pete Ratkiewich, late in 2021, he welcomed our HDC input and in fact offered to include our bridge study requirements in his RFP that he will eventually release for his formal bridge study that must include a cultural assessment by a subject matter expert.

We also have interest from local citizens who are very involved with historic preservation and could perhaps provide valuable input as well.

Working together with town departments, subject matter experts who would be contracted to write the report and local citizens we should be able to arrive at the best possible solutions in the preservation of these lovely contributing resources to the Town of Westport.

Again, the HDC is on record to support the preparation of a Stone Bridge Study Report. The only question is the source of the funding for the study report subsequent to the completion of the Town Plan of Historic Preservation as required by SHPO.

STONE BRIDGE STUDY COMMITTEE (Springer, Braun, Van Wie)

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by Scott Springer, 27 February 2020

Pursuant to the bridge study committee's meeting of February 25th, the study committee recommends the preparation of a study report for the following bridges:

1. **Main Street at Willowbrook Cemetery** (pending approval of the Willowbrook Cemetery Association, which has been contacted about potential designation).
2. **Saugatuck Avenue**
3. **Evergreen Avenue** (pending confirmation that the established boundary of the Evergreen Avenue Historic District currently excludes the bridge).
4. **Jesup Road** (pending confirmation that the established boundary of the Jesup Road Historic District currently excludes the bridge).
5. **Greens Farms Road at Center Street**
6. **Cross Highway Over Dead Man's Brook**
7. **Long Lots Road Over Muddy Brook**
8. **Myrtle Avenue at Violet Lane**

The bridge study committee requests the allocation of resources—internal or external, as deemed appropriate by the HDC—for the preparation of the study report.