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BOARD OF
REPRESENTATIVES

Board of Representatives
888 Washington Boulevard
4th Floor, Government Center
Stamford, CT 06904-2152

May 17, 2010

Dear members of the Board of Representatives,

Stamford was frankly stunned by the recent vote to stop acquisition of properties for completion of the Urban Transitway Phase Two. Once commitments have been made, abandoning them is ill advised.

The East Side Partnership, a non-profit organization of residents, merchants, and property owners in the East Side, urges you to read its enclosed position paper, reconsider, and approve the proposal.

We have supported the SUT for several reasons:

- Improved traffic flow through the East Side, South End, and downtown.
- More efficient intermodal transportation.
- Relief of congestion at and around the Stamford Transportation Center.

Suspending the project in mid-stride is extremely risky. It was also the worst possible action the Board could take, even though some members obviously felt they were helping owners whose property is involved. Once mentioned for acquisition, these properties effectively became unmarketable to any other possible purchaser than the City itself. Financing would not be available from informed lenders. No intelligent investor, even with with ready cash, would risk it on obviously vulnerable property.

Notwithstanding personal feelings about City land acquisition, this is no time to reverse course. The only fair responsible action for the Board to take at this point is to authorize continuing and completing the SUT.

Thank you for your consideration,

James M. Grunberger, Chairman

John Roman III, Acting Director

The East Side Partnership, 79 High Ridge Road, Stamford, CT 06905 Phone (203) 324-516 Fax (203) 961-9209

The Urban Transitway – Why Halfway Is No Way

The East Side Partnership's Position

Stamford's commitment to the Urban Transitway was made years ago, and the course of its development was set. Altering, even stalling it, threatens the City's ability to receive future grant funds essential to its overall transportation needs which are, and will remain urgent for years to come. The weakening goes beyond transportation funding – to all sorts of Federal support! We struggled to earn our favorable position, ahead of many others vying for support. Losing it will be easier, through waffling and indecision. Regaining it? Nearly impossible!

Millions have been spent on planning and developing the first phase, and starting the second phase, to complete the project at East Main Street (US-1.)

The time to debate the project - its flaws and its strong points – has come and gone, no matter how we feel about them. At a time when Stamford is in the unique, fortunate position of being one of the few cities in the country to qualify for strong Federal financial support second-guessing the Transitway is akin to the City cutting off its nose to spite its face. Surely, it makes a point, but at a terrible price, which would literally disfigure Stamford in the eyes of Washington.

Why is that important? For one thing, precious little other money will be available to the City for the foreseeable future. A new parking garage is needed at the Stamford Transportation Center (STC). The Atlantic, Elm and East Main Street railroad underpasses need to be widened. An all-track "reliever" rail station on the East Side is expected to ease pressure on the STC as Harbor Point and the rest of the South End grow. Then, there are all the other Federal grants we seek.

This will continue to place exponentially increasing demands upon our infrastructure. Demands which must be anticipated and met as the City tries to attract new businesses and jobs, with sustainable Transit Oriented Development of workforce housing, spurred by more efficient intermodal transit.

True, the taste of eminent domain is bitter to many. That is very understandable. Yet, it is obvious that efforts have been made here to avoid as many complete takings of property as possible, and that the process has been much more cordial than one might expect. Yes, it's disruptive. But delay, now, is worse.

Then, there is something else to consider. Throwing these property owners into an interminable limbo - waiting to see if and when anything will happen – is in itself truly an act of adverse condemnation. The clouds over their properties will not blow away. Stalling now condemns them to a fate worse than eminent domain – eminent financial pain with no relief.

They have been thrown into jeopardy, and stuck with unmarketable properties no one else would ever buy. Once named as an acquisition site, the property really has been taken. In fact, the very people whom opponents of continuing the Transitway are trying to help are the ones they are hurting the most!

Then, there's the impact of stopping a job in the middle. Other unintended consequences could include catastrophic traffic management failures for the millions already spent, including even more agonizing bottlenecks at Elm Street, Magee Avenue, and East Main Street.

Stopping now will replicate the obvious "wisdom" Stamford exercised years ago, when it decided to let the Town Center Mall dead end Main Street. Like it or not, it would not be prudent – for many reasons – for Stamford to ditch or even delay Phase Two of the Urban Transitway project.

The truly responsible thing for members of the Board of Representatives to do now is to approve the continuation of work on the Urban Transitway, including property acquisition. That is why we urge reconsideration and approval of the SUT acquisition resolution without further delay.

This is the time for reasoned action, not for retrenchment. Stamford has no choice but to complete the SUT, and to maintain its most favored eligibility status for future Federal funding. That requires a dispassionate decision to carry the SUT to its completion.

Thank you for your consideration,

James M. Grunberger, Chairman John Roman III, Acting Director

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