



Westport Historic District Commission

Town Hall

Westport, Conn. 06880

TO: Larry Bradley, Director of Planning and Zoning
Planning and Zoning Commission Members

FROM: *ACE*
Francis Henkels, Chairman, Historic District Commission

DATE: September 5, 2013

RE: Relocation of Kemper-Gunn House from 35 Church Lane to Elm Street.

Westport has few remaining good examples of Queen Anne houses, dating from the latter half of the nineteenth century, in as prominent a location as the Kemper-Gunn house, currently located close to the town center at 35 Church Lane. This house embodies qualities representative of that period of time in Westport's history; growing prosperity, civic pride, interest in living "in town", a sense of community. It has graced that portion of Church Lane for over 120 years, easing the visual transition from the more residential character of the neighborhood to the east to the more densely developed commercial town center.

Unfortunately, this house now stands in the path of a large new mixed-use development project. With the threat of demolition looming, a group of concerned citizens and members of the Historic District Commission began investigating ideas for preserving it. Bedford Square Associates initiated an offer to relocate the structure, at their expense, to town property and to donate it to the town. They suggested the relatively simple move across Elm Street to a portion of town property currently part of the Baldwin parking lot. They presented a conceptual design that involved placing the house on a new foundation structure that will contain parking beneath the house. BSA has committed to funding all costs for the new site work and foundation construction.

The preservation advocacy group, in an effort to develop the most viable way for the town to undertake this effort, has conceived of a process whereby the donated structure would be transferred to a private developer who would renovate the building at their cost and pay the town rent on the land. The process would produce a steady cash flow to the town in the form of lease income and real estate taxes while requiring minimal or no capital costs to the town. The town has prepared an RFP for developers to undertake the ownership and renovation of the house and have a viable proposal. We believe it is now time for the town to take the next step and for the Planning and Zoning Commission to issue a positive 8-24 report to move this project forward.

We believe the carefully designed re-siting of the Kemper-Gunn house to Elm Street will enhance the streetscape, which has historically been residential in character. As conceived it will afford the town the flexibility to retain most of the parking currently provided or to integrate the relocated house into a possible future parking structure that might be developed there. In the process we will have saved an important asset to Westport's historic character.

cc: Gordon F. Joseloff, First Selectman