May 30, 2007

Dear City Commissioners:

Up to this point, I have not taken a position with respect to the location of the ramp for the underground parking garage.

However, after reviewing the findings of the Planning Board, the Parks and Recreation Board, the Architectural Review Committee and the Historic District Commission, all of which unanimously recommended that the ramp be located on Henrietta Street, I have realized that it is vital for our city to adopt their recommendations. I think that the location of the ramp on Henrietta Street is in the best interest of the city and the users of the park, City Hall, Baldwin Library and The Community House.

My reasons for strongly supporting the location of the ramp on Henrietta are as follows:

- Because Bates Street has much more pedestrian traffic than Henrietta Street, the ramp should not be located on Bates Street in the interest of pedestrian safety.

  - Because of The Community House and Baldwin Library, there is significant pedestrian traffic on Bates Street as contrasted with Henrietta Street. Our Community House winter session alone had 200 classes from 8:30 am to 10:30 pm plus many other activities including the Early Childhood Center and other civic events. On a typical Friday, over 200 senior men with an average age of 80, fill The Community House. Hundreds of pedestrians a day will stream from the parking structure across Bates. These pedestrians will be endangered by cars exiting the structure that make right turns and by cars approaching from Maple to enter the structure. In contrast, there is very little pedestrian traffic on Henrietta.

  - According to the traffic study, the existing lot has 150 cars and 6 ingress/egress points. The proposed parking garage has 210 cars and one ingress point creating a concentration of cars eight times greater than now exists directly across from The Community House.

  - The traffic study unrealistically weights the queuing capacity of Bates without regard for the dynamics of the situation. Many drivers queue from the north on Bates Street to drop off or pick up children and seniors in front of The Community House. Impatient drivers will pull around the queue to enter the parking structure intensifying the danger to pedestrians.

- A potentially unsafe condition exists because motorists entering or exiting the ramp will shoot into or out of the ramp jeopardizing pedestrians. Although this will be the case wherever the entrance and exit are located, danger is lessened on Henrietta Street where there is less pedestrian traffic.

- The current design has the ramp emptying traffic on to Bates Street which is the residential side of the park. The ramp should empty on to Henrietta which is the commercial side of the park and will be used less by pedestrians entering and exiting the park.

- For aesthetic reasons, the ramp should be located on Henrietta which is a commercial area where it would face a commercial looking wall and the ramp to the Townsend Hotel's parking structure.

  - The overhead "height restriction" beam spanning the ramp entrance will detract from the historic and aesthetic quality of The Community House architecture. The utilitarian nature of the restriction beam directly relates more to the overhead door of the Townsend garage.

- For logistical reasons, the ramp should be located on Henrietta Street.

  - The logistics of pulling out of the parking structure and entering The Community House pick-up queue southbound on Bates are problematic. It cannot be done without turning left and circling the entire block or by turning right out of the garage and immediately doing an illegal U-turn. In contrast, if the exit is on Henrietta Street, a car can pull out and circle one-half block to pick up guests of both The Community House and the Townsend Hotel ballroom.

  - Currently, there are three entrances/exits to Lot 7 off Henrietta Street. Because there will be one entrance to the underground parking garage off Henrietta, there will be more room to stack limousines and busses on Henrietta.

Most importantly, with the tremendous amount of pedestrian traffic on Bates, the city should locate the ramp to the underground parking structure on Henrietta to ensure, to the extent possible, pedestrian safety.

Respectfully,

Shelley Roberts
President and CEO
The Community House

cc. Tom Markus, Dennis Dembiec