

VERBATIM PROCEEDINGS

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COUNCIL MEETING
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

MARCH 6, 2019

9:40 A.M.

WILLIMANTIC TOWN HALL
979 MAIN STREET
WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT

POST REPORTING SERVICE
HAMDEN, CT (800) 262-4102

RE: HISTORIC PRESERVATION COUNCIL MEETING
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1 . . .Verbatim proceedings of a meeting of
2 the Historic Preservation Council, held at Willimantic
3 Town Hall, 979 Main Street, Willimantic, Connecticut on
4 March 6, 2019, at 9:40 a.m. . . .

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9 CHAIRPERSON SARA NELSON: I'm going to
10 call the March 6th Historic Preservation Council meeting
11 to order and welcome all of you.

12 For those of you -- I want to just -- who
13 have come in previously I want to draw your attention to
14 the sign-in sheet which is at the back of the room, as
15 well as the public comment procedures. And we're having
16 trouble with the microphone -- there we go.

17 The meeting is going to be divided into
18 two parts as you will see from the agenda. The first
19 part of the meeting will run till 10:15, and that's to
20 allow us to conduct our regular business.

21 There will be a 15-minute recess and then
22 the second part of the meeting, part two, will begin at
23 10:30. And the recess is to allow for more people to
24 come in, further set-up with regard to Agenda Item No.

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1 IX, which is why I imagine most of you are here today.

2 Should we have sufficient time before
3 10:15 to conduct further business on our agenda what we
4 will do is reorder the agenda to have agenda Item No. XI,
5 which is the report of the SHPO office in part one, but
6 we'll see how we're doing time-wise.

7 For the benefit of the transcriptionist,
8 for Council members today I will be calling on you by
9 name so that it's clear in the transcript who is
10 speaking. And I just want to quickly make sure that
11 everybody who wants to speak so far to any of the agenda
12 items has actually signed into the sign-in sheet.

13 The Historic Preservation Council votes on
14 matters which provide leadership service and economic
15 benefit to property owners, consultants, local
16 governments and not-for-profit organizations. Given this
17 responsibility and to maintain the highest professional
18 standards in the discharge of our duties, it's important
19 to maintain a strong code of ethics for all Council
20 members and department employees.

21 In order to provide possible violations
22 with the Department of Economic and Community
23 Development's ethic's statement it is necessary for
24 Council to be aware of situations which there is real

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1 potential or apparent conflict of interest involving
2 anyone here. A conflict of interest may occur when a
3 public official's participation in agency matters result
4 in personal financial gain.

5 You've been provided with a copy of the
6 DECD ethic's statement and the governing state statutes
7 and having reviewed them and today's agenda, I'm going to
8 ask members of the Council and staff to identify any
9 affiliations that may potentially create a conflict of
10 interest. Are there any? None noted, okay.

11 The next agenda item is the review of the
12 February 6, 2019 minutes. Are there comments or
13 corrections to those minutes? None noted. All those in
14 favor of the minutes as presented?

15 VOICES: Aye.

16 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: It's unanimous. All
17 those opposed, no, okay. Motion passes.

18 Agenda Item VII (a), pursuant to
19 Connecticut General Statute 7-147q(c), the Historic
20 Preservation Council votes to recommend approval of the
21 proposed ordinance and boundary as presented in a study
22 report for the proposed Historic District 39 Cross
23 Highway, Westport, Connecticut, as presented by the
24 Westport Historic District Commission and dated January

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1 24, 2019.

2 The above named property -- oops, that's
3 it, sorry. I was reading an old motion.

4 MS. KATHLEEN MAHER: Oh, the old motion?

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Yes. Is there a
6 motion to move?

7 MS. MARGARET FABER: So moved.

8 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Margaret, and a
9 second?

10 MS. MAHER: Second.

11 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy Maher seconded.

12 MS. MARY DUNNE: Good morning everybody.
13 So as you know, these site reports are produced at the
14 local municipal level --

15 COURT REPORTER: Can I have your name
16 please?

17 MS. DUNNE: -- oh, Mary Dunne, State
18 Historic Preservation office, D-U-N-N-E.

19 COURT REPORTER: Thank you.

20 MS. DUNNE: At the municipal level as part
21 of the local designation process they're submitted to
22 their local Planning & Zoning for comment, and then
23 submitted to the Historic Preservation Council for
24 comment.

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1 The voting matter as allowed for in the
2 statute is to approve the boundary in the ordinance. So
3 staff is recommending approval of the boundary ordinance,
4 they seem in order.

5 And then the other purpose is to comments
6 from the Council that will be submitted back to the
7 Historic District Commission of Westport to be read at
8 the public meeting.

9 As far as staff comments, this staff
10 report is motivated by a design for the strongest
11 preservation tool to protect the property. The main
12 block of the historic house is very architecturally
13 intact.

14 The 2,000 square feet of the additions are
15 not so much, but we do commend the owner for wanting to
16 protect this property and we do recognize the
17 architectural significance of this.

18 Are there any comments from the Council
19 that I can share?

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Apparently not. It
21 was nice to see some mention of the land and having a
22 site -- a real site plan.

23 MS. DUNNE: Right.

24 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: That was a great

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1 benefit to the future.

2 MS. DUNNE: Ahum.

3 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Margaret.

4 MS. FABER: I just had a question. So on
5 the September 20th e-mail she mentions about the
6 protections offered and I just wanted to be sure that she
7 doesn't think it's protected under CEPA.

8 MS. DUNNE: Right. No, but as you may be
9 aware a local property designation -- in order to get a
10 demolition permit in the town the owner would have to
11 secure a Certificate of Appropriateness from the
12 Commission.

13 So if the Commission votes not to approve
14 that, then they can't get a demolition permit. So it's a
15 pretty powerful tool, that's not CEPA correct.

16 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Any other questions?

17 MS. MAHER: And there's --

18 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy.

19 MS. MAHER: -- thank you. And there's no
20 other contributing properties on the --

21 MS. DUNNE: Not on this parcel, no.

22 MS. MAHER: -- okay.

23 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Any other comments or
24 questions? All those in favor of this motion?

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1 VOICES: Aye.

2 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: All those opposed?

3 Motion carries.

4 Agenda Item XII(b), pursuant to
5 Connecticut General Statute 7-147q(c), the Historic
6 Preservation Council votes to recommend approval of the
7 proposed ordinance and boundary as presented in the study
8 report for the proposed historic property 15 Hyatt Lane,
9 Westport, Connecticut as presented by the Westport
10 Historic District Commission and dated January 24, 2019.

11 The above named property will be added to
12 the State Register of Historic Places. Motion to move?

13 MS. MAHER: Motion to move.

14 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy, and second?

15 DR. WALTER WOODWARD: Second.

16 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Walt.

17 MS. DUNNE: Okay, and my comments
18 regarding 39 Cross Highway sort of apply to this property
19 as well as far as the comments and the motion are
20 concerned.

21 Staff does recommend approval of the
22 ordinance and boundary, however, the barn is not really
23 congruent with the property that's being designated. I
24 think it's a good idea to have the entire boundary as

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1 part of the parcel, but I believe that reviewing changes
2 to the barn are going to be problematic.

3 It is a relocated barn, it doesn't really
4 bear any architectural or historical relationship to the
5 house itself. However, again as a local tool, the town
6 does have the leeway to establish the parcels that they
7 think are fit.

8 The house itself, again, is part of a
9 former subdivision of which about half of the properties
10 have been demolished and replaced with larger buildings.
11 So again, this study report is motivated by a desire to
12 preserve this property which is intact from its
13 construction in the 1940s.

14 And so that is basically the comments of
15 staff. Are there any comments or questions from the
16 Council?

17 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Margaret.

18 MS. FABER: Just a comment. I saw that
19 they might be considering, not this application, but to
20 include the other six 1950s houses in the local Historic
21 District. I think that would be a great idea.

22 MS. DUNNE: Yeah, yeah. It'll be a little
23 --

24 MS. FABER: Right, right, they're the same

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1 genre, yeah.

2 MS. DUNNE: -- but I think it's good to
3 have a pioneer --

4 MS. FABER: Yeah, exactly.

5 MS. DUNNE: -- and it might motivate other
6 people --

7 MS. FABER: And they're all --

8 MS. DUNNE: -- to actually just recognize
9 the fact that they are in a neighborhood that once had --
10 that has some significance and kind of preserve what's
11 left of it.

12 MS. FABER: -- yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Any other comments?
14 Leah.

15 DR. LEAH GLASER: Yeah, I think -- I mean,
16 it's -- since part of it's submitted as part of a World
17 War II subdivision, to have it all alone is a little out
18 context.

19 MS. DUNNE: Yes.

20 DR. GLASER: So I agree that it would
21 help, that it would have benefits --

22 MS. DUNNE: Yeah, that was something that
23 staff kind of struggled with as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Other comments?

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1 Brian.

2 DR. BRIAN JONES: Just curious, so if the
3 District is eventually -- does that has the town talked
4 about that yet, have you discussed it?

5 MS. DUNNE: No, I've not heard anything --

6 DR. JONES: So it's not --

7 MS. DUNNE: -- from the town.

8 DR. JONES: -- very important yet. But
9 when there is sort of discontiguous cases like that
10 doesn't that pose challenges to developing the district
11 boundaries? How do you -- is there anything established
12 like that?

13 MS. DUNNE: It would -- if this were a
14 National Historic Register District, it probably would
15 not be a viable district, too many non-contributing.
16 Probably the same with State Register.

17 With local Districts, sometimes it's the
18 nature of the designation if they want to start with a
19 small group of buildings. However you're right, the
20 other buildings would not even be contributing to the
21 architectural history of the district.

22 So -- but no, it is allowable under the
23 state enabling legislation.

24 DR. JONES: So in a sense it's more of a

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1 thematic district --

2 MS. DUNNE: Yeah, actually it probably
3 would be something more like that.

4 DR. JONES: -- okay, thanks.

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Other comments or
6 questions? Hearing none, all those in favor of the
7 motion?

8 VOICES: Aye.

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: All those opposed?
10 Motion carries.

11 MS. DUNNE: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Okay, I'm noting that
13 the time now -- we've got about 25 minutes before our
14 10:15 stop to part one of the meeting.

15 I'm going to suggest to identify the time
16 certain for the start of Agenda Item IX, that we reorder
17 the agenda to bring Agenda Item XI forward and we can do
18 that by a unanimous vote.

19 So all those in favor of reordering the
20 agenda to hear No. VI -- okay, thank you. Alright.

21 MS. ELIZABETH SHAPIRO: Great, good
22 morning, this is Liz Shapiro speaking. I'm excited to
23 talk a little bit about what the SHPO Museums have been
24 doing and to let you -- I'll give you an update on what

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1 we've been doing in terms of our other SHPO activities,
2 conference, etc.

3 You know I love giving the Museum reports
4 but we're a little bit in limbo right now because as we
5 work towards our opening of May 1st for all four of our
6 properties, we're waiting for approval on our seasonal
7 workers.

8 I'm optimistic because I was told that
9 they have been put into the CORE system, so that's good
10 news, but we're still waiting on approval from the powers
11 that be. Meanwhile we're moving ahead on a lot of
12 interesting things.

13 Some of the things have been on the list
14 for quite a while including new security systems. Our
15 security systems on the sites are quite old, they are
16 functional at most places but it's time -- they are
17 getting to the point beyond where they can be repaired
18 because of age.

19 So at Old Newgate Prison, because they
20 recently reopened, they're always our guinea pig with our
21 new system. So we're installing a completely new system
22 there as we speak and that's going to include video
23 cameras.

24 We've changed our security system to move

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1 away from the system we had been -- the provider we had
2 been using and now we're using the same provider that
3 DEEP uses for its park sites. So we're hoping to work
4 more with them to try different kinds of technologies.

5 But we are going to be using some video
6 cameras at Old Newgate Prison, which can put images onto
7 your phone. So if we receive word that things are
8 happening we'll be able to actually see, not the whole
9 complex, but be able to see what's happening.

10 So that's an exciting development. We're
11 also moving ahead with doing that at the Whitfield
12 Museum. I think -- if you remember last year I told you
13 how we had done drone videos and 3-D videos at Old
14 Newgate. Well, we have completed those for the Prudence
15 Crandall Museum.

16 And we were able to do those prior to
17 closing the Museum for restoration Labor Day this year,
18 so they have already come in handy. We haven't widely
19 distributed them or made the public aware of them, but
20 we're using them in the Museum.

21 They were used actually two days after
22 they were completed when we had visitors to the site who
23 -- part of the party could not go upstairs and we were
24 able to show them a clip of the 3-D tour of the entire

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1 upstairs of the Museum and they were thrilled. So this
2 has great possibilities and potential and it's really
3 very economical.

4 They're going to be moving to Henry
5 Whitfield and we're going to be doing the Henry Whitfield
6 Museum and the Visitor's Center next, so we're really
7 excited about what that means in terms of accessibility
8 issues.

9 At Prudence Crandall we've also been
10 working very effectively with the Bridgeport public
11 schools. They declared -- we had a day declared to be
12 Prudence Crandall Day in Bridgeport, and so now there's a
13 whole bunch of people who want to move forward to look at
14 what that could mean and how we could really begin to
15 talk about our state heroine in Bridgeport so that's
16 exciting.

17 Let's see, at the Eric Sloane Museum we're
18 all waiting for construction to begin. The Museum has
19 been almost completely opened. We have a pre-bid meeting
20 for the contractors on March 18th. The Museum has been
21 fully emptied now except for a few things that -- our
22 staff person Barb Russ needs to still be working in there
23 as needed.

24 When the Museum becomes a construction

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1 zone we will only have very limited access to the
2 building and Barb will be working from home through the
3 time when the season starts. And when the season starts
4 she is going to spend a bit of her time at Old Newgate,
5 so that's exciting.

6 I guess the last thing I would say is that
7 we're also working at Newgate on some of the final
8 testing that needs to be done, so we're updating all of
9 our radon testing. We are also contracting to have a
10 complete review of the mines. The last time that was
11 done was in 2014, and for obvious reasons we need to make
12 sure that things have not changed.

13 So we're excited about that. And then I
14 would encourage everybody to visit Old Newgate this
15 summer because Morgan has been spending a lot of time
16 looking at things to put in her gift shop. So it's going
17 to be an amazing gift shop, so feel free to stop by and
18 spend money because that will help support the
19 organization, which we really like.

20 In terms of SHPO activities, I think I'll
21 bring Mary back and see if she wants to do any updates.
22 I would just say that we've been working pretty
23 extensively preparing for our SHPO conference. We do
24 have our keynote speaker confirmed, and that's going to

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1 be Tom Maize from the National Trust for Historic
2 Preservation. Are there things -- other things that
3 you'd like to add?

4 MS. DUNNE: I think we've talked a lot
5 about the format of the conference. It's going to be the
6 one-day on Friday and then a half day on-site in Guilford
7 to do a variety of materials, preservations.

8 The attendance there is going to be
9 limited. We're hoping to get, you know, close to 300
10 people at the conference itself but we might be only able
11 to accommodate about 60 people at the half day, the next
12 day. But we're really excited about that so things are
13 coming along there.

14 We also -- I think last time I noted that
15 we got two solid proposals for our economic and quality
16 of life impact report, and that's all I can say. But
17 that's moving forward through the evaluation process.

18 And then next week Alyssa and I and Kathy
19 and Charlie Janson are going down to preservation
20 advocacy week. I'll be attending the National Conference
21 of State Historic Preservation Officer's meeting.

22 And then we'll be visiting to give
23 information to our congressional delegation on what we're
24 up to and what the purpose of the Historic Preservation

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1 Fund is and -- just our yearly visit. I believe that's
2 it, anything else?

3 MS. SHAPIRO: Does anybody have any
4 questions? Thanks.

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you Liz, thank
6 you Mary. I'm just looking at the agenda to see if
7 there's anything else that we can bring forward.

8 The only other thing would be Liaison with
9 Public and Private Agencies about any matters unrelated
10 to the agenda. I don't know if there's anyone here to
11 speak to that agenda item.

12 Okay hearing none what I'll suggest is
13 that we will break early now at 10:00, we will still
14 reconvene at 10:30 which is the time that we've
15 identified, and we will hear agenda Item IX. Walter.

16 DR. WOODWARD: Just a technical question.
17 I believe that Willimantic has some parking restrictions
18 in terms of time and I wonder if those applied to us and
19 if so, will we be able to break and go see what --

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Is there anyone here
21 --

22 MS. SHAPIRO: Jim.

23 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: -- Jim, yes.

24 MR. JIM RIVERS: We've asked our parking

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1 attendant to take the day off.

2 DR. WOODWARD: Thank you.

3 MR. RIVERS: And if you get any tickets if
4 you could just please bring them to our attention?

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Any other
6 general questions? Okay, so I'm going to conclude this
7 portion of the HPC meeting.

8 (off the record)

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: I'm going to call
10 part two of the Historic Preservation Council meeting to
11 order. Before reading the motion for agenda Item No. IX,
12 I just want to go over a couple housekeeping things.

13 So for those of you who may be just
14 joining the room right now, there's a sign-in sheet at
15 the rear of the room as well as a one-page list of
16 comment procedures when appearing before the Historic
17 Preservation Council.

18 We will be asking people to present their
19 information in the order in which they've signed in with
20 deference given to first the elected state and local
21 officials. For those of you who are speaking to this
22 agenda item, we want -- we recognize that many of you
23 have taken time away from work, valuable time. We want
24 to give you the opportunity to speak.

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1 However, there are an extraordinarily
2 large number of people here. We want to ask you to
3 present new information to us so if you in fact agree
4 with something that one of your colleagues has said
5 previously, we simply ask that you state your name for
6 the record and signal your agreement with whatever the
7 point that was made.

8 Because our meeting actually concludes at
9 12:30, and I'm just doing the math and realizing that
10 we're going to need to be very efficient with time, we'll
11 ask that you come forward and speak from the platform,
12 the DIAS right in front of us, and for our
13 transcriptionist I would also ask that you spell your
14 last name so it's clear for the record.

15 Also, if any of you have copies of your
16 statement or written information that you wish to make
17 part of the record I would ask that you give it to our
18 liaison who is Todd Levine, who is sitting at the end of
19 the table. He will take that and he will bring that into
20 the record for this meeting today.

21 Again, before the motion I just want to
22 give a little bit more background information. As
23 Councilmembers are aware, in December of 2018 the SHPO
24 office on Council's behalf sent a letter invitation to

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1 Carmody & Torrance, who is the legal counsel for RUC
2 Holdings, the then soon to be owner of record for 819 and
3 833 Main Street, inviting them to a Council meeting to
4 discuss their intentions for the future of those two
5 properties.

6 As Councilmembers are also aware, the
7 letter had appended to it a list of 11 questions for
8 architectural and engineering resources that were
9 requested to be answered in writing prior to the Council
10 meeting, which were. And the list of questions was
11 included in the Councilmembers' brief for the meeting
12 today.

13 Since extending the invitation the
14 Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation has
15 identified themselves as an interested party in this
16 proceeding. The format of the presentations will flow
17 this way.

18 First, Todd Levine will give the sort of
19 introductory remarks and a little bit about the history
20 of the discussions that have happened to date. And then
21 we invite the property owner, RUC Holdings, to make a
22 presentation of up to but no more than 20 minutes.

23 After that presentation Councilmembers
24 will have an opportunity to ask representatives of RUC

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1 Holdings any questions related to their presentation.
2 And then because they've identified themselves as an
3 interested party, Connecticut Trust will be allowed to
4 also do an up to 20 minute presentation.

5 Thanks to Todd for clarifying, currently
6 the owner has asked to go second. Normally we invite
7 them to go first in deference to the fact that it is
8 their property, but the Connecticut Trust will be going
9 first with their presentation, Councilmember questions,
10 then representatives for RUC Holding will be going
11 second.

12 Councilmembers will again have an
13 opportunity to ask questions, and then we will be calling
14 from the sign-in sheets and asking people to come
15 forward. And we will be calling you by name and as I
16 said, we'll ask you to speak from the front of the room.

17 So having gone over the background, I just
18 want to now get into reading the motion and start the
19 consideration of this agenda item.

20 The Connecticut Historic Preservation
21 Council votes to request the assistance of the Office of
22 the Attorney General to prevent the unreasonable
23 destruction of the historic properties at 819 and 833
24 Main Street, Willimantic, Connecticut pursuant to the

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1 provisions of Section 22a-19a of the Connecticut General
2 Statutes. Can I have a vote to move?

3 MS. MAHER: So moved.

4 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy Maher, and a
5 second?

6 DR. WOODWARD: Second.

7 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Walter Woodward.

8 MR. TODD LEVINE: Good morning. My back
9 is turned to these folks, it's kind of awkward. But for
10 the record, my name is Todd Levine. I'm an architectural
11 historian for the State Historic Preservation office and
12 staff assigned to Connecticut Environmental Protection
13 Act cases.

14 The two buildings that have been brought
15 to your attention today that were threatened with
16 destruction are 819 Main Street, also known as The Hooker
17 Hotel built in 1887; and 833 Main Street, also known as
18 The Nathan Hale Hotel, built in the 1920s.

19 These two buildings are located within the
20 Main Street, Willimantic National Register for Historic
21 Places District listed July 28, 1982. These first came
22 to the attention to the State Historic Preservation
23 Office in August of 2018, when a state-funded garage was
24 being proposed to be built in an adjacent site within the

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1 district behind these buildings and diagonal. Our office
2 determined later that month that there would be no
3 adverse effect for having this garage built within and
4 adjacent to the district.

5 In October of 2018, RUC Holdings, which is
6 now the current owner of record under the name of 819 and
7 833 Main Street, LLC, applied for a Brownfield
8 Remediation and Revitalization Program, which is
9 basically insurance, that any hazardous materials that
10 are on that site would insure them in case it seeped out
11 into a neighboring site and our office was notified that
12 there might be a potential conflict under the Connecticut
13 Environmental Policy Act.

14 We began an environmental review to
15 determine if that is indeed the case. And because this
16 was a new situation for the State Historic Preservation
17 Office and DECD with this program we were unsure whether
18 it would trigger a review, so we called the Attorney
19 General's office for guidance.

20 In November of 2018, our statutory non-
21 profit partner the Connecticut Trust for Historic
22 Preservation, notified us that they had been contacted by
23 the local community about the proposed demolition of 819
24 and 833 Main Street and subsequent construction of a 150-

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1 unit structure at those locations.

2 In December of 2018, Brad Schide from the
3 Connecticut Trust and I met with the local community to
4 explain how the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act
5 works and that process. A petition was started and had
6 331 signatures by December 17th, to date it has over 750
7 signatures.

8 Also in December as Chairman Nelson had
9 noted, the Historic Preservation Council had, through
10 SHPO's office, sent a letter requesting their presence at
11 the January meeting. Our -- HPC meets monthly, we
12 requested their -- that they come in January.

13 Pamela Elkow, who represents and is legal
14 counsel for the owners, requested a later date which was
15 first going to be February and then ended up being this
16 meeting here today. In January, RUC Holdings closed on
17 the acquisition of the buildings.

18 In February of this year RUC Holdings, or
19 819-833 Main Street, LLC, allowed the Connecticut Trust
20 for Historic Preservation and their architects and
21 engineers access to the buildings to determine condition
22 and possibilities of feasible alternatives to demolition.

23 And we usually have a State Review Board
24 meeting which confirms these buildings or any buildings

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1 that come into a potential CEPA case still contribute to
2 the historic nature of the District, but because of
3 timing of these quarterly meetings that the State Review
4 Board reviews, we couldn't get it into their first
5 meeting which was earlier this year.

6 They only meet quarterly, so they will be
7 meeting March 22nd to determine if these buildings still
8 contribute to the National Register District. If anyone
9 has any questions I'm happy to answer them.

10 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: What I will do is
11 invite the Connecticut Trust to come forward at this
12 time. Thank you Todd.

13 MR. BRAD SCHIDE: I'm Brad Schide, I'm
14 from the Connecticut Trust Historic Preservation. We're
15 obviously here today and we're seeking assistance from
16 the Attorney General to stop the unreasonable destruction
17 of the two buildings as Todd has elaborated on.

18 I'm sharing my time today with Cirrus
19 Engineering. Cirrus is the structural engineer and she
20 did provide a report for the public record in your
21 folder, but she will elaborate on that. I also did
22 prepare testimony for the public record. I'm going to
23 probably veer from that as I always do, but you will have
24 both.

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1 So I did put together -- and by the way,
2 we also have an architect. Art Peck can't be here today
3 but he did -- it is for the public record, you have
4 drawings. The main thing they did is do a limited kind
5 of conditions assessment. The buildings do need a lot of
6 work, I mean, nobody's evading those points.

7 They also did however kind of a re-study
8 to see how many units we could get in the buildings if
9 they were rehabbed. And we're following along with idea
10 of students, so we probably got about 51 units in with
11 the two buildings. So again, we're trying to ride behind
12 some of the economics of this versus, you know, just the
13 history alone.

14 So I put together a quick PowerPoint which
15 we'll go through, but let me back up and say as Todd
16 said, I was pulled in -- as Circuit Rider I was probably
17 pulled in about October or November-ish I guess. And as
18 Todd said, what we always do as a performa, we always --
19 who cares about these buildings? We wouldn't be here if
20 nobody cared whether these buildings were down or up.

21 It turns out there was a groundswell of a
22 lot of people who were very interested. Todd's a non-
23 believer so we have to always come together, bring all
24 the people in, and we do walk through the whole

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1 Connecticut Environmental Protection Act. But we also
2 try to gage interest, you know, and what are their
3 reasoning to save the buildings. And it's beyond
4 history, okay.

5 It is streetscape. I don't know if the
6 Council -- I mean, what's great about holding the meeting
7 here, I hope you guys walk the site a little bit. So
8 you've got all these great buildings on Main Street and
9 you walk behind the block and there's all these vacant
10 lots, you know.

11 And so the thought has always been, well
12 why can't we look at development on the vacant lots more?
13 But I'm sure you will hear more from them. As Circuit
14 Rider, you know, I'm all over the state. I've been in
15 Willimantic a lot.

16 To be very honest with you I was a little
17 surprised. You're going to hear major support by the
18 town today. I was very surprised, they are -- most of
19 the time the town has been very supportive of historic
20 preservation. You've got a beautiful building here. I
21 don't know, we'll hear I guess in their testimony why
22 they think this is a great idea.

23 The other thing since we're going first,
24 you're going to hear a lot of great testimony and it's

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1 also in the files, about Hooker being a drug den and it
2 being a terrible spot. What I found in Historic
3 Preservation is buildings like people have personalities.

4 I mean, I think you've got to understand,
5 yes, there was a drug den. I'm not debating any of those
6 points. But that was an owner-management issue not a
7 building issue. And to blame the building and say the
8 building should come down -- and you're going to hear a
9 lot of testimony from the Police Department and others.

10 And I'm not debating that at one time
11 these were dangerous buildings and I'm sure vacant
12 buildings are no better. But, you know, the whole idea
13 is we want to rehab them and get them back into real good
14 use. I can go to the next slide.

15 So I think Todd went through some of
16 these. Again, I want to be really clear. You're going
17 to hear huge town support here. But they don't own these
18 buildings, okay. The owner is a developer and as you --
19 hopefully he's here today, but nobody really knows who he
20 is or his capacity or what really they're planning except
21 a more conceptual way.

22 They did take control December 2018. Todd
23 and I have had a real hard time getting reports from them
24 and they've been very resistant, but I think -- to give

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1 the town credit they did provide us so I don't want to --
2 but the main thing I want to point out here in all these
3 points and the reason we're standing here is there demo
4 delay.

5 There's no demo delay, so Todd had to do a
6 miraculous job of trying to convince these people not to
7 demolish until we got to this meeting. So what the
8 Council's role here is, is pretty big. You know,
9 whatever the vote that's taken here -- you know,
10 presumably they have the money to knock these buildings
11 down. So I just wanted -- and so there is no other
12 alternative except to try to stop the destruction of
13 these buildings.

14 The buildings are currently vacant. The
15 community support I talked about, we have met here a few
16 times with Todd but also others and, you know, I've
17 worked on some of the testimony. I think you've got them
18 all in the file. You know, there's a lot of folks who
19 really care about these buildings. Go to the next slide.

20 So the only thing I want to point out and
21 I'm hoping -- what's great about having you guys here is
22 I hope you saw this stuff. Historic preservation is
23 working here so -- you know, and sometimes we're in these
24 scenarios where the town says oh, historic preservation

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1 will never work here. They can't say that here. I mean,
2 we're in this great building here, the Town Hall. The
3 brewery right across the street is a former post office
4 that's been converted. Go to the next slide.

5 And we have great -- there's great coffee
6 shops here, I'm telling you. And that one, the yellow
7 building there, after our walkthrough we went and had
8 coffee in there. And there's a couple other places. On
9 the other side is the Thread City Diner in the other
10 building.

11 Cities -- there's cities in Connecticut
12 that would die to have a restaurant, a coffee shop and
13 have places to walk in downtown. So historic
14 preservation is working here. And I don't know why there
15 is this sudden shift and again, I give the town a lot of
16 credit. The town's been very supportive of all these
17 efforts in the past. Go to the next slide.

18 So I'm kind of a numbers nerd, okay. I do
19 historic preservation but I also need to understand how
20 things are put together. And when developers make these
21 announcements -- and to be fair, they just took title but
22 when they make these announcements you want to kind of
23 see where is the beef, you know and -- anyway, so the new
24 owner has provided -- they have some details they've

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1 provided to the town I think to select people.

2 But there's not been a widespread kind of
3 -- you know, what the plans are. I think most of the
4 people I met with did not know what the building
5 elevations -- new structure building elevations would
6 look like, does it relate to the street, is it filling
7 the gap, whatever?

8 Okay so look, I don't know what they'll
9 bring today but there is one piece of paper in your
10 public record and it's called project narrative. I don't
11 know who wrote it, I assume the developer. Maybe it was
12 the attorney, I don't know. So all I can go by is what I
13 have here.

14 They're saying the total project --
15 they're talking about the total project cost, the whole
16 phase is \$30 million. Now, I've heard it was \$50 million,
17 we'll probably hear today it's \$80 million. It's just
18 zeros right? So what I did is take -- I'm only going to
19 operate off this piece of paper, I don't know what else
20 they have and they may come with other things.

21 Phases, if you look at the document
22 there's three phases, you know. And if I were a
23 developer I would want to start with vacant lots and
24 build new versus going through this whole hassle of

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1 knocking the buildings down which is going to cost a lot
2 more money. Phase three, they could start there as
3 opposed -- and I guess the question is can they do
4 different phases as opposed to saying there's this
5 urgency that we gotta do phase one, the buildings have to
6 come down now.

7 Well the number nerd in me, so we start
8 doing some division here -- again, you've heard a lot of
9 different numbers but I'm just operating off this piece
10 -- this sheet of paper and it's around 400,000 square
11 feet in all three phases that's going to come downtown.
12 They're saying it's about 360 units, I've heard more than
13 that, but on this piece of paper it looks like it's about
14 360 units.

15 So I'm just trying to divide and try to
16 figure out well what are costs? So if you divide the
17 square foot by the total cost you're at \$75 a square foot
18 and if they're saying that's the total development cost,
19 that's not reasonable and there's no economy scale will
20 get you that low.

21 And the other is I just looked at per unit
22 cost. That again is also very low, but it's -- you know,
23 if they did economy scales, all three phases at the same
24 time, maybe it could get close to that but it's unclear

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1 and we don't have a schedule, we don't know how the
2 sequence is going to work. Maybe we'll find out today.
3 I don't know anything about student housing and UConn is
4 about eight miles away.

5 Everybody's saying student housing is what
6 this is going to be. I don't know anything about it but
7 I don't think anybody -- maybe they will today with new
8 information, there's been nothing on file about why you
9 think they'll come, you know.

10 I mean, the danger here is you we jump in
11 and knock these buildings down with the expectation of
12 something happening and then nothing happens and it's
13 happened in Willimantic before. There have been other
14 developers who have tried to do it, so that's what we're
15 really trying to go on.

16 The other thing, it says in this piece --
17 and again, I'm just going off this one piece of paper,
18 it's 33,000 square feet of retail. That is a lot of
19 retail. It's probably over half of what's there now. We
20 don't know anything about it and maybe they'll talk more
21 about it today.

22 But it's -- who are these chain -- and as
23 you know these are small mom and pop stores that are out
24 there now and is that going to be affected if these new

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1 buildings come online? And the market is pretty soaked.

2 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Brad, I'm just going
3 to warn you you're halfway through your time.

4 MR. SCHIDE: Yeah, I'm almost done. So in
5 closing -- perfect timing.

6 In closing, the developer just took title
7 of the property. I know they don't have final drawings,
8 I know they don't have final budgets, but they're asking
9 the Council to approve the demolition of these two
10 properties with very little information.

11 I mean, that is really what's at stake
12 here. As soon as the buildings come down there's nothing
13 we can do. And again I remind you urban renewal days,
14 this is very similar. The town, the developer kind of
15 teamed up, said it was a great idea and then nothing
16 happened.

17 So the only reason I focused a lot on the
18 budget number is because it's the only way they're going
19 to build this project and hopefully rehab it. So -- and
20 ultimately they made no argument why they can't rehab
21 these buildings versus demolish them, so with that I'll
22 turn it over to Beth.

23 MS. ELIZABETH ACLY: Hi everybody, for
24 those of you who don't know me my name is Elizabeth Acly.

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1 I am a professional structural engineer with almost 20
2 years of experience. I've specialize in historic
3 structures for about 15 years and estimate that I've
4 worked on somewhere between 750 and 1,000 historic
5 structures with many being on the National, State and
6 Local Historic Registers.

7 I own and operate Cirrus Structural
8 Engineering where I serve as principal and technical
9 expert leading a team of four others. I was engaged to
10 review the structural condition of the Hale and Hooker
11 Buildings by the Connecticut Trust for Historic
12 Preservation and visited the site on February 21st of
13 this year.

14 I was provided with two previous
15 structural condition assessment reports for the Hooker
16 Hotel including a cursory study done by Santo Domingo
17 Engineering in 2005, and a detailed study done by Bounds
18 Kalberer Engineers in 2009 along with follow-up repair
19 drawings that address the immediate concerns highlighted
20 in the report.

21 I was not given any previous structural
22 studies for the Hale Building. When I made my site visit
23 and review of previous work on the buildings I wrote and
24 submitted a report summarizing my findings, which I think

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1 you have in your packets, and I will take you through a
2 summary of my findings.

3 So first we have the Hooker Building. It
4 is a four-story wood frame structure with exterior load
5 bearing brick masonry in the walls and interior wood
6 bearing walls on the corridors. It was constructed in
7 1886 and a narrow two-story addition was constructed in
8 the 50s or 60s along the front and side elevations as you
9 can see in that photograph.

10 The most significant issue with the Hooker
11 Building originates at the roof level where one of the
12 two roof drains has failed causing collected drain water
13 to discharge into the fourth floor. The water has
14 locally deteriorated the framing in two of the rooms
15 which you can see here, and partially into the hallway
16 and the stairs.

17 This area with a future rehabilitation
18 would be to be reframed and again, it's the -- it's joist
19 framing that would basically go between the brick
20 exterior masonry wall and interior corridor walls and
21 then the corridor framing as well. Next one please.

22 And here you can see one of those rooms
23 underneath and how much water is coming in, it's
24 significant. I mean, you can also see staining on the

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1 brick wall to the outside and it's likely that due to the
2 absorption of water into the masonry, that there would be
3 some deep cutting and pointing and probably some local
4 rebuilding in that area as well.

5 The other significant structural problem
6 is the deflection and under framing of the interior
7 bearing lines along the corridor, particularly at the
8 north end which you can see rained up there. This was
9 thoroughly studied in the 2009 conditions assessment and
10 temporary shoring was recommended.

11 Shoring was installed per the temporary
12 drawings and you can see a section cut on the right
13 there, and it is still in there. Unlike the drawings
14 though it was put in as wood-bearing walls, and if you
15 could switch it to the next one we can see that.

16 It's a little bit dark but -- so there's
17 some wood-bearing walls at the north end holding up the
18 first and second floors. This area would need to be re-
19 supported with beams at the first floor together with
20 wall and footing repairs in the basement during a future
21 renovation. There's also some miscellaneous other
22 smaller things, but those are the two main things.

23 And both of these issues represent
24 significant structural scope for building rehabilitation

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1 but both are discrete issues that we consider to be
2 repairable in a renovation scenario.

3 In the short-term in order to limit future
4 damage, we recommend that the roof be made water tight
5 and the roof drainage reinstated. Interior shoring may
6 also be required on the floor structures below where the
7 water's been getting in. Next slide.

8 And just a quick sort of aside, this
9 building that I'm showing here in Windsor Locks is an
10 example of a building of similar vintage and condition
11 that is currently being rehabilitated and renovated into
12 housing. The framing was in similar if not worse
13 condition, it is now repaired and finish work is moving.

14 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: I'm just going to
15 give you the five-minute warning.

16 MS. ACLY: Okay, the Hale Building. The
17 Hale Building is a five-story reinforced concrete framed
18 structure with an interior -- exterior brick veneer
19 rather. It was constructed in 1920 and here it is.

20 The Hale Building has also been affected
21 by compromise with three-inch components but it has
22 sustained much less damage due to the first floor
23 location of the drain failure and the robustness of the
24 reinforced concrete slab framing. Standing water on the

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1 first floor is readily apparent but floor framing appears
2 intact.

3 Structural recommendations for this area
4 include inspecting and testing the concrete to determine
5 if erosion of the rebar or chemical reactions from water
6 infiltration have locally weakened the concrete slab.

7 Next slide. The Hale Building is in otherwise excellent
8 structural condition. We can compare -- next one please.

9 We can compare this type and vintage of
10 construction in the Hale Building to another building on
11 the Windsor Locks project site that I showed before. The
12 reinforced concrete building in Windsor Locks had so much
13 water leaking in through the roof that algae wounds
14 occurred on the floor below and columns had cracked from
15 corroded roof drains.

16 The concrete was in much worse condition
17 than that of the Hale Building but is now repaired and
18 finish work is underway. And just a few parting
19 thoughts, aside from my professional observations I also
20 would like to comment as a resident of the neighboring
21 town of Columbia.

22 Willimantic starts as the regional
23 downtown amongst the surrounding rural towns including my
24 hometown. My family and I come here weekly to grocery

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1 shop and get coffee or dinner and attend my children's
2 dance class. We are drawn to downtown Willimantic for
3 the ambience and local businesses that speak to our love
4 of healthy local farm raised inspired foods and culture.

5 For me, the ambience is created by the
6 scale and love of the late 19th century Main Street
7 buildings constructed after the arrival of the railroad
8 in 1849. The Hooker and Hale Buildings take up a
9 significant area of streetscape on Main Street.

10 Changing the buildings, in whatever form
11 that may take, would have a significant impact on the
12 cohesiveness of downtown and run the risk of being a
13 deterrent to consumers of local businesses and culture if
14 not done sensitively. Thank you very much.

15 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. So our
16 Councilmembers (applause) -- I'm going to ask if
17 Councilmembers have questions for either Brad Schide or
18 Beth Acly on their presentations.

19 So Brad, I'll start with one question.
20 You've looked at proformas for the cost for renovating
21 the buildings. I know often times you're looking at
22 state/federal tax credits and what that means for
23 property owners in terms of economic incentives. Have --

24 MR. SCHIDE: Yeah, that was in my other

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1 testimony that's in the public record prior to tonight.
2 Somewhere between \$11 and \$12 million is probably the
3 hard cost only to rehab the two buildings roughly.

4 But again, there's a lot of details there.
5 That would include structural, environmental, demo work
6 and I think it raised about \$3.8 million in historic
7 credits, state and federal historic credits.

8 In this case they said they're going to
9 privately fund everything, so this just helps them raise
10 some other private funds.

11 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: And that funding is
12 GAP funding? How does that work, the tax credits?

13 MR. SCHIDE: The historic credits -- yeah,
14 it's historic GAP funding I guess due to private. And
15 again, I haven't seen their overall budget.

16 And it's \$30 million that historic credits
17 just started the process, but they've represented they
18 have private money for everything else, so let's see --
19 that they would use the historic credits if they wanted.

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Walter.

21 DR. WOODWARD: I have a question for Ms.
22 Acly. Your assessment of the Hooker Building in
23 particular, is its real variance with either the 2005 or
24 the 2009 -- I think it was the 2009 structural

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1 engineering assessment of the same property, which at
2 least in tone is, you know, much less rehab oriented and
3 much more hopeless.

4 So is there some -- what accounts for your
5 kind of positive assessment versus the former very
6 negative?

7 MS. ACLY: I think it's, you know,
8 experience in having done some similar projects before.
9 Sometimes when you see finishes falling on the ground and
10 water in the building things can look very severe when
11 you first present it.

12 But if you dig in and, you know, sort of
13 -- I know in the slide I had -- I wanted to show with
14 that shaded area while it sounds really severe it's
15 actually not a huge percentage of the floorplate that's
16 damaged. So I think it may just be my approach and, you
17 know, experience of doing this perhaps.

18 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Margaret.

19 MS. FABER: So this is just for Brad. So
20 when he went through his numbers and he was considering a
21 51-unit student housing complex, that scenario wouldn't
22 take away all or almost all of the building's economic
23 value would it?

24 MR. SCHIDE: No. Actually I think I did a

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1 calculation in my testimony, it's like \$1,000 a month.

2 MS. FABER: Right, that you --

3 MR. SCHIDE: I had just estimated \$1,000 a
4 month --

5 MS. FABER: -- for rent, which is quite
6 low.

7 MR. SCHIDE: -- for rent.

8 MS. FABER: Yeah.

9 MR. SCHIDE: And you usually take about 35
10 percent of that total amount for operating expenses and
11 the rest is not operating. So yeah, economically it
12 works.

13 They've also again, told us over and over
14 again and they've told Todd over and over again, there's
15 no public money, so this would be all private money
16 somehow too. So I don't know what kind of debt service
17 they would want to carry at this certain area.

18 MS. FABER: One follow-up, were they made
19 aware of the public money available?

20 MR. SCHIDE: Well, I think that's a -- but
21 I mean I think that we always talked store credits, we
22 always talk -- I mean, you're going to hear a lot about
23 opportunity, zone funding which -- you know, which is
24 still in its infancy stage.

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1 The IRS is just starting to create the
2 rules on it. I think -- I mean, we'll hear it today but
3 the only thing I heard was the take-backs on the whole
4 thing. I don't know, you should ask them exactly how
5 they're going to do it.

6 But I think they were very specifically
7 positive saying there was no public money that they're
8 seeking at all.

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Brian.

10 DR. JONES: For Todd, so we heard about
11 the tax credits. Could you summarize the amount of
12 additional funding that might be available through SHPO?

13 MR. LEVINE: Again -- well I mean besides
14 state and federal tax credits, which could be
15 substantial, you know, there is -- well there's other
16 (indiscernible) --

17 COURT REPORTER: I'm sorry, can you please
18 go to a microphone --

19 MR. LEVINE: -- sorry, usually I'm pretty
20 loud.

21 COURT REPORTER: -- you need to reach the
22 speaker.

23 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Oh the other one,
24 sorry.

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1 MR. LEVINE: Sorry, Todd Levine. So yeah,
2 besides federal and state tax credits, which could be
3 substantial, each -- our state tax credit is up to \$4.5
4 million per building, and that's 25 percent of eligible
5 costs. And then the federal tax credit is 20 percent of
6 eligible costs and then there's also a five percent
7 affordable housing tax credit.

8 So it could be 50 percent of eligible
9 costs for those buildings, for just those buildings. So
10 I know that the overall development plan includes, you
11 know, 350 units. My understanding is that the developer
12 would put 150 units at this location but I'm not sure how
13 all that would fit in.

14 But I know their architect is going to
15 explain that I believe next and we'll have a better
16 understanding of that dynamic. But there's also DECD
17 funding that could be acquired, there's other state
18 funding, bond funding and other grants that could be
19 worked out with a partnership with the development and
20 this developer.

21 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy.

22 DR. JONES: I want to just add, the reason
23 we haven't talked about money with them -- there are many
24 opportunities. There's CHAMP funds if they want to do

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1 housing, CHFA has money. CHFA does these kind of things,
2 they do first mortgages in here.

3 You've got the tax credits, you've got new
4 market credits, I mean, there's a whole host of things
5 that they really did not give us any indication they
6 wanted to go in that direction, so we really haven't
7 spent any time on that.

8 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy.

9 MS. MAHER: Thank you. To that point,
10 also it was referenced the urban COWLS grants (phonetic),
11 the opportunity zone grants, does that get administered
12 through SHPO? I think it's rather new, and has that been
13 explored?

14 MR. LEVINE: My understanding is that the
15 opportunity zone is a major point to their funding and
16 they will go into that. Our office does not administer,
17 or at least SHPO certainly does not administer,
18 opportunity zones.

19 But it's a major component and their
20 financial guy or owner or rep will explain how that all
21 works, but it should be noted that in your packet we did
22 ask for an explanation of how their funding is supposed
23 to work and they did give an explanation. And you'll see
24 -- and they'll elaborate I'm sure, is that timing is

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1 important for opportunity zone funding to make the impact
2 that they needed to make.

3 So it has to be closed this year, in 2019,
4 and in fact there's timeframes within the year that
5 milestones have to be met for them to get their funding
6 for the numbers to work for this entire project. So note
7 that, and they'll explain as well, how this site has to
8 work with the other sites.

9 So it's not just the sites at 833 and 819
10 Main Street and the opportunity zone funding that's
11 important, but also how the interconnectivity between 833
12 and 819 Main Street and these other adjacent and across
13 the street sites work together to formulate the funding
14 pyramid for opportunity zones.

15 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Other questions?

16 DR. GLASER: Leah Glaser. So the
17 developer's plan my understanding is, is student housing
18 and some retail. And I guess then a rehab -- I was
19 wondering if there would still be a possibility for some
20 mixed use of the building?

21 MR. SCHIDE: Yeah, well definitely. We
22 had about 5,000 square foot of retail in the rehab, the
23 architect came up with that. So it was 51 units and
24 there was about 5,000 square feet of -- and there was

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1 another couple thousand in office space.

2 Again, these are all conceptual. We only
3 had one walkthrough and -- I'd like to say one thing
4 about the opportunity funds. I'm sure they'll go into
5 more detail on it for you but the reason they have to hit
6 the end of the year is because it's a -- the whole
7 opportunity zone thing is capital gains deferral.

8 If they close something this year and they
9 go up 10 years, they can get their total capital gains
10 forgiven. But that's one of the reasons you need to be
11 really questioning this because to do that the investors
12 need to have a rate of return in addition to the capital
13 gains.

14 So I don't think they're going to invest
15 just for the capital gains, so that's why I'm a little
16 surprised we don't have anything except this piece of
17 paper so -- but maybe they'll come in with more, so just
18 to let you know.

19 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy, last question.

20 MS. MAHER: Have we seen -- I don't
21 believe it was in this package, a position statement from
22 either UConn or Eastern?

23 MR. SCHIDE: No. I raised that in the --
24 I think Eastern was never a part of this. As far as I

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1 understand I think it was always UConn, so. But it's
2 kind of what I asked, you know, is there market study or
3 is there a MOU or --

4 MS. MAHER: So there's no --

5 MR. SCHIDE: -- or some kind of agreement?
6 I'm not aware of it, no.

7 MS. MAHER: -- okay. So universities have
8 very guided formulas on student housing, so there's
9 nothing really to support that from the university
10 itself.

11 MR. SCHIDE: I'm sure there is but I --
12 and maybe they'll talk about it today, I don't know.

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Brad, I have one
14 final question.

15 I realize that the State Preservation
16 Board will be reviewing the original nomination but do
17 you have any sense on the District that is on the
18 National Register, how many buildings are still part --
19 are still standing?

20 MR. SCHIDE: I have not looked at that in
21 detail. These two buildings are -- the only folks that
22 have had these two buildings are a couple coffee shops
23 and that's it. But no, I haven't looked at that.

24 But again, we are talking about that if

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1 these go down and there's vacant lots there, you know,
2 and nothing ever gets built or maybe it will get built in
3 the future, you're still talking about a drag on all the
4 other properties. So I think that's what you have to be
5 concerned about.

6 But no, I'm not aware of how many. I
7 mean, maybe Todd can --

8 MR. LEVINE: And I just -- there was 46
9 and now there's 45, so there's been one collapsed
10 building.

11 MR. SCHIDE: Forty-five or 44?

12 MR. LEVINE: Forty-five or 44.

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you, okay. Any
14 other questions before we move on? Okay.

15 At this point -- thank you Brad of The
16 Connecticut Trust. I'm going to invite a representative
17 for RUC Holding.

18 MS. PAMELA ELKOW: Good morning, for the
19 record my name is Pamela Elkow. I'm an attorney with
20 Carmody Torrance Sandak & Hennessey, and I represent RUC
21 Holdings and 819/833 Main Street, which is the owner of
22 the property where the two buildings are that we're
23 talking about this morning.

24 I'm the one that got Todd's letter so --

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1 and thank you for the time this morning to speak to this
2 issue. Just to introduce a couple of the players, Martin
3 Kelly is the principle of RUC Holdings, he's here today.
4 Richard Garber is the architect that we've been working
5 with, he's also here today, and he's going to make a
6 brief presentation.

7 I know we have a lot of people who want to
8 talk so we're actually going to be pretty quick and give
9 the public lots of opportunity to talk. I know there's a
10 lot of town officials that want to speak and they're
11 going to speaking to some of the issues that I think
12 you've raised today.

13 So if you ask me questions I may end up
14 deferring to them just because a lot of them are going to
15 be speaking to that. So Richard's going to give a quick
16 overview of the project. The project is preliminary and
17 you're going to see a messy plan. That's what's already
18 in your materials.

19 Just so you know, it is early because in
20 December we did get this letter and this process began.
21 It took us a little while to understand exactly what the
22 process was given that there were no public funds
23 involved, so we weren't part of the public CEPA but the
24 other CEPA so we're here now.

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1 So we have not been to the town yet other
2 than talking generally to them about the project. We
3 have not actually presented anything to the Planning
4 Commission, Zoning Commission, because it doesn't make
5 sense to do that until we actually know what we're going
6 to be able to do with these buildings, so that's why this
7 discussion is preliminary basically.

8 A little bit about RUC Holdings, it is a
9 developer that currently has been -- Martin's been in
10 business 25 years, this is what he does. He does not do
11 historic renovations or rehabilitation. There's very
12 specific companies that do that, that's not what he does.

13 He currently has a 200,000 square feet
14 under construction right now -- under development that
15 he's working on. This is I believe his first project in
16 Connecticut, but he has primarily done work in New
17 Jersey. You know, he's in the development business.
18 He's not going to be investing time on me or Richard or
19 other people if this doesn't make sense to do.

20 There's been a couple discussions about
21 student housing. This is not dorms, this is housing that
22 is geared towards students because there are a lot of
23 students between Willimantic and Mansfield who need
24 housing, in addition to other people who need housing.

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1 So when we talk about student housing it's more from a
2 marketing perspective, these are apartments these are not
3 dorms.

4 The plan is to have apartments that range
5 anywhere from studio up to three-bedroom and then retail
6 and amenities that go along with that. So just so -- we
7 have no agreement with Eastern, we have no agreement with
8 UConn. But again, those are sort of the demographics
9 that we expect will be interested in apartments like this
10 in downtown.

11 And that's what we've understood from
12 talking to the town officials that we've talked to. A
13 couple of the things just -- and I will get to Richard,
14 but I know there were a couple of things that came up in
15 the previous presentation.

16 Opportunity zones, I think Brad did a good
17 job listing that. That's not funding that comes from
18 anyone else, it's really just -- an area is an
19 opportunity zone. Downtown Willimantic is in fact an
20 opportunity zone. Those are distressed communities that
21 the Tax Act that the feds passed last year, among all
22 those other things they did, one of the things it did was
23 create opportunity zones.

24 And the idea was to create resident

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1 incentives for people in distressed communities. So yes,
2 it does obviously allow for a deferment of capital gains.
3 There's a deadline for the end of the year to get the
4 maximum capital gain deferments. If any of you are in
5 the real estate business it's been described as a 1031 on
6 steroids.

7 You can take proceeds from one asset, put
8 it into this and that will defer your capital gains.
9 It's an incentive but nobody's going to invest in that if
10 that project doesn't make money. That's what we're going
11 to talk about a little bit after Richard presents the
12 master plan and a brief description of the project.

13 Because frankly, anyone who's going to buy
14 these properties like we did is going to want to have a
15 project that makes money and that's really what this
16 comes down to and we think that's really what you need to
17 think about when you're thinking about what's a prudent
18 and feasible alternative.

19 We appreciate that we're going to present
20 about what we need to present about but I think the real
21 question is, is rehabilitating these two buildings, is
22 there any prudent and feasible alternatives to taking
23 them down? We don't think that there is a prudent and
24 feasible way to redo these buildings and have them

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1 actually turn into a project that is viable.

2 So we'll talk about that in a minute but
3 Richard, if you can --

4 MR. RICHARD GARBER: Hi, I'll just stand
5 over here by my laptop. My name is Richard Garber --

6 COURT REPORTER: I'm sorry, would you --

7 MS. ELKOW: -- you know what, I'll move
8 forward.

9 MR. GARBER: -- ready? Hi, I'm Richard
10 Garber. I'm a principal from GRO Architects, which is a
11 New York City based architecture planning firm and we do
12 a lot of demo and revitalization kind of projects.

13 And when I was contacted by the owner
14 about this project we were obviously very excited about
15 being involved in the rehabilitation and revitalization
16 of downtown Willimantic. So I'm going to show a few
17 images and I'll just talk general numbers.

18 We've only been working on this project
19 for a matter of months at this point so we don't have a
20 kind of level of detail especially given what's being
21 asked of us today, but I can tell you that the overall
22 build-out that we're imagining -- and this is the image
23 and somehow I haven't figured out how, but it ended up on
24 Facebook somehow so people have seen it.

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1 We're imagining that there are about 400
2 units on all three sites and if you're looking at the
3 image now, the U-shape building on the left, that's the
4 site of Hooker and Hale. And so on that building site
5 we're thinking that we can get somewhere like 130
6 residential units on top of both parking and amenity
7 space.

8 The idea here is that we're bringing a lot
9 of ground floor amenity space in retail as well as
10 parking, to really increase the viability of a walkable
11 downtown, which you already have here and we'd like to
12 try and amplify that with some of the programs that we'd
13 bring in for students but also for people that would be
14 living in the units. Pam, if you could just go forward.

15 So this is the site plan of 819 and 833,
16 so on the left we have Hooker -- excuse me on the left we
17 have Hale and on the right, sort of the tall narrow site,
18 that's Hooker. And, you know, one of the things that I
19 think is very important here in terms of how these kinds
20 of development projects work is we really look for
21 efficiency at the workplace.

22 And so what that means is on upper floors
23 we want a kind of double-loaded corridor, which is the
24 most efficient kind of floorplate you can get. Typically

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1 that's based on how much sunlight can actually penetrate
2 into buildings, which is about 25 or 30 feet. So
3 generally we look for a floorplate somewhere around 65 to
4 70 feet. So you have a hallway in the middle and you
5 have units on both sides that can take advantage of
6 windows for natural lighting and that type of thing.

7 In the case of Hale, the upper floors are
8 40 feet and there's a column about 18 feet down the
9 middle of them. So, you know, adding to this building to
10 actually get this kind of efficiency is a lot of cost per
11 square foot to basically do that. Hooker on the other
12 hand is about 50 feet, same problem. We still have to
13 find 50 additional feet of depth in that building to
14 actually get a cost effective and efficient floorplate,
15 right.

16 The more efficient we can lay these units
17 out, the more retail amenity space we can actually give
18 below. We try to be at about 85 to 90 percent efficient
19 in terms of loss factor. We don't want to spend that
20 much on egress and things like that and that's what we'd
21 be having to do in these buildings. So if you can go to
22 the next slide.

23 This is just a quick -- and again, these
24 are all three buildings so the square building on your

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1 left is the block of Hooker and Hale. We're really
2 imagining red is retail and amenity space on the
3 frontage, really increase the walk -- you know, amplify
4 the walkability of the downtown area while still
5 providing parking, parking at the base of the block of
6 833 and 819 Main as well as a potentially double-stacked
7 deck in the larger lot to the right.

8 If you can go one more Pam and then I'll
9 conclude. And this is actually -- go one more please,
10 sorry -- yup. So this is a typical layout of a
11 residential floorplate and what you're seeing color-coded
12 on your lower right, we do have a really kind of robust
13 mix of studios, one-bedrooms, two-bedrooms and three-
14 bedrooms planned.

15 The studios are nominally around 450-500
16 feet; the one-bedroom is a little bit larger, that's our
17 student market right there. That's who we are really
18 trying to think about marketing these to whereas the two-
19 bedrooms and three-bedrooms are for, you know, residents
20 of town, small families, etc. And you see how we're
21 really kind of trying to mix them equitably on all three
22 of these sites taking advantage in each instance of a 70-
23 foot wide double-loaded corridor which I think lays out
24 very well.

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1 And with that, thank you.

2 MS. ELKOW: So maybe -- I don't know if
3 you have questions for Richard or if you want to wait
4 till we're --

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Why don't we wait?

6 MS. ELKOW: -- okay. And so just to
7 follow-up, so back to -- now that you've seen this I
8 really want to talk about again this sort of prudent
9 feasible alternatives and whether these are -- it's the
10 unreasonable destruction of these buildings.

11 So we heard from the engineer for the
12 Historic Trust with respect to Hooker. We would
13 respectfully disagree and I think the town building
14 official is going to be talking today about his view of
15 the actual structural viability of Hooker. And as I
16 think one of the members, Mr. Woodward, mentioned that
17 the previous structural analysis of that building had
18 suggested that in fact it's not really viable.

19 So I think the building official will be
20 weighing in on that. Our structural engineer actually
21 refused to walk into the building because it's full of
22 ice and wasn't going to do that until the ice was gone
23 and he wasn't in a position to walk into it because he
24 felt it was unsafe to walk into right now so we cannot

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1 use -- we will for ourselves have that at some point.

2 No one would disagree Hale is structurally
3 sound. From everything I've heard and from everything
4 I've read it's built like a, you know, concrete bunker
5 and it's not going down any time soon. But that in and
6 of itself makes it difficult to rehabilitate and Richard
7 talked about the efficiency of floorplates.

8 So to that point, we actually did look at
9 the proforma that the Historic Trust put together to try
10 to -- you know, we appreciate that they did that to try
11 to figure out what you could do with these buildings and
12 a couple of things jumped out. One, they suggested 51
13 units were possible. A couple of things there.

14 One, those are just studio and one-bedroom
15 so that really adhered just to student housing as opposed
16 to a mix. Second, 51 units actually doesn't work. If
17 you actually look at the actual floor plans that the
18 architect put together, it actually was only 40 -- sorry,
19 there's four -- five less than that. There are actually
20 only 24 in Hooker not the 29, so they're already five
21 less than what their actual own floor plans show but
22 their proposed development doesn't comply with zoning.

23 So the minimum lot -- the minimum size for
24 an apartment in the downtown district is 450 feet and all

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1 of these studio apartments were around 400/405. So when
2 you take out the ones -- take out enough so that you
3 actually can comply with zoning, you lose even more so in
4 reality even this plan that the architect put together
5 can only support 43 units.

6 That aside, if we just took the numbers
7 that they actually put together and assumed about \$12
8 million in hard costs, you have to add soft costs to that
9 obviously. So that gets you to about \$13.5 when you
10 figure that in. Assume you get \$3.5 in tax credits,
11 which was in the proforma that they put together, that
12 leaves you with about \$10 million that you need to raise
13 between debt and equity.

14 Let's say, you know, if you stand -- so
15 that's the money that needs to be borrowed. They also
16 did a calculation based again on again, the higher number
17 of units, the 51, that got to a net operating income of
18 about \$400,000 I guess a year. That can't service the
19 debt on \$8.5 million. So what it comes down to is even
20 if you built the maximum that they came up with, which
21 can't be built, and you took advantage of the historic
22 tax credits, you still can't make a project that makes
23 money.

24 If a project doesn't make money, nobody's

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1 going to build it. Developers are in the business of
2 making money, that's -- investors are in the business of
3 investing in projects that make money. As I mentioned at
4 the beginning, this developer is not in the historic
5 rehabilitation business so this developer is not going to
6 be building that building.

7 We're not going to be taking advantage of
8 tax credits, we're not looking for federal funds, we're
9 not looking for state funds. This was going to be and
10 that is going to be a purely privately funded development
11 but my point is that this is not something that can in
12 fact be done -- it is not prudent and feasible.

13 It doesn't make money. If it doesn't make
14 money it's neither prudent nor feasible because nobody's
15 going to do it. And I know at least one or two of the
16 building officials is going to talk about other efforts
17 at historic rehabilitation in town and the fact that
18 those still don't make money.

19 It's great to save the buildings and I
20 think we would all want to do that, but you can't do it
21 if at the end of the day nobody's going to actually make
22 any money doing that because then you're going to have a
23 bunch of buildings that have no income stream and
24 nobody's going to want to continue to invest in them.

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1 And then our last comments will be that
2 the fact that these buildings have been sitting vacant
3 for 40 years, you know, give or take which building we're
4 talking about and what -- either vacant or seriously
5 underutilized, in some ways their history themselves is
6 evidence of the fact that there is no prudent and
7 feasible alternative to taking them down. Nobody has
8 been able to do anything with that.

9 And again, I know that the folks who have
10 been intimately involved with this with the town are
11 going to be speaking about this. There have been
12 numerous attempts to get somebody to come in here and do
13 exactly this, to try to rehabilitate these buildings and
14 turn them into something -- something for the Town of
15 Windham and nobody has been able to figure out a way to
16 do that.

17 Having them sit empty doesn't help
18 Windham, it doesn't help the rest of the Historic
19 District because now you have, again, these big empty
20 buildings sitting there that aren't helping the other 44
21 historic buildings that continue to remain in this
22 Historic District. So we think that there are in fact no
23 prudent and feasible alternatives to demoing it.

24 I'm happy to answer any question but I

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1 know there are a lot of people who want to talk about
2 this today too.

3 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you, are there
4 any questions Councilmembers have? Leah.

5 DR. GLASER: I guess since this developer
6 does not do historic rehab, why this site?

7 MS. ELKOW: Because this site together
8 with the other sites that we're looking at make sense
9 from a development perspective. They're the right sites
10 in the right market for what they think they can build
11 and actually get a return on their investment for
12 themselves and their investors.

13 DR. GLASER: I know they think that but I
14 don't understand because this is a Historic District and
15 this is a historic section of town. And there is
16 evidence that historic rehabilitation of a Historic
17 District is economically profitable, and so I just --
18 there's nowhere else in town to do a similar project
19 besides the site of these two very prominent buildings?

20 MS. ELKOW: So I think I and others who
21 are going to speak today would actually disagree with the
22 concept that -- maybe in other places historic
23 redevelopment is financially viable.

24 Again, I think others going to speak to

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1 the fact that that has not necessarily been the
2 experience in Windham. So -- and again, when we came in
3 to buy these buildings the plan all along had been to
4 take these down. The lots are good locations, the other
5 two -- and you saw on there, the other are vacant empty
6 lots.

7 I think Brad spoke earlier about the fact
8 that can't somebody invest in that? Yes, we're going to.
9 These also though are part of the project that we think
10 makes sense. I think the real question is, is there
11 another viable alternative for these buildings?

12 And I think the answer has to be no,
13 nobody has been able to do anything with these buildings
14 for the last 10 years or even under private ownership and
15 for the 40 years before that Eastern owned it, they
16 weren't able to come up with anything. The Hooker hasn't
17 been able to do anything, they had to move people out.

18 There has not been an alternative for
19 these buildings and I think for Windham this is the right
20 alternative.

21 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Walter.

22 DR. WOODWARD: So much of the argument
23 behind doing these buildings depends upon the economic
24 viability of the project.

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1 MS. ELKOW: Ahum.

2 DR. WOODWARD: And that economic viability
3 depends on the investors getting a return and that return
4 is going to depend on filling the retail space and
5 filling the apartments.

6 MS. ELKOW: Right.

7 DR. WOODWARD: Has there been a marketing
8 plan? Where are the people going to come from? Where
9 are the businesses going to come from? This is an -- if
10 you build it they will come proposition.

11 How do you know they will come and where
12 in Connecticut or New England are they coming from?

13 MS. ELKOW: So I don't know that there has
14 been a market study done but again, I think that really
15 the question for this group is where's the financial
16 viability of keeping these buildings? That's the
17 question.

18 There is no viability to keeping these
19 buildings. They have been empty for 10 years. There is
20 no viable alternative. There's nobody filling these
21 buildings because nobody's renovating them and nobody's
22 turning them into any kind of housing. So the developer
23 is not in the business of doing this out of charity, he
24 intends to make money.

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1 The sense is -- and again, we've been
2 talking to people in town, that there is an interest in
3 housing, an interest in housing and what is becoming a
4 revitalized downtown Willimantic and that there are
5 opportunities here. You do have students at Eastern, you
6 have students at UConn. You have people like -- frankly
7 people like my daughter's age and my age.

8 People who don't want to be necessarily
9 living in a house anymore and mowing lawns and God help
10 us, shoveling snow. So I think that the opportunity is
11 there. I mean, all over Connecticut you see people
12 moving to downtowns to be in vital downtowns but they
13 need to be in buildings that work for them.

14 And people want to be in new buildings so
15 I think there is a market for new buildings. And again,
16 the Economic Development Director for the Town of Windham
17 is going to be talking about that. There are people who
18 know the town much better than we do who can speak to
19 that but that's really what it comes down to, and 43
20 units at the cost that we're talking about is not a
21 viable project, so.

22 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Kathy.

23 MS. MAHER: So to build on that, just for
24 clarity the units that you're proposing are designed to

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1 really engage a student housing community?

2 MS. ELKOW: Some, but as Richard mentioned
3 sort of the studio to one-bedroom probably more. But
4 there's a mix, that color-coding is kind of hard to see
5 up there but --

6 MS. MAHER: I see.

7 MS. ELKOW: -- yeah, but there's a range
8 anywhere from studios up to three bedrooms.

9 MS. MAHER: And what's the percentage of
10 student that you're assuming is going to fill them?

11 MS. ELKOW: I don't know what the percent
12 of the numbers --

13 MR. GARBER: Probably somewhere around
14 60/40. Right now we have -- on a typical floor plan
15 we're imagining that there are 14 one-bedrooms as well as
16 four studios.

17 So 18 of the 25 units on a typical floor
18 plan for the big block we're talking about would be
19 probably marketed toward, you know, students or young
20 professionals.

21 MS. ELKOW: I think another important
22 point is this is all market rate housing, this is not
23 intended to be affordable housing. There -- which I
24 think speaks to two things, one is there is other

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1 affordable housing and that's not what Windham or
2 Willimantic are looking for.

3 They're looking for market rate housing.
4 That also means that the benefits that were talked about
5 earlier that a developer who does affordable housing that
6 would be able to take advantage of aren't going to be
7 available. So that is not the plan here, the plan here
8 is market rate housing.

9 MS. MAHER: So to that point though, if
10 you don't have a feasibility study and it's not a
11 successful project moving forward and you can't fill
12 those rooms, then you're facing a new building that's
13 empty so then the community loses part of its character
14 when it has the opportunity in advance.

15 Have you also done an environmental impact
16 study and what the carbon footprint of demolishing an
17 already existing building is going to do versus every
18 bit of efficiency you could put into a new building
19 really gets eradicated by the fact that you're
20 demolishing the building.

21 MS. ELKOW: No we have not done an
22 environmental impact study, because that's not something
23 we would typically do if there's not state or federal
24 funding required.

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1 But I would -- I guess two thoughts and,
2 you know, I guess it's dangerous to let lawyers talk
3 about things that architects and engineers should talk
4 about but, you know, a new building is often by
5 definition more efficient. You can seal them better, you
6 can design them to be better efficient from a heating and
7 cooling perspective.

8 But -- you know again, I think it's done
9 in phases. Again, if this -- here's what I'm struggling
10 with and I've said this a couple of times, but the
11 question isn't just what's the new building? The
12 question is can these buildings be rehabilitated in a way
13 that is prudent and feasible?

14 And I think the answer to that is no.
15 There hasn't been anybody who has come forward to say I
16 can make this work. Even the plan that was proposed
17 today by the Trust doesn't work. And so I appreciate the
18 concern and I think that again, whatever we end up
19 building we're going to be working with the Town.

20 We will be going through all of the normal
21 approval processes, we'll be going to the Planning &
22 Zoning Commission, we'll be complying with zoning and
23 design guidelines and all of those things that have to
24 happen with any new construction. But the question is

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1 does it make sense to save these buildings as an
2 alternative and right now, I haven't seen one, I don't
3 think anybody in Windham has seen one.

4 And again, I don't want to take up much
5 more time because I know -- and I don't want to not
6 answer your questions but I know there are a lot of
7 people in this room that want to talk about them.

8 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you very much.

9 DR. GLASER: And just so you know, there
10 is a lot of evidence that historic buildings are very
11 efficient, so that's important and I'm sure there's a lot
12 of people in this room with that position.

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Are there any --
14 Margaret.

15 MS. FABER: So would the developer
16 entertain the possibility of incorporating the existing
17 structures into a larger development plan?

18 MS. ELKOW: I think we -- we don't see
19 that the current buildings, their rehabilitation is
20 prudent or feasible. We have not had the opportunity to
21 do that because we've been frankly dealing with this, so
22 I don't think we're in a position to talk about that
23 right now.

24 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Other questions?

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1 Thank you.

2 MS. ELKOW: Thank you for your time.

3 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Okay so just a
4 reminder, we will be calling on people in the order in
5 which they have signed in. We will be giving deference
6 to the elected officials. I want to remind you that this
7 is -- you will be given up to five minutes.

8 We're looking for new information. If
9 somebody has expressed a view that you happen to share
10 and were planning to speak to, we just simply ask that
11 you state your name for the record from the podium and
12 signal your agreement with the prior statements because
13 it's important to us that we give all of you an
14 opportunity to come forward.

15 And I am going to call on the State Rep.
16 Susan Johnson first.

17 MS. SUSAN JOHNSON: Thank you so much.
18 I'm State Representative Susan Johnson and thank you for
19 coming to Windham today and hearing the testimony and all
20 the work that you're doing all throughout the state. I
21 wanted to just give you the benefit of the time that I've
22 been here on Main Street.

23 I went to Eastern Connecticut State
24 University when the Hale Building was open and it closed

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1 about the time I graduated, so that's a few years ago. I
2 also after that went to work at Legal Services on Main
3 Street and I was there about 15 years working in the
4 downtown area.

5 During the time that I have been here,
6 working in Willimantic first and then I went on the
7 Council as a Councilperson, we had a number of severe
8 changes that occurred. First The Hale Building did
9 close. Around that time the mall, the strip mall opened
10 up and took a lot of our businesses.

11 After that time the chance for us to have
12 any kind of transportation in and out of here was
13 eliminated because of the difficulty with trying to get
14 Columbia, Andover and Coventry to agree on where to put a
15 highway that would connect us to the rest of everywhere
16 else.

17 Also, the road going out of here to
18 Norwich connecting to the other highway is a very kind of
19 treacherous road at this point in time. So if you have
20 large amounts of traffic coming in and out of here you
21 would run into real difficulties, so we are an isolated
22 area now.

23 We do have the university systems, we do
24 have Eastern Connecticut State University, we have QVCC,

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1 but it's been limited in the last few years. We have
2 UConn students, graduate students, many of them living
3 here in town, so we do have a vibrant community of
4 students and graduate students and people doing all kinds
5 of good work all throughout the area.

6 During the time I was on the Council we
7 worked really hard to address the closings of The Mills.
8 That had been a big issue in the mid-1980s and we were
9 able to get about \$30 million for Mill No. 1. Mill No. 1
10 is still half built. We changed the zoning requirements
11 and made it possible for them to also put housing units
12 in there but nevertheless the developer has gone
13 bankrupt.

14 And Mill No. 2 was developed and put into
15 housing that's affordable housing. In fact we have more
16 affordable housing on a per capita basis than any other
17 place in the State of Connecticut except for Hartford, so
18 we do have that. But we also have lost a lot of access
19 to different types of employment that we used to have and
20 that was the reason we built the affordable housing or
21 the below market cost housing or subsidized housing in
22 the first place.

23 Back after World War II we created the
24 Housing Authority to make sure veterans had a place to

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1 go. Then the mills took advantage of all that housing
2 that we have and we were able -- they were able to hire
3 people at less than what they would have to hire, the
4 cost of living was higher here. So they tried everything
5 they could to stop unionization and we had very low cost
6 housing.

7 So that is kind of like the backdrop.
8 This is not Windsor Locks, this is not Guilford or any of
9 the other places that you might be able to do more
10 housing. We do not have the same kind of market benefit
11 that some of these other places have. So for example the
12 tax credits, you give the same tax credits to the people
13 developing in Greenwich that you give to people here in a
14 distressed municipality.

15 That doesn't help in terms of the ability
16 to be able to preserve historic places. If you gave more
17 money in tax credits, if you lobby for more money for tax
18 credits for the development of housing or restoration
19 then what we would is maybe we'd have more return on an
20 investment.

21 But as you just heard, the return on the
22 investment based on what they're getting doesn't come
23 close to trying to address what's happened over the last
24 few years, I'd say 40 years since the 80s, because what

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1 happened in the 80s? What happened in the 80s is we lost
2 in Connecticut and all over the country, we lost our
3 industrial base. Our tax bases are gone.

4 Now, maybe some places in this state you
5 have flourished, but it's at the expense of places like
6 this where we provide for everybody here. We provide --
7 we have three homeless shelters. We have low cost
8 housing. We do all this work.

9 We have a hospital, we have all kinds of
10 payment in lieu of taxes, the structures here that do not
11 get the money from the state that they should. And
12 because of that we are cut off and we are having real
13 development problems.

14 So I'm extremely passionate as I know you
15 are, and I hope that we can come to some kind of a
16 resolution to let the downtown area get redeveloped so
17 that it will be able to create a tax base for us again
18 and help us preserve the rest of the buildings that we're
19 working on.

20 Thank you so much for your time and your
21 spirit.

22 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you, and did
23 you have any statement you wish to give into the record?

24 MS. JOHNSON: I have presented testimony

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1 in the Bill that I submitted and I'm glad to talk to you
2 some more about that as well, so thank you so much.

3 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: The next person, Jim
4 Rivers.

5 MR. RIVERS: Thank you Madame Chair and
6 thank you all for being here tonight. I do appreciate
7 you coming to Windham, I know it's a long journey for
8 many of you but it allowed us to have the public here see
9 the process and participate in the process.

10 I've been the Town Manager in Windham for
11 almost two years now. Prior to that I was a four-term
12 elected First Selectman in the Town of Pomfret. I've
13 been in banking and more notably in the context of this
14 process I'm currently an owner of four buildings similar
15 to the ones, a little smaller, in Main Street in eastern
16 Connecticut that I am the steward and owner of, and I've
17 owned many others.

18 I can appreciate many sides of this
19 argument, I'm right in the middle of it as a matter of
20 fact. We have tried even since I've been here very hard
21 to do something with those two buildings and for any of
22 the downtown sites. I'm going to throw facts at you as
23 fast as I can because I only have about five minutes and
24 I don't want to be redundant with what the attorney had

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1 spoken earlier.

2 But I met Martin Kelly almost a year ago
3 now. We have been trying very hard, we have a very good
4 team here, a very aggressive team, to try to develop
5 especially the Main Street area which is the most
6 challenging. We brought -- and often I would get
7 involved in these processes because it was so important
8 that we'd let them know the community was behind the
9 project.

10 We saw dreamers and tire-kickers and
11 rehabbers and people that would do much bigger projects
12 that thought that those two buildings were too small.
13 We've seen them all and it's just a short time that I've
14 been here. And then Martin came along, and I'm pretty
15 quick with the numbers and what might work and not work.
16 And when my team told me what he planned to do,
17 unfortunately take the buildings down, I penned that out
18 real quick.

19 I said that's going to work because many
20 of these other dreamers, it's just not going to work.
21 You have to make the numbers work in the end. And as he
22 described this project and he went further along I said
23 this -- you know, we investigated and we know more than
24 you do and I don't know if he wants to share some of his

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1 personal information, maybe he will, but he has the means
2 to complete this project. I'm sure of that.

3 And we have made sure that we didn't spend
4 our time, our valuable time working with a developer that
5 wasn't going to be able to finish the project the way we
6 want it finished. I want to say to Representative
7 Johnson's comments, our town is -- our real estate value,
8 50 percent of it is exempt in this community.

9 I think we're one of the highest in real
10 estate in the state, we're fifth overall on all property
11 -- we have a lot of exempt property. We have property on
12 Main Street -- and I know there's some successes there,
13 we have some great businesses in town that have made the
14 best of old buildings.

15 But if you look carefully a lot of the
16 stock on Main Street, standing stock, some of these
17 contributing buildings are empty. They are vacant. So
18 we have some successes but we have a long way to go. And
19 one point that I want to make to you today, sometimes you
20 have to cut the arm off to save the body.

21 If we don't get an injection of capital
22 into this community, into the downtown, we're going to
23 watch our historic structures drop one at a time because
24 of some of the comments you heard earlier from the

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1 attorney. The money isn't there to keep these structures
2 up, to take care of them.

3 And once they get to a certain point -- we
4 have a couple other structures on Main Street, the water
5 is pouring through those buildings now as well. If we
6 don't get some catalyst to increase the enterprise value
7 of Main Street, then these buildings are going to go down
8 one by one.

9 You're going to hear testimony today from
10 staff about the condition of the Hooker Building. We are
11 very close for that building to be torn down, I'll tell
12 you right now. And I'm not an engineer and I'm not an
13 architect but we have some reports, we have expertise
14 here, and we're not going to take responsibility for a
15 building falling in the street on our people.

16 I can tell you, I will not do that. But
17 that building -- I went in there recently myself and
18 there's five inches of ice in places. There's ice on the
19 roof, but water is pouring through there. It was in bad
20 shape before that, it's not going to be long. And there
21 are other buildings on Main Street that have a similar
22 condition so we need to move quickly.

23 And this developer that we have, Martin
24 Kelly, he's about speed, he's about scale and he's using

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1 his own money and he wants to move quickly. If we start
2 to work a historic renovation project, which he's not the
3 right developer anyway, that is going to delay the
4 process. Historic renovations are more expensive and we
5 don't want to slow down one bit.

6 Just to answer some of the presentation of
7 the proforma because that's sort of my expertise, I'll
8 take all the numbers that were represented by the Trust,
9 many of them I think are incorrect, you can't service the
10 debt on that project that was presented. You have to
11 finance this or you have to have a return on investment.
12 And right off the get-go, \$400,000 in net cash flow,
13 you're going to have 21 years before you pay back the
14 money without a return.

15 And then you start getting into some of
16 the numbers and what it's really going cost to repair
17 those buildings, which we have a pretty good idea because
18 of how many people have come through here and looked at
19 other projects such as the Wauregan, such as the Mills
20 which you're going to hear about today right in town,
21 financially they don't work -- \$30-some odd million in
22 the Mill and they want a \$1 million assessment on their
23 property and that was mostly public money. These
24 projects don't always work.

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1 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: You're out of time.

2 MR. RIVERS: I appreciate you being here,
3 thank you for your time, please let this project go
4 forward. This is critical for this community, thanks
5 (applause).

6 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. I'm going
7 to read down the list, Jim Bellano.

8 MR. JIM BELLANO: Good morning, thanks for
9 coming here today. My name is Jim Bellano, I'm the
10 Economic Development Director for the Town of Windham.

11 One of my charges in my capacity is to
12 enhance business development and grow the tax base for
13 the entire town, and that certainly includes our Main
14 Street. And to a large extent we have town-wide
15 commercial property values, we're up about 14 percent in
16 the most recent eval that was done.

17 And even on Main Street some values are
18 rising and we do see tenants becoming property owners.
19 And maybe they'll buy historic buildings be good stewards
20 of those buildings. They're moving from tenant to Main
21 Street stakeholder. I expect you'll be hearing from some
22 of them today. But historic Main Street still lags
23 behind the rest of the town primarily because of the
24 decade old difficulty in developing The Hooker and Hale

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1 Buildings.

2 We know where these buildings are, they're
3 in the middle of Main Street, they take up a large part
4 of Main Street. They're the keystone to the economic
5 future of the downtown. And as you're aware, the two
6 buildings are not on the National Register. They're
7 contributing buildings to a District that's on the
8 National Register.

9 For CEPA purposes that may be a
10 distinction without a difference, but we have an
11 excellent track record in historic preservation. You've
12 heard about the 44 and 45 buildings still existing and
13 you've also heard about other projects we have done and
14 the town has always supported those.

15 From an Economic Development perspective,
16 the revitalization of the entire downtown Historic
17 District is one of my priorities. I really don't have
18 the luxury to prioritize two buildings over the other 42,
19 it's got to be the whole District. And talking about Mr.
20 Kelly's development, some of the economic impact from
21 that development can be quantified in a sense.

22 Our Assessor tells us that when those
23 buildings come on-line, and I mean on-line because they
24 are also in an enterprise zone, a state designated

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1 enterprise zone which means it's another ability to
2 encourage private investment, it should add another half
3 a million dollars to the town tax base. I'm talking
4 about this project not the project that was presented.

5 What can't be quantified though is the
6 intent, what a project like that would mean to the entire
7 Main Street District. You know, both the National Main
8 Street Center and Connecticut Main Street Center talk
9 about the primary imperative to revitalizing downtown is
10 feet on the street.

11 When you put 150 units, and he's talking
12 about doing more, on Main Street and you put retail
13 there, that's going to revitalize the entire District and
14 the other 42 buildings that will be left standing. So
15 feet on the street is something we're very concerned
16 with.

17 Secondly and more importantly they've
18 talked about opportunities zones. These properties are
19 in a newly created opportunity zones. Last week I went
20 to an Adaptive Reuse Summit for Historic Buildings, some
21 of you may have been there. I know some SHPO people were
22 there, some Trust people were in attendance. Opportunity
23 zones were a prominent topic at the seminar.

24 Nationally about 48 percent of opportunity

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1 zones lie within Historic Districts. The number is
2 probably similar if not even higher in Connecticut. A
3 woman named Merrill Hoopengardner, hopefully I'm
4 pronouncing her name right, President of the National
5 Historic Trust, gave a presentation entitled Opportunity
6 Zones and Advocacy.

7 One slide of her presentation stood out in
8 particular that was entitled OZ Limitations. Now the
9 slide wasn't talking about limitations on opportunity
10 zones as a tool for investment, it was talking about
11 limitations on opportunity zones working with the current
12 historic preservation funding models.

13 The first bullet point was telling
14 regulations, present limitations for OZ investments to
15 easily be combined with other financing tools such as new
16 market tax credits or historic tax credits. I assume --

17 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

18 MR. BELLANO: -- I assume it was presented
19 today from the Trust's presentation it was a prudent and
20 feasible alternative talking about mixing federal
21 historic tax credits with opportunity zones and new
22 market tax credits.

23 Well, the head of the National Trust for
24 Investment Corporation says they have limitations. If I

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1 only have a minute left I'd just say the Governor is
2 promoting the enterprise zones, so is DECD. And to be
3 kind the historical process is long, it's costly, it's
4 small in scale compared to market rate.

5 I'll just finish up by saying we have many
6 historic buildings on Main Street, we'd love to work with
7 SHPO and the Trust with them, I certainly have a list.
8 You know, our Main Street is at a tipping point and we're
9 really trying to push forward so I would ask you to not
10 push back in the other direction on this.

11 This is the right development for this
12 area. Thank you (applause).

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. I just
14 want to clarify for the record that when there is
15 contributing as part of National Register District or
16 individually listed, it is the same just so you know.

17 Okay, Matt Vertefeuille? I apologize if I
18 butchered your name.

19 MR. MATTHEW VERTEFEUILLE: I take no
20 offense it's Vertefeuille; I'm sorry for my voice. After
21 the walkthrough we did on February 21st, I developed a
22 lung infection and pneumonia because of the exposure to
23 the mold within the buildings, so my voice is a little
24 bit weak today.

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1 My name is Matthew Vertefeuille, I'm a
2 third generation Willimantic born. I live in the 1890s
3 Reverend Evan George Victorian in the Hill Section right
4 over here under restoration, walking distance to this
5 room and to the Town Hall. I live there with my wife and
6 my two young sons who I'm raising here as well.

7 I've restored houses I've renovated and
8 converted; the historic 1887 Guilford Smith Farm in South
9 Windham. I acted as designer, contractor and owner. I
10 consider myself to be a preservationist of historic
11 architecture. But I also act as Director of Development
12 for the Town of Windham. I'm ZEO wetland's officer and
13 head of the code enforcement department.

14 A big part of my job is to proactively
15 meet with new developers and businesses to find out where
16 they fit within our regulations and to work side by side
17 with them and guide them through regulatory meetings,
18 paperwork and requirements for their project.

19 Local zoning regulations help to protect
20 these historic structures. The incentive is the reuse of
21 the buildings. Sometimes it is not possible to do the
22 overwhelming cost associated with the unknowns of
23 historic restorations, we understand that. Our
24 regulations also guide new construction so it doesn't

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1 ruin the fabric of our Historic District.

2 We've taken great steps creating binding
3 architectural guidelines for properties built within our
4 historic downtown, so if you're building a new building
5 architecturally it has to fit in with our downtown. Brad
6 Schide from The Historic Trust pointed out that historic
7 preservation is working here. And I agree, it is working
8 here. We've had some great successes.

9 We -- I have worked on several different
10 projects in town to preserve local historic buildings
11 that remind us of where we came from. The Path Academy,
12 the ACT School, the old Capital Theater, Windham Mills,
13 516 on Main Art Space, the Hurley Murray Building, these
14 projects are all historic restorations all working
15 through historic tax credits here in town.

16 These projects have been transformative
17 but come at a cost. Each has shown that probability was
18 not achieved, many have gone bankrupt, all have
19 struggled. We've seen the buildings change hands time
20 and time again to escape the debt and it's still not
21 escaped. The Windham Mills was a \$35 million project, it
22 was recently valued at about \$6 million. It's a great
23 example of a bigger scale project but how using these
24 credits doesn't necessarily make it profitable or prudent

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1 and feasible.

2 Over the past 40 years we've struggled to
3 reenergize our downtown. We have countless studies and
4 plans sitting on a shelf. We have gone after and worked
5 to attract developers from across the region but this is
6 not Hartford, this is not Westport. Our Main Street is
7 unique and our town is unique.

8 We are a small distressed municipality
9 which needs all the help we can get to attract a
10 developer like Mr. Kelly. Over the past few years we
11 have shown and worked with dozens of qualified developers
12 looking at the buildings at 819 and 833 Main Street. I
13 myself have walked through those buildings close to 15 to
14 20 times in each building.

15 CHFA, POCO, CIL, Women's Institute, Beacon
16 Student Housing, Common Ground, they've all poked,
17 prodded and beaten these buildings to death. I've seen
18 proformas from most of these companies, I've had
19 conversations with the principals from these companies.
20 All the similar conclusions, the numbers don't work.

21 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

22 MR. VERTEFEUILLE: Restoring or tearing
23 them down, historic credits, supportive affordable VA
24 money, there's still too much of a gap. How many times

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1 do we need to demonstrate this for us not to conclude the
2 plans are not feasible? I'm going to skip right to my
3 conclusion.

4 Historic buildings are saved because we
5 want to remember our history. You'll hear today about
6 the history we don't want to remember, which is that
7 these buildings represent one 40-year vacant building
8 abandoned by the state and the other a center for
9 prostitution as you will hear from our Fire Chief and our
10 Police Chief with over 275 overdoses.

11 I'm speaking before you to appeal to your
12 objectivity, to ask that you look at the larger picture
13 of what is reasonable and prudent and what a reasonable
14 and prudent alternative plan might be. I'm asking you to
15 help us end 40 years of blight so that other historic
16 structures can survive.

17 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: You're out of time.

18 MR. VERTEFEUILLE: If a feasible plan was
19 available it would have shown up by now.

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you.

21 MR. VERTEFEUILLE: Thank you (applause).

22 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Joe Smith.

23 MR. JOE SMITH: Joseph Smith, S-M-I-T-H,
24 good morning. I've reviewed the reports dated 28

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1 February 2019 from Cirrus Structural Engineering; August
2 10, 2009 from Bounds Caliber; and the Schadler Selnau
3 Associates, PC dated February 22, 2019.

4 The report from 2009 included
5 recommendations for structural repairs that the authors
6 indicated were urgent in nature and the others with no
7 indication of urgency. The urgent items were addressed
8 to the satisfaction of the engineers shortly after the
9 report was created.

10 Some of the repairs included adding wood
11 structural members. These members were made from
12 laminated and common lumber none of which were treated
13 for or naturally resistant to decay. These members had
14 been exposed to extremely wet conditions for an unknown
15 time and are exhibiting signs of decay.

16 The remaining items, which included
17 recommendations for repointing exterior brick-bearing
18 walls, reinforcing existing roof framing, replacing
19 portions of exterior brick walls and further
20 investigation of the condition of the corridor-bearing
21 wall's footings among other items, were not addressed to
22 my knowledge.

23 Please note that the report indicates that
24 the roof at the time was well drained and did not show

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1 evidence of ponding. The report from Cirrus Structural
2 Engineering is as stated in the first paragraph, a
3 cursory assessment. This report relies entirely on the
4 report from 2009 for structural data and provides no new
5 empirical data in its conclusions.

6 The executive summary included in the
7 building assessment from Schadler Selnau has been created
8 by an architectural firm with no indication of
9 preparation or review by an engineer licensed to perform
10 such assessment in the State of Connecticut.

11 The summary contains statements and
12 conclusions relating to the condition of structural
13 components such as the general structural frame and the
14 brick wall face stating that they're intact and adequate
15 in their current state. The previously mentioned report
16 indicates that the brick face has continued to
17 deteriorate beyond that which was observed in 2009.

18 Both engineer's reports indicate the
19 immediate need to address the ponding on the roof and the
20 need to perform previously reinforcements to the rafters.
21 I've also reviewed the letter from Brad Schide of The
22 Connecticut Trust Historic Preservation dated March 4,
23 2019. This letter states that the engineers come to the
24 conclusion that the building is not in danger of

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1 collapse.

2 Please note that none of the reports made
3 available to this office have indicated that the authors
4 of the reports have come to this conclusion. This
5 office, which is charged by statute to determine whether
6 a structure is safe or unsafe, has determined that the
7 current condition of 819 Main Street creates an unsafe
8 structure.

9 Deterioration of structural members,
10 standing water on the roof, the conclusions and
11 recommendations of the qualified structural analysis and
12 the additional dead load in interior floors created by
13 several inches of ice on these floors.

14 In conclusion the owners of the structure
15 must either remove the structure, have a new complete
16 structural analysis performed that disputes the findings
17 of the previous qualified analysis and/or perform
18 structural repairs or upgrades to temporarily or
19 permanently support the structure. Thank you (applause).

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Rich
21 Cody.

22 MR. RICH CODY: Good afternoon, my name is
23 Rich Cody. I am the town attorney, I've been working for
24 the town since 1989, very familiar with these economic

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1 development efforts and projects and negotiated a lot of
2 the agreements that none of which really came to fruition
3 through the development of properties on Main Street.

4 Also I don't usually mention this but it
5 seems appropriate here, I have an LLM in environmental
6 law and in view of that degree I focused on CEPA and I've
7 litigated many cases on CEPA and understand the statute
8 very well. And I've argued the statute and the standards
9 to the Supreme Court at least twice.

10 What I'm going to focus in on my litigator
11 hat, I'm going to focus in on the statutory role the
12 Council plays and that is your decision today, is whether
13 or not to ask the Attorney General to bring a case under
14 CEPA and demonstrate that the destruction of these
15 buildings would be unreasonable as a prima facie case.

16 And in doing so I'm going to ask you to
17 look at the evidence that you have and to decide whether
18 or not recommending a case to the Attorney General will
19 carry with it the kind of evidence that will be necessary
20 in a court of law to support the case. And I'm talking
21 about admissible testimony, I'm also talking about the
22 statements that may be made that are against interests.

23 One of the -- to me as a litigator, the
24 most important fact that I've seen in the records and

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1 documents that have been presented to you is the simple
2 fact that this property was owned by the state and put up
3 for auction about 10 years ago. In the bid documents the
4 state admitted that the property was obsolete, and I'm
5 talking about The Hale Building, for purposes of a
6 commercial hotel and efficiency apartment development.

7 This is a statement that you would have to
8 surmount and overcome in court and it would make for an
9 interesting court moment indeed to watch an Attorney
10 General, an Assistant Attorney General stand up and tell
11 a Judge please ignore what we said 10 years ago. We --
12 the state said that 10 years ago, please ignore that
13 after 10 years of more neglect, 10 years of more
14 abandonment of the property.

15 I don't think you would be able to make
16 that prima facie case in a court. In looking at the
17 report that was presented by The Trust, there were
18 several things that I noticed that were just missing and
19 some of which Mr. Vertefeuille and Mr. Smith referenced.
20 There's no mention of cost or actual rehabilitation that
21 they presented, it discusses only repairs to the
22 structure and nothing more. There's no connection
23 between fixing the structure and any functional use of
24 the property.

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1 There's no mention of environmental
2 remediation of asbestos and lead and you're going to find
3 asbestos and lead abatement costs there, so. There's no
4 mention of availability of actual funds. Courts in CEPA
5 cases look to actual evidence not speculation or
6 conjecture. The idea that there could be financing,
7 could be grants isn't going to be enough. They have to
8 be proven to be available.

9 Importantly courts evaluating a CEPA case
10 also look at time periods in which the alternatives can
11 be evaluated. In the report by The Trust there's no
12 mention of time involving conducting the activity of the
13 rehabilitation, there's no mention of time to acquire
14 financing and there's no mention of time to do the
15 construction.

16 I negotiated for the property that was
17 down on the bottom across Main Street, it's a vacant
18 property that the town owns and Mr. Vertefeuille noted
19 that he worked with CIL. They wanted to put a
20 public/private partnership together and use grants. We
21 negotiated an agreement in principle, they were looking
22 for a five-year due diligent period.

23 Five-year due diligent period just to
24 determine whether or not the financing would work. This

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1 is an unreasonable amount of time. They walked from the
2 deal, they said it wasn't enough time, they decided they
3 couldn't get the financing and that's for a vacant parcel
4 of land that you don't have to worry about the
5 environmental remediation for.

6 So putting on my litigator hat I'm going
7 to ask you to look objectively at the evidence and ask
8 yourselves have we given them qualification in this
9 particular case to the Attorney General? Thank you
10 (applause).

11 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Victor
12 Funderburk.

13 MAYOR VICTOR FUNDERBURK: Thank you for
14 being here. I'm going to read a short statement. We
15 heard a lot of facts and figures here today but I want to
16 talk a little more about the heart of the matter. As a
17 long-time resident I want to talk about the vacant
18 buildings at 819 and 833 Main Street.

19 My name is Victor Funderburk, the Mayor of
20 Windham, Connecticut. I would like to welcome you to our
21 Town Hall and to thank you for this opportunity to speak
22 about our current efforts at economic development for our
23 residents.

24 Today both personally and professionally,

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1 I ask you to clear the way for the removal of these
2 buildings which continue to be an impediment for economic
3 growth. In the early 1970s, as an intern and a teacher
4 in Hartford for Hartford High School while earning a
5 Master's degree in urban education at the University of
6 Hartford, I developed an intense interest in urban
7 problems.

8 In the evenings and on weekends I worked
9 as a volunteer with the Revitalization Corps painting
10 apartments, tutoring, organizing and learning that with
11 work you can change lives. In 1973, I came to Windham
12 and have enjoyed 46 years of active participation in the
13 Windham community. I have been a modest part of positive
14 change over those years.

15 From 1973 to 2010, I was a biology teacher
16 at the middle school and the high school and learned to
17 overcome obstacles in money and resources to help my
18 students. In 1985, working with 20 other people, we
19 founded the Windham Theater Guild. You are looking at
20 the only living producer of the opera The Frogs of
21 Windham. Today the frogs on the bridge downtown and a
22 successful community Burton Leavitt Theater located on
23 Main Street attest to our success.

24 Last year we produced 10 plays along with

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1 the community chorus of Broadway music. I want to add
2 this has been an enormous community effort when we have
3 so many people involved now. Collaboration works. I
4 received a Bachelor's degree in history from the
5 University of Connecticut in 1970. Few had the passion
6 or respect I have for history and its role in our lives.
7 My house is full of history books.

8 I highly value historic preservation, I
9 supported efforts to preserve The Mills and The Textile
10 Museum, but we are here today to discuss two buildings
11 that are an abomination. For four decades I have been
12 upset with The Hooker Hotel as a dilapidated humiliation
13 of Thomas J. Hooker's legacy with its awful history of
14 drug use, prostitution, abandonment and today sagging
15 floors and an unstable wall.

16 My dream has been that this building will
17 be torn down and the town will put a placard to reclaim
18 and reeducate the community about the true history of
19 Thomas J. Hooker. The other building, The Nathan Hale,
20 has small rooms of concrete and is reported to be filled
21 with asbestos. Abandoned for a long time this building
22 too is an insult to our hero from Coventry, Nathan Hale.

23 Having an interest in town administration
24 along the way, I earned a Master's degree in public

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1 administration from the University of Connecticut. While
2 continuing to teach I served on many Committees working
3 to improve our community. Since 2000, I served on the
4 Windham Collaborative, The Thread City Development
5 Corporation and the last 11 years on the Windham Economic
6 Development Commission.

7 During that time we heard from many
8 Committees, engineers and owners of The Nathan Hale and
9 The Hooker Buildings. The result was always the same,
10 economically impossible and not feasible to restore. And
11 so the buildings have sat for so many years in the heart
12 of our Main Street damaging efforts for economic
13 development.

14 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

15 MAYOR FUNDERBURK: In 2017, I was elected
16 Mayor of Windham. I ran because I saw it as a chance to
17 help economic development to improve the lives of all who
18 live in Windham. I won in all three voting areas of town
19 not because of me, but because of a shared commitment to
20 a genuine desire for growth and change.

21 I come here today to ask you to help us in
22 this effort. As a more prosperous town we will be better
23 able to preserve the 42 other aging buildings in town
24 that have been identified as historic. Please help us

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1 preserve those buildings while we make more history with
2 historic changes in our downtown.

3 I thank you for listening (applause).

4 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Tom
5 Devino (sic).

6 MR. TOM DeVIVO: It's DeVivo and --

7 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: My apologies.

8 MR. DeVIVO: -- no, that's okay. Thank
9 you for coming to coming to Windham today. You know, I
10 come from a unique position. I'm one of the former
11 owners of those two structures.

12 Yet today when Mr. Kelly was here, it's
13 the second time I ever met him, he never showed me his
14 plans. I think it was no quid pro quo that he would help
15 me demo in any way. But basically and I run a business,
16 we're businessmen, my brother and myself. And we want
17 the best for Windham, we want what every Windham resident
18 wants.

19 When we purchased those buildings we
20 wanted to see vitality on Main Street, we want to see
21 feet on the street. But I'm also a Councilmember and
22 with me are the rest of the Council, they're all sitting
23 -- many of them are sitting here in the front row. I've
24 been on the Board of Planning & Zoning, I've been

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1 Chairman of Economic Development.

2 These buildings can't be redeveloped in
3 the way that The Historic Trust thinks that they should
4 be. My brother and my mother and I, we all purchased 833
5 and 819 Main Street fully aware of those challenges.
6 CHFA actually owned them, owned The Hotel Hooker and they
7 own the YMCA building across the street, but they owned
8 them.

9 They were there with Common Ground, Common
10 Ground was going to put supportive housing. The Town
11 Council stood up and said we like supportive housing, we
12 like Common Ground. We thought it would be a good deal
13 for Main Street, Willimantic. They couldn't put
14 financial structure together no matter what they did.

15 CHFA actually evicted the people that
16 lived in there or found suitable housing for them
17 somewhere else in Columbia up at the Columbia Hotel
18 actually. They said that there was structural issues in
19 the building and they had to leave quickly. Lots of
20 people in the community that were gossipers said it's a
21 ruse, there's no structural problems. There are
22 structural problems.

23 The basement had to be jacked up with two
24 by fours holding the whole basement. You go up to the

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1 top floor of 819 Main Street, it's got huge waves in the
2 floor. The building is like -- it sinks in the middle of
3 the building creating great distress on the back and
4 front walls.

5 When they talked about saving the façade,
6 the façade was put on in the 70s. There's no front --
7 wooden front porch, the furnace in the building came out
8 of St. Mary's School when it burned down, okay. I know
9 the history of this town, I'm multi-generational here.
10 That building is in trouble.

11 833 Main Street, in 1978 it's been vacant
12 most of the time I ever remember. It wasn't -- it's not
13 super historical looking it's just a brick building. To
14 compare it against factory buildings that were built to
15 be a factory in Windsor and compare it to two buildings
16 that were built to be hotels, they're not even comparable
17 when I saw those things.

18 We did spend time, we met with Ken Olson
19 from POCO. Unfortunately he's passed away otherwise I
20 would have come here to show us you couldn't get the
21 density, you couldn't get the money. The funding never
22 came up. You just couldn't make the numbers work for
23 those two buildings to be rehabbed. It just -- it wasn't
24 available.

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1 We've walked through numerous developers,
2 CIL was one of them. There's so many folks came through
3 I can't think of every name now but they came through and
4 they never would come back. So finally after our mother
5 passed away my brother and I said we should just sell
6 these buildings and move on.

7 And we listed with a real estate agent and
8 people would come with great plans and this and that and
9 finally Mr. Kelly came and said he wanted to purchase
10 them and he has a plan that's coming to Town Hall. The
11 Town Council has also agreed that removing these
12 buildings is probably in the best interest of the town.

13 We have lots of other structures, wood
14 structures on Main Street where there's a rug thing that
15 the town -- the state spent \$50,000 putting a new roof
16 on. The roof -- the building is still caving in. After
17 the state spent \$50 grand to repair the roof no one ever
18 moved in.

19 So it sits there, we have a carpet guy on
20 the first floor but no one moved to the second and third
21 floor. So we need development, we need solid people on
22 the street and we need -- we definitely need this
23 development and I wish only the best for Mr. Kelly.

24 Thank you (applause).

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1 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you.
2 Councilmembers, we have 10 minutes left in the regular
3 scheduled meeting. I want to see -- first ask for a show
4 of hands of who can stay till 1:00 p.m. at least? Only
5 one -- okay, so we -- yeah, alright.

6 So I'm going to suggest that we continue
7 this meeting to 1:00 p.m. to allow more opportunity for
8 people to come forward. I just want to remind everybody,
9 I understand the very personal connections that a lot of
10 you have to these buildings. I'm going to ask you to
11 remember that we're looking for new information.

12 We are very interested in that and in the
13 interest in having as many of you speak today as
14 possible, I just want ask you to remember to -- if you're
15 just signaling your agreement with things that have been
16 said, to do that and let the next person speak.

17 Okay, the next person is Tom White.

18 MR. KEVIN DONAHUE: Hi, I'm Kevin Donahue
19 not Tom White. Tom White was unable to come and I am
20 standing in in his stead. I'm here representing the Town
21 of Windham Board of Finance and it's from that
22 perspective I want to chat with you.

23 I've lived in this town for a decade.
24 I've served on the Town Council and the Board of Finance.

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1 I've been in the orbit of this town for decades before
2 that living in Columbia and other towns and been on
3 Boards of Finance there, so I recognize the financial
4 constraints here.

5 I live in Windham Center in the historic
6 1750s Dr. Hunt House, into which I have poured vastly
7 more money than I will ever get out, but it's a hobby and
8 a passion. And I recognize that real estate development
9 is neither of those two things so I want to kind of focus
10 my talk on the concept of balance.

11 We at the Board of Finance are the hub of
12 the wheel when it comes to need in this town. We see
13 every budget and every need. We see the library, we see
14 the school, we see the town agencies. All have needs,
15 needs that are in excess of our ability to pay.

16 And it's always a question of balance,
17 what can we do to improve the organism of our town in the
18 best possible way? How do we balance the various needs
19 which is of course what you have to do today, is think
20 about that balance? And I'd like you to kind of think
21 about some of the things that we think about on the Board
22 of Finance.

23 We recognize that we have a limited tax
24 base and grand list. We're a poor town -- 164,000,

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1 169,000, struggling downtown with many missing teeth.
2 Businesses struggling and in particular our schools are
3 struggling. Our schools are aching for more money than
4 our taxpayers can afford and so our town has many, many
5 needs.

6 I recognize that many of our neighbors
7 from other towns come here and love the quaint appearance
8 of many of our structures and etc., but they're kids
9 don't go to our schools. They don't pay our taxes and
10 our town has to support the needs of a very poor, poor
11 town as best we can.

12 So the Board of Finance as a group has
13 come up with a resolution noting that we're deeply
14 concerned with the future -- with the present and the
15 future of the town. Our goal is to balance, balancing
16 the present and the future moving forward in the best
17 possible way.

18 Our -- we recognize the loss of
19 manufacturing employment in town and how that stands from
20 an economic -- how this impacted our town. We note that
21 the town in general, as you've heard already, has a very
22 strong interest in economic development and has done many
23 things to forward that goal.

24 The town has consistently supported

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1 historic rehab as Matt has pointed to you and has a long
2 history of that. And we also note in the town -- the
3 Board of Finance notes the condition of these buildings
4 that you've heard about today.

5 So on January 16th the Board of Finance
6 had overwhelmingly passed a resolution in support of this
7 project recognizing that it is in the best interest of
8 the town to move forward in that area. We are very
9 interested in the fact that this is privately owned.

10 As our State Rep has noted, we have a
11 significant number of supported housing, we need to
12 increase our grand list. We need to do that to support
13 the many needs that we see on a regular basis. So
14 supporting our grand list and growing our town are
15 critically important to us.

16 We see towns -- we see our businesses on
17 Main Street in the neighborhood with these buildings
18 struggling. I have friends who own buildings there and
19 whose businesses are right on the edge. They're doing
20 what they can to maintain a business on Main Street but
21 it's hard because we don't have the foot traffic that we
22 need and the foot traffic that this project promises to
23 have.

24 We also note that state funding has not

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1 been that effective and I think you heard that from Mr.
2 Rivers. I would point out The Hurley Building, to look
3 for, and count on, state funding has been a fool's errand
4 for us for generations and I think that we need to see
5 that.

6 So we are looking -- in following up on
7 that point, we also note that disallowing this project
8 would in effect hurt Main Street and hurt the private
9 owners of these other 44 buildings that are crumbling and
10 in need of private development. So for that many reasons
11 we feel while economic development is crucial, it's our
12 number one goal here in town and on the Board of Finance
13 in increasing our grand list.

14 We recognize that historic preservation is
15 important but right now by way of balance, this is by far
16 the most important thing we could do in this town and the
17 most important that we've done or looked at in
18 generations. So we strongly -- and the Board of Finance
19 strongly support this effort (applause).

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Dennis
21 O'Brien.

22 MR. DENNIS O'BRIEN: Thank you very much
23 for coming to Windham, it's a real pleasure to have you
24 here. I'm Dennis O'Brien, I've lived in Windham since --

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1 or Willimantic since 1974.

2 I grew up in the City of New Britain.
3 I've been an attorney for almost 47 years, was in legal
4 aid for 23 years as Director of Litigation for the
5 statewide legal aid program, Connecticut Legal Services,
6 working with Racine Pakulski, who I think some of you
7 know, for more than 15 years.

8 I also was a Judge in the children's
9 court, Probate Court, for 12 years. I've had a lot of
10 experience here in Windham working with the community
11 especially the low income community. And the thing that
12 I want to -- oh, I should say in full disclosure. You
13 heard from State Representative Johnson earlier.

14 I am married to State Representative
15 Johnson, she is my wife. That's the most important
16 things that I can tell you about me. But in any event, I
17 retired from the Probate Court two years ago, I'm in my
18 mid-70s. A few years ago my wife talked me into
19 accepting Dawn Niles's invitation to take the position on
20 the Town Council in the Town of Windham, and I've been
21 there ever since.

22 Her concern was that she had received --
23 she had gotten the state to bond over \$1 million, \$1.3
24 million for a new Senior Community Center in this town

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1 but then that sat on the table for five years and nothing
2 was being done about it. So she said Dennis, you should
3 go on the Town Council, shake them up and get them going.
4 So I did go on there and we have a new -- Dawn and I are
5 on the Town Council, we've got a new Town Manager, Jim
6 Rivers who you heard from.

7 And low and behold now we're in the
8 process of building a new Senior Community Center. We're
9 also in the process of renovating our high school, we're
10 also in the process of doing many other important
11 projects in town including a new parking garage downtown
12 using state money. The state's been very good to us in
13 the last several years thanks to our local officials and
14 our state delegation.

15 Okay I've lived here a long time,
16 supported all the historic preservation projects that
17 have come down the pike until this one came -- until this
18 issue came up. I was stunned when I first heard that a
19 private developer was interested in investing millions of
20 dollars in The Hooker and Hale Buildings because we don't
21 see a lot of private developers coming into this town to
22 invest in it. We haven't for ages, at least certainly
23 not at this level.

24 We have difficulty drawing private

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1 investment. Most of the investment in our town comes
2 from state dollars. We get a lot of money from the
3 state, we don't get enough, we could use more. Let me
4 say something that nobody has said before.

5 We said we were a small town, okay. Our
6 population is less than 25,000. Of that population
7 you're talking about a lot of children whereas in the
8 surrounding town there's a lot of empty seats in
9 elementary schools. We don't have that, we got a lot of
10 kids here.

11 We are a low income town, very low income,
12 our poverty rate according to CRC is 25 percent.
13 Coventry's for example, a neighboring town, not a wealthy
14 town. The poverty level is three percent. We're
15 different. We're also different from Hartford and
16 Norwalk as Matt had first pointed out.

17 Okay, I've been to all those towns. When
18 I was Director of litigation for Legal Aid, I litigated
19 in Stamford, Hartford, Norwalk, New Haven, Bridgeport,
20 Waterbury, everywhere. Those towns have one advantage
21 over us, there's a lot of historic preservation that goes
22 on there and a lot of them have to review within those
23 towns, but those towns are not a town of less than 25,000
24 people with the kind of poverty that we have.

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1 We don't have wealthy people in this town.
2 When I was Judge in Probate -- you've heard about the
3 estate tax. In Fairfield County 50 percent of the people
4 who die -- and the estate tax is a few million dollar
5 threshold. In 12 years as at the Probate Court I saw
6 two, two estates above that level.

7 We are a low income town. We cannot
8 afford to ignore an opportunity to bring private
9 development into this town. If this development is not
10 accepted and it doesn't go forward somehow, we're going
11 to have a reputation that we're not welcoming private
12 development.

13 And I learned from expert witnesses in
14 cases I've handled in the federal court that a town's
15 reputation means everything. This is a once in a
16 lifetime opportunity for the Town of Windham and the City
17 of Willimantic.

18 We need to do this and we need to do this
19 mostly for the people in our town who suffer from poverty
20 from economic deprivation. Those are the people that
21 really need help in this town. It needs the town's
22 economy to take off. We're working very hard to make it
23 take off and we need your help.

24 I agree with Attorney Cody, I've litigated

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1 in courts all over the east and even in the Supreme Court
2 and I can tell you I think that if this case is brought
3 forward to the court I don't think it will succeed, I
4 really don't.

5 And I don't think the Attorney General
6 will bring it because I've litigated with the Attorney
7 General many, many times. But of course that is up to
8 you.

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Time is up.

10 MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you very much for your
11 time (applause).

12 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Okay, we
13 have a half hour left. We still have a considerable
14 number of people, we are going down the list in the order
15 in which people have signed-in. The next person is
16 Charlie Krich.

17 MR. CHARLIE KRICH: Good afternoon,
18 welcome to town. It's a place that I love dearly. I
19 hope you'll have the time to walk through some of the
20 streets and byways here before you leave. There's just
21 great things (indiscernible) other places. I also own an
22 old home in the Prospect Hill Neighborhood's Historic
23 District here.

24 We have three Historic Districts in

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1 Windham, one of them -- the center of Main Street itself
2 was is a Historic District. And if you do go to the
3 Prospect Historic District a picture of my house is
4 there. It's like my baby pictures, we all have pictures
5 we want to share of our grandkids.

6 That's been my grandkid there, it's been a
7 labor of love for me to be able to do that. I loved what
8 Kevin Donahue said because that's so much how I see it.
9 I'm a member of the Town Council that voted almost
10 unanimously nine to one to support the developer here.

11 It's not that we did that lightly because
12 we just want to see things go. We know through all of
13 our lives here how difficult that property has been to
14 market. There's just been no prior success, it's going
15 to take a private developer to do this.

16 One thing that -- and it's going to take
17 the balance that Kevin talked about and that balance
18 particularly is the scale that this project is going to
19 have. The only thing that hasn't been mentioned is that
20 we look at the three phases of the development. One
21 phase that was described as being vacant, yeah it's
22 vacant because that building fell down.

23 So I hope that we don't just focus on two
24 buildings but on the scale of what that could possibly do

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1 to revitalize the rest of that whole area which is not
2 easy to say, a thing our Town Manager didn't mention
3 either, but there's a façade of the building that just
4 fell down this year.

5 You have the one on Walnut Street but
6 that's only a few steps from where we're sitting here
7 right now. A lot of these buildings are in delicate
8 condition and I think we have a project. What we'd do as
9 Kevin had mentioned would encourage other people to take
10 ownership of some of these buildings in bringing them
11 back.

12 And I would as a member of the Council
13 urge you again to do what we requested, which is if you
14 would not stand in the way of this development and allow
15 them to proceed. I think we've been good stewards of
16 buildings here and this development will give us an
17 ability to continue what we've always been doing
18 (applause).

19 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you.
20 (Applause) Dawn Niles.

21 MS. DAWN NILES: Hello, my name is Dawn
22 Niles. I currently serve on the Town Council for the
23 Town of Windham. I also serve on the Board of Selectmen
24 for the Town of Windham and on the Planning & Zoning

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1 Commission for the Town of Windham and I currently am in
2 charge of constituent services for House Democrats for
3 the Speaker of the House.

4 I'm here to basically say that -- I mean,
5 a lot of people talked to you about what we think of The
6 Hotel Hooker now and it's falling down. I actually -- my
7 mom used to work in The Hotel Hooker as the bookkeeper
8 when it was the hotel and it's beautiful, but it's not
9 anymore.

10 It's gone from being a place that people
11 wanted to go and stay in to a place that we just want to
12 forget. It is called Heroin Town. We've had enough of
13 this negativeness. The building is falling apart. As
14 part of the Town Council and the Board of Selectmen,
15 we've given tax credits across the board for the Windham
16 Mills, we've tried to bring things back.

17 We worked to make sure that two
18 renovations on Main Street, the YMCA and the Capital
19 Theater, were renovated as new and one of them actually,
20 I can't remember which one, had the façade come down as
21 we were trying to renovate it. As Charlie mentioned, we
22 had a building with the façade starting to come down on
23 Walnut Street.

24 We -- as a Town Council we have been

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1 working really, really hard to move this town forward and
2 we watched all these developers that have come in that
3 want to have all these breaks and tax credits and let's
4 face it people, the State of Connecticut doesn't have a
5 lot of money to be handing out right now.

6 We are nickel and diming everything on the
7 state level never mind trying to help some of this stuff.
8 We have a private developer that's come in who wants to
9 sink some money into this town that we so badly need. We
10 nickel and dime our budget -- we're in budget season
11 right now and we're talking about \$5,000 here \$5,000
12 there.

13 Why? Because we're doing our best to keep
14 our tax base down because we have no development
15 happening. This would help us move forward. The Town
16 Council voted overwhelmingly for Resolution No. 2745. We
17 ask you please, do not hinder our development (applause).

18 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Randall
19 Prose.

20 MR. RANDALL PROSE: Hi, I'll make it brief
21 because I want this development to go through as well.
22 I'm a teacher at the high school. I fell in love with
23 this town 12 years ago, bought a house, a 1880 and
24 another 1920. I had a lot of fun ripping up shag carpets

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1 and tearing paneling down restoring those beautiful
2 Victorian homes.

3 A couple of years ago I ran for Town
4 Council and got elected and this town is on its way back.
5 In the last two years we've really -- I was wondering
6 what to say and the kids are like coach -- I also coach
7 the football team, track team. They were like -- go get
8 them, be honest, don't write a speech go talk from the
9 heart.

10 In the last two years this community has
11 dug deep. We voted to renovate our high school, we voted
12 for a brand new Rec Center, we've got a parking garage to
13 redevelop Main Street, built a stage, cinema for the Rec
14 Center for our students, and we need this tax base.

15 We need this private investor, our schools
16 are struggling. The community has dug really deep to
17 support their own community but this would really help so
18 please let this development go through (applause).

19 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. I'm
20 reading handwriting I may not be able to read clearly,
21 Nectaus Martinez?

22 FEMALE VOICE: He's not here.

23 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Okay, Marc Schrivner.

24 MR. MARC SCHRIVNER: Good morning, I'll

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1 make this brief. Welcome to Willimantic. Undoubtedly
2 you will hear and have already heard some passionate
3 testimony today on both sides of the issue.

4 Regardless of our position, all of us that
5 are sitting out here, most of us are friends and we all
6 love Willimantic. We may not agree on the issues but we
7 agree that we have a lot of potential here in this
8 community. I'm sure you can see that passion.

9 I'd like to share with you my opinion and
10 perspective as Chief of the Willimantic Fire Department.
11 I live here in Willimantic, I live about a mile away from
12 here and I've worked for the Willimantic Fire Department
13 for 20 years. I'm very familiar with these buildings.

14 They directly abut my building, the public
15 safety complex. I not only live one mile but because I
16 live one mile from the building I can walk downtown. I
17 do have a work vehicle that I drive to the firehouse
18 every day and I park it right behind 819 Main Street. I
19 just about touch it where I park each morning when I come
20 to work.

21 And because I live and work here, I walk
22 by these buildings almost daily either for work purposes
23 or for leisure. 833 -- in my opinion 833 Main Street,
24 The Nathan Hale, has been disused since prior to my

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1 tenure. I've been here 20 years at the Fire Department
2 and it's simply sat idle for the entire time.

3 There's just been no activity in the
4 building in fact this morning I was discussing that
5 building with our administrative assistant, Liz Lucas
6 (phonetic) who today is her 41st anniversary on the job
7 and she only has a vague recollection of the building
8 being in use during her career.

9 She's been here 41 years and can you
10 imagine that that after her 41 years she only has some
11 vague recollection the last time the building was used?
12 In my role I did speak with the Connecticut Fire Academy.

13 At one point they had prior went to the
14 state discussing the building, had looked at the building
15 for use for the Fire Academy for training purposes and
16 they thought it to be unsuitable. You know, on a regular
17 basis myself and the building official you heard from
18 earlier and others, the Fire Marshal, we constantly are
19 keeping an eye on these buildings for public safety
20 reasons for concern for things falling from them.

21 819 Main Street, The Hotel Hooker, was
22 very active in the early part of my career. I've looked
23 over the records prior to coming today and found that
24 while it was open we responded to 350 emergency

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1 responses, 273 of those were medical related which you've
2 heard from many were overdoses.

3 The majority of the other emergencies were
4 fire alarm, sprinkler activation. Most of these occurred
5 prior to the facility being closed. It was primarily
6 occupied and frequented as you've heard by our neediest
7 residents, people in the lowest end of the socioeconomic
8 scale.

9 In most cases they look to the ambulance
10 for their first access to medical care, last chance for
11 survival from addiction-related emergencies. The access
12 to advance care or lack thereof was too late to prevent a
13 poor outcomes in many cases. Thankfully those residents
14 have been relocated to more suitable housing at the
15 Cedarwoods Complex on Cameo Drive.

16 But that building is vague to our
17 collective memory here in the community for those
18 experiences. It's my understanding that 819 Main Street
19 is in very poor condition as you've heard and we're
20 growing at the Fire Department very concerned for its
21 proximity and its risk to us in the public safety
22 complex.

23 I recently asked Joe Smith, the building
24 official, if the building was in danger of falling onto

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1 our building and he said he just wasn't sure. He
2 specified today that he's very concerned for that
3 building to come down. As someone who appreciates the
4 risk -- the rich history of our community, I understand
5 the affection for these buildings.

6 I feel some of the same affection and it's
7 greatly attenuated though by the stain of our unfortunate
8 branding as Heroin Town some years ago, which had its
9 epicenter right next to the firehouse and The Hotel
10 Hooker. As a public safety professional, I believe that
11 the time for preservation for these buildings has long
12 past and they need to be raised for the safety of the
13 community.

14 After watching these buildings deteriorate
15 in my 20-year career with little hope for outside
16 investing as you've heard, I think it's unrealistic to
17 keep doing what we have been doing while expecting
18 different outcomes. It would be very unfortunate for
19 these buildings to sit unused for even another year.

20 Our Fire Department administrative
21 assistant will likely retire in two years, I just told
22 you she's 41 years on the job so she'll retire in a
23 couple of years with 43 years of service.

24 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

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1 MR. SCHRIVNER: And I'll be eligible for
2 retirement in fewer than five. It would be a real shame
3 if she and I both retired from service here in Windham
4 with no developer in sight and no change in these
5 buildings.

6 I recommend that the current developer be
7 allowed to raise the buildings, redevelop the lot within
8 the confines of our zoning rules and allow our community
9 to turn the page on this chapter of our history. Thank
10 you (applause).

11 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Roberto
12 Rosado.

13 MR. ROBERTO ROSADO: Good afternoon, my
14 name is Roberto Rosado. I'm the Willimantic Police
15 Department Chief of Police. I'm also a town resident,
16 therefore I have a personal and professional interest in
17 the community.

18 I have over 21 years of law enforcement
19 experience all with the Willimantic Police Department and
20 am one of the few remaining officers in this town that
21 was here when The Hooker Hotel was operating. We have a
22 public safety concern with The Hotel Hooker and The
23 Nathan Hale Building.

24 The concerns are related to crime, overall

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1 unsafe structure, poor conditions to part of our downtown
2 area that present dangers to our community. This
3 community is still scarred from the violent crime and
4 drug activity that existed since The Hotel Hooker opened
5 its doors for living arrangements to transient
6 populations since the early 70s.

7 This Hotel Hooker era labeled our
8 community Heroin Town. I don't have the crime statistics
9 for the entire era but I reviewed data from 2001 to 2003,
10 which is a two and a half year span. In that span it
11 brings back terrible memories. We had over 280 calls for
12 service which seems like we were going there constantly,
13 almost daily.

14 Environmental causes such as the criminal
15 association of individuals and deplorable living
16 conditions at The Hotel Hooker are one of several
17 theories that lead to crime. The crime and nuisance that
18 occurred at The Hotel Hooker since the 70s diminished any
19 historical value it had.

20 Today people remember the label Heroin
21 Town and it's one of the reasons why people have a fear
22 to come into the community and visit our downtown or move
23 here. The Nathan Hale and Hotel Hooker buildings'
24 condition are poor and do not meet minimum standards for

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1 human habitation and the properties are determined to be
2 a danger to the public.

3 Over several years there have been other
4 structures in the downtown area in close proximity to The
5 Hotel Hooker and The Nathan Hale buildings that had
6 debris falling from the roofs or the facades. In 2003
7 the Tin Tsin Building, located at 804 Main Street, was
8 raised because of exigent circumstances related to
9 structural deficiencies.

10 804 Main Street still remains vacant, it's
11 a vacant lot today. Recently the bricks from the façade
12 of the Inglesia Bautista de Willimantic located at 32
13 Walnut Street, again, fell on Walnut Street. A portion
14 of that road from Main Street to Meadow Street had to be
15 closed down for several days and today the sidewalk still
16 remains closed.

17 We cannot have that or we cannot afford
18 that on Main Street in town. The project as proposed
19 will bring a breath of fresh air to this community and
20 allow the Town of Windham to move forward in a positive
21 way. Crime rates in the town have been reduced by a
22 number of strategies over the years and this development
23 can help in the same fashion.

24 Raising the buildings and building new

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1 structures as proposed for housing and business
2 opportunities will create a larger population of
3 residents and businesses to our downtown area.

4 Empirical studies have shown that when you
5 design the environment to increase the population and
6 area through zoning, building structures or housing it
7 will lead to the probability of a reduction in crime.

8 Lower crime rates are important to the
9 Willimantic Police Department and the Town of Windham for
10 several reasons. It's important to shed the stigma of
11 our Heroin Town, increase the property values, reduce
12 fears and improve our overall community.

13 This project design as proposed will make
14 the downtown area look more appealing for people to move
15 here --

16 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

17 MR. ROSADO: -- or visit our downtown
18 area. It also has a potential to address many public
19 safety concerns that I have. Thank you for giving me the
20 opportunity to provide this testimony. Thank you
21 (applause).

22 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. I'm
23 looking at the time, it's 10 of 1:00. We are working on
24 the sign-in sheet in the order in which people have

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1 signed in. I'd like to do a quick show of hands for
2 those of you remaining in the room who are opposed to --
3 or for I should say, the demolition.

4 Could you just raise your hands? I'm just
5 trying to get a sense of numbers who have not testified.

6 FEMALE VOICE: Oh, have not testified?

7 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Yes.

8 DR. WOODWARD: Could you ask that question
9 again?

10 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Let me -- let me --
11 sorry, I'll try to be clear. For those of you remaining
12 in the room who have not yet testified, how many of you
13 are speaking to allowing the demolition to go forward?
14 Twelve. How many of you in the room who have not spoken
15 will be speaking to prevent the demolition?

16 Okay, we are -- we will not be able to
17 hear everybody in the time that we have allotted. It is
18 important that we actually hear from everybody, in this
19 type of situation what we would do is we would continue
20 the meeting and hold it over to our next scheduled
21 meeting.

22 I think given the amount of people who are
23 here, I think that's in the best interest so I would like
24 to continue to hear as many people who are present here,

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1 again, working down the sign-in sheet. But then to
2 continue this until our -- what would be our April 3rd I
3 believe meeting, the first Wednesday in April.

4 MALE VOICE: Is that here or in Hartford?

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: The location would be
6 yet to be determined. I'm sorry, could you speak up?

7 MALE VOICE: Can we submit comments
8 (indiscernible).

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Absolutely, yes,
10 written comments would be accepted. (Whispering between
11 panel members.) One of the things that I have been made
12 aware of is that the owner may be preceding -- I wonder
13 if the owner could speak to the timing.

14 If we continue this meeting, if we
15 continue it to this location so that we can allow the
16 full public process to occur, which has only partially
17 occurred at this point, do you agree to not take any
18 action towards the demolition to allow the public
19 process?

20 MS. ELKOW: No we don't. We've wait -- we
21 agreed to wait till this hearing and we think you have
22 enough information to make a decision. We appreciate
23 that the public needs to be heard, you can hear from a
24 couple people in opposition. You've got the papers from

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1 the Trust but we're not going to wait.

2 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Okay, thank you.

3 MS. MAHER: So in light of that I would
4 make a recommendation to move this to the Attorney
5 General (applause).

6 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: The Council has not
7 had an opportunity to hear all the rest of the
8 information. Do you wish to close the public test -- the
9 submission of public testimony in order to -- Margaret?

10 MS. FABER: Would it be possible for us to
11 stay later and continue? I know it's getting late.

12 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Let me -- a show of
13 hands who can stay another half hour.

14 MALE VOICE: I'll buy pizza.

15 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One, two, three, four
16 -- well let me explain. Councilmembers have actually
17 travelled from all across the state to be here and are
18 also working professionals as well.

19 So we're trying to come up with some
20 workable alternatives. Okay, those of you who can stay
21 till 1:30? One, two, three, four, five, six -- we don't
22 have a quorum. (Whispering between panel members.) I
23 just want to ask the attorney for RUC Holdings one
24 further question.

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1 So you talk about applying for the
2 building permit, do you agree to not take down the
3 buildings until we complete the process?

4 MS. SHAPIRO: She should say it out loud.

5 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Can you just come up?

6 MS. ELKOW: No.

7 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: In the time that's
8 remaining --

9 MS. ELKOW: We would be fine with whoever
10 wants to speak in opposition to take whatever time is
11 remaining if that's --

12 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: -- that's exactly
13 what I was going to ask for.

14 MS. ELKOW: -- that's fine, yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: So I'm going to ask
16 at this point for somebody who is in support of
17 maintaining these buildings to give some of the testimony
18 related to actually saving the buildings so that we can
19 begin to hear a balance.

20 That gentleman who raised his hand first
21 can I invite you forward?

22 MR. BRUCE CLOUETTE: Madame Chair and
23 Councilmembers, I am Bruce Clouette, 483 Woodland Road,
24 Mansfield. Although not a Windham resident, I consider

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1 Willimantic to be an important part of my life.

2 It's where we buy all our pet food, auto
3 parts, vacuum cleaner supplies and natural foods. We go
4 out to eat a lot and three of our top favorite
5 restaurants are right here in Willimantic. Both Donna
6 and I participate in numerous Willimantic activities
7 including Victoria Days and the Theater Guild of course.

8 For 40 years I've worked in historic
9 preservation but I'm speaking just for myself not on
10 behalf of any organization or my employer, Archeological
11 Historical Services. I love Main Street, Willimantic
12 because it is a real place, a unique place, not a
13 faceless commercial strip.

14 The late 19th and early 20th Century
15 buildings arranged along Main Street are a big part of
16 that uniqueness testament to the fact that this was not a
17 place created overnight but rather built up by the hard
18 work of many generations. The historic context of these
19 two buildings is similar though 40 years apart.

20 When it opened in the 1880s, Seth Hooker's
21 hotel had steam heat, large rooms, an elevator and an
22 intercom system. It was considered the finest hotel in
23 eastern Connecticut eclipsed only in the 1920s when The
24 Nathan Hale was built. Some people have said nothing has

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1 happened with these buildings for years, and that's true.

2 Decades of inaction by previous owners,
3 most notably the State of Connecticut, have brought us to
4 where we are. But historic preservation never just
5 happens, it's always the result of creativity, vision,
6 ambition and perseverance. One of my projects from the
7 1980s was the rehabilitation of Burritt Hotel in New
8 Britain.

9 It's similar to The Nathan Hale in that it
10 is a brick colonial revival-style 1920s hotel but just a
11 little larger. The Burritt was rehabbed into 65 units of
12 senior housing, 30 plus years later it is still fully
13 rented and generates about \$177,000 a year in local
14 property taxes. Last night in the Willimantic Chronical
15 someone cited Northampton as an aspirational model for
16 Willimantic. I'm assuming no irony was intended.

17 In the early 1970s, most people considered
18 Northampton a complete dump. The community however
19 pulled itself together in large part by embracing its
20 historic architecture not tearing it down, today one of
21 the centerpieces of The Hotel Northampton, another brick
22 colonial revival hotel from the 1920s. It's currently
23 used as a luxury hotel, fine restaurant and event venue.
24 So New Britain preserved its historic hotel and so did

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1 Northampton, which makes you wonder why not Willimantic?

2 What pains me is that in following this
3 issue in the Chronical I have not heard one local leader,
4 not the Mayor, not the Town Manager, not the Economic
5 Development Commission, not the Council, not even the
6 editor of the Chronical, express one bit of interest in
7 seeing these buildings rehabilitated.

8 From the start all you heard was tear them
9 down and something wonderful will take their place, but
10 you won't find the preservation solution if you're not
11 looking for one. It may surprise you but I am not asking
12 the state to intervene. For one thing, the State of
13 Connecticut played a large role in creating this problem.

14 But more importantly, I think the state
15 should only intervene when there is broad community
16 support and in this case, the community seems divided at
17 best. I know that all the local leaders I just mentioned
18 are good people who have the town's best interest at
19 heart but I can't believe that creativity, ambition and
20 perseverance make historic preservation possible in other
21 places but not here.

22 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: One minute.

23 MR. CLOUETTE: What I would like to see
24 happen is for the town and the current property owner to

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1 just give it one more try to see what a historic
2 rehabilitation, at least of The Nathan Hale, would entail
3 and to consider new construction with retention of the
4 historic facades.

5 A couple of more months in a bona fide
6 good faith effort to make preservation work. Thank you
7 for listening to me, I just couldn't let this go without
8 speaking on it (applause).

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Thank you. Okay, we
10 are at 1:00. We have -- there are still 40 people left
11 as many of you are aware.

12 But given that the representative for the
13 developer has stated that they will move forward with an
14 application for demolition as well as demolition before
15 this meeting could be continued to our next regularly
16 scheduled meeting which is the first week in April, we've
17 had one Councilmember suggest to bring it to a vote -- to
18 call a vote now.

19 Do all of you feel ready to take a vote at
20 this point knowing that there is still some information
21 that we haven't heard? Margaret.

22 MS. FABER: I think I feel comfortable --
23 I would love to hear some more from the opposition since
24 we haven't -- we've only heard one person.

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1 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: And we will lose our
2 quorum if we --

3 MS. FABER: I see.

4 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: - so that's why we're
5 doing this now. Brian.

6 DR. JONES: And just for a point of
7 clarification, this is to decide whether we feel there's
8 a case to bring to the Attorney General's office.

9 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: So the motion on the
10 table is to request the assistance of the Office of the
11 Attorney General to prevent unreasonable destruction.

12 DR. WOODWARD: Madame Chair --

13 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: Walter.

14 DR. WOODWARD: -- I don't know how we can
15 make an honest evaluation without hearing from both sides
16 of this argument. And just by virtue of the way people
17 have signed up, we have heard predominately all one
18 position.

19 And because of the -- I find many of the
20 arguments that I've heard today persuasive, but I'm not
21 -- I feel like my hand is being forced to go against what
22 I've heard because of the unwillingness to hear both
23 sides of an argument.

24 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: I understand, I think

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1 that that's the sentiment that I'm seeing around the
2 table. Brian.

3 DR. JONES: Is there a possibility of
4 getting the written testimonies in and taking another
5 week or so to be provided with those and voting somehow
6 outside this session?

7 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: No, you can't vote
8 outside of the session.

9 DR. JONES: Okay.

10 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: The owner was not
11 willing to grant us additional time. Margaret.

12 MS. FABER: So my question is, is there
13 any legal means that we can employ to get a temporary
14 stay while we're considering the situation without a
15 demolition delay?

16 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: If we are referring
17 the matter that's for the Office of the Attorney General
18 --

19 MS. FABER: For the delay, okay.

20 CHAIRPERSON NELSON: -- yup.

21 Alright, the motion before the Council,
22 the Historic Preservation Council votes to request the
23 assistance of the Office of the Attorney General to
24 prevent the unreasonable destruction of the historic

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1 properties at 819 and 833 Main Street, Willimantic,
2 Connecticut pursuant to the provisions of Section 22a-19a
3 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

4 All those in favor? I need to have clear
5 hands. One, two, three, four, five -- this is for
6 referring, one, two, three, four. All those opposed --
7 two, so the motion carries. (Applause)

8 The meeting is adjourned.

9 (Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at
10 1:03 p.m.)

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