**GREENWICH PRESERVATION NETWORK**

c/o Greenwich Historical Society

39 Strickland Road

Cos Cob, CT 06807

October 1, 2015

Planning and Zoning Commission

Town Hall

101 Field Point Road

Greenwich Ct. 06830

RE: 599 West Putnam Avenue Application

Dear Commission members:

The Greenwich Preservation Network was founded under the auspices of the Greenwich Historical Society, and the Network’s mission is to educate and provide information to Greenwich residents and to Town officials regarding the value and need to preserve significant architectural and historic structures and streetscapes. The Preservation Network is comprised of representatives of the leading historical and preservation organizations in Greenwich, and of individuals associated with these organizations or otherwise interested in historic preservation in our town.  Among others, the organizations represented by our Network include the Greenwich Historical Society, the Greenwich Preservation Trust, the Greenwich Point Conservancy, the Greenwich Tree Conservancy, the Historic District Commission and the Architectural Review Committee.

The Preservation Network recently has partnered with the Greenwich 375 Committee in erecting the first Historic District sign in front of the Havemeyer building on Greenwich Avenue. The Greenwich Municipal Center Historic District was created in 1987, is listed on the National Register and incorporates the Old Town Hall, the present Town Hall, the Common, the Havemeyer Board of Education building, the Old Post Office, the Central Firehouse, and the Town Hall Annex building on Mason Street and Havemeyer Place. The Town departments were very cooperative in installing the sign in time for the parade.

At a meeting on Monday September 28, the Preservation Network reviewed and discussed the application of 599 West Putnam Avenue, focusing on the proposed removal of the historic walls and gatehouse as part of that application. The consensus of the group was to provide this letter to the Planning and Zoning Commission to reflect strong opposition to the demolition and removal of these historic structures.

The Preservation Network notes that these walls and the gatehouse are important features of the historic streetscape on this section of the Post Road, and have significant historical value to the town and its residents. One reason this section of the Post Road is historically important is that it is within one-half mile of the New York border, and for hundreds of years this immediate area has been considered the traditional “gateway” to Connecticut and New England.  This section of the Post Road in western Greenwich has particular historic importance, in that it contains the historic Thomas Lyon House just a few properties away, which is one of the oldest fully intact colonial-era historic houses in Greenwich, and just a few doors in the other direction is the historic structure (still existing) that served as the famous “Toll House” during colonial times and thereafter, which was used for the collection of tolls from travelers entering New England. The walls and gatehouse subject to this application are an important part of this historic streetscape, and have long been recognized in town for their historical value, including by the Greenwich Planning and Zoning Commission a number of years back with a decision that as a result of the historical importance of these same features (walls and gatehouse) the square footage of the gatehouse would be excluded from the allowable “FAR” for this property.

The further consensus of the Preservation Network is that these structures (walls and gatehouse) present a more quiet and green ambiance with the large green trees behind the wall (which probably will need to be removed also in the current plan) reflective of an earlier time, and that they also provide a “break” from the urban/commercial feeling of this portion of the Post Road that is at odds with its historic past.

*Importantly, the Preservation Network further notes that both the Historic District Commission and the Architectural Review Committee have opposed the removal of all these structures, and have suggested that alternative designs be considered.*

The Preservation Network respectfully suggests that the applicant explore other creative and thoughtful alternative designs for these structures that would incorporate sections of the wall (particularly the openings and gate) and the gatehouse, and adapt and reuse them in their renovation plans for the property.  We also request that the large trees behind the wall be preserved. We strongly believe that these measures are highly achievable, and doing so would not in any way negatively impact the ability of the applicant and its clients fully to enjoy a top-quality facility.  Furthermore, we note that a creative adaptation and reuse of these important historical and natural features would actually enhance the value of this property, as has been shown with dramatic effect at other properties associated with the applicant.

In that regard, we note that Catterton Partners, the firm that occupies and uses this building, has developed as one of its significant businesses the company known as Restoration Hardware and recently rebranded as RH.  One of the big achievements of this very successful company has been its use of creative design to drive its evolution to a high-end lifestyle brand.  A key aspect of RH’s design and business strategy has been the creative reuse of historic buildings and features in a modern way that blends a respect for history and preservation with modern design.  In the words of RH’s chairman, speaking about its strategic use of historic preservation and adaptive reuse,  “Our design point of view comes from an architectural perspective—it’s all about balance, symmetry, and proportion.”  Regarding RH’s ability successfully to adapt reuse historic elements, the Chairman stated, “When we have the opportunity to harmonize with [the historic] architecture, there’s no better way to present our brand.”

Among RH’s historic properties are the famous circa 1863 former Museum of Natural History in Boston, and most recently the beautifully restored and preserved Old Post Office Building on Greenwich Avenue.  The work by Catterton Partners and RH to preserve the Old Post Office in Greenwich was exceptional and we are most grateful for their efforts to keep and maintain this significant historic building.  Their work and interest in preservation speaks to their concern and ability to keep and maintain historic structures. We respectively request that Catterton Partners recognize that the same opportunity exists for its headquarters building as does for RH’s retail establishments, and that it revisit the great possibilities in adapting and reusing the historic features of this site, including the wall and gatehouse.  The company has shown that it has an ability and talent for historic preservation and adaptive reuse, and it would be a deeply appreciated service to our community if it would make the same effort in the present case to preserve the important historic features of this site and the streetscape.  Rather than lose this valued piece of our irreplaceable historic streetscape, we believe that the Commission should require that the applicant make this effort.

To conclude, the Preservation Network believes that it is in the interest of the applicant and the town to undertake a redesign to incorporate important aspects of the walls, gatehouse and trees, and that this is recommended by the Commission to the applicant.

Thank you for your consideration and we hope that the applicant will see these recommendations as positive input for alternative designs to preserve this historically important section of the Post Road in the western part of Town.

Sincerely

Diane W. Fox,

 Chairman

Greenwich Preservation Network

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