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E. Patricia Llodra
First Selectman

TOWN OF NEWTOWN
OFFICE OF THE FIRST SELECTMAN

March 2, 2011

To: State Senator John McKinney
State Representative DebraLee Hovey
State Representative Christopher Lyddy
Other Interested Parties

From: Newtown First Selectman Patricia Llodra

Re: Request to raise CT DOT priority for traffic and
safety improvements on Route 6 in Newtown

Please find attached a recently completed report on the needs of Route 6. You will see that Newtown has a compelling case; a regionally significant safety problem, economic development benefit, and a record of many years of effort towards a solution.

Simply, the Town feels that Newtown's turn for CT DOT attention has come.

The residents and businesses of Newtown would be most appreciative if you could use the attached facts to make our case in Hartford.

**DOCUMENTATION OF NEED FOR
TRAFFIC SAFETY
IMPROVEMENTS
ON ROUTE 6 IN NEWTOWN, CT**

MARCH 2011



Newtown's Route 6 traffic problem area just west of I-84 Exit 10

SECTION 1 SUMMARY OF MERITS

THE PROBLEM:

CT DOT Project 0096-0192 calls for Edmond Road to be realigned to meet Commerce Road on Route 6 (Church Hill Road) in Newtown, CT in conjunction with adjacent Route 6 safety improvements. Due to statewide budget cuts in 2009, federal funding for design and construction phases of this project were slowed.

The Town of Newtown demonstrates below why federal funding should be accelerated at the earliest possible date.

HIGH ACCIDENT RATES SUPPORT PRIORITY:

In 2005 Route 6 in Newtown from I-84 Exit 10 westerly to Commerce Road had the worst highway safety record of any state roadway in the entire ten town Greater Danbury Area.

A regionally high rate was in place before 2005 and has continued until the present, documentation attached. The motoring public is entitled to better protection here.

EARMARK DESIGNATION SUPPORTS PRIORITY:

Due to the regional importance of this traffic safety improvement, in 2005 Congresswoman Nancy Johnson obtained two Congressional Earmarks totaling \$3.6 million to fund project construction.

These funds are a significant component of the anticipated \$6 million to \$8 million cost. CT DOT has recently confirmed to Newtown that these funds remain available.

HIGHWAY FUNCTION SUPPORTS PRIORITY:

All roads in the nation are classified in a functional hierarchy. Non-local interest climbs while moving up the scale from minor collectors, major collectors, the next larger category of minor arterials and then major arterials, etc. It is appropriate to evaluate the proposed Route 6 safety improvement from this perspective.

Capping the federal road hierarchy is the highest and most important network; the "National Highway System" (NHS). This Route 6 project is on the NHS.

TRAFFIC TYPE SUPPORTS PRIORITY:

Many travelers on nearby I-84 who use motorist's services on this portion of Route 6 are from outside of the area and thus unfamiliar with its traffic patterns. This traffic type adds to the urgency of upgrading safety features here.

EDMOND ROAD NOW PUBLIC:

CT DOT informed Newtown in March of 2005 that for this project to proceed, it was necessary for a portion of privately owned Edmond Road in the vicinity of Route 6 to first become a public road. This significant municipal action was completed in January of 2006.

POSITIVE ECONOMIC IMPACTS:

This project will have significant positive economic development effects, as documented in the attached letters.

PROJECT RELATES TO CT DOT PRIORITIES:

CT DOT funding priorities call for the retrofit of existing traffic systems prior to the development of new ones. And highway safety funding is a continuing top priority. This Route 6 safety project meets these statewide objectives.

SECTION 2 HISTORY OF TRAFFIC ISSUES

OVERVIEW

Route 6 in Newtown, known locally as Church Hill Road, from its intersection with Commerce Road easterly to I-84 Exit 10, has for many years been highly problematic in terms of traffic safety.

Accordingly, preliminary plans for a safety improvement at this location have been prepared by the Connecticut DOT. CT DOT Project 0096-0192 calls for Edmond Road to be relocated to intersect Route 6 directly across from Commerce Road, this revision in conjunction with median installation and safety improvements on Route 6.

The background below provides a history of traffic safety problems at this location and presents evidence documenting the merits of funding priority for this project.

OPENING OF I-84 IN 1961

The modern history of this roadway dates from 1961 when I-84 opened across Newtown. The problem area under analysis, from the intersection of Route 6 and Commerce Road easterly to the intersection of Route 6 and I-84 Exit 10, immediately took on major new traffic functions.

The primary access between the center of Newtown and the new I-84 Expressway was via this roadway segment. Business parks were soon built on either side of the project area to maximize access to I-84. And commercial businesses to serve expressway travelers were sited adjacent.

1970S DEVELOPMENT

For historical background note that thru the seventies, signage on I-84 indicated that Newtown's Route 6 via Exit 10 qualified for interstate designation as a "Business Loop", encouraging easy access to Route 6 services from I-84.

Business park development continued both north and south of the project area. Edmond Road, a private road, served the north side. And Commerce Road, a public road, the south.

However, as traffic turning on to Route 6 continually increased from these unaligned side roads, a key traffic circulation design flaw began to exert a negative safety impact.

Turning movements were increasingly accident prone, as Edmond Road and Commerce Road were not opposite each other for efficient management of turns. Instead, they formed an inefficient and cumbersome "offset" intersection.

A key purpose of the current improvement project is to correct this historic alignment error.

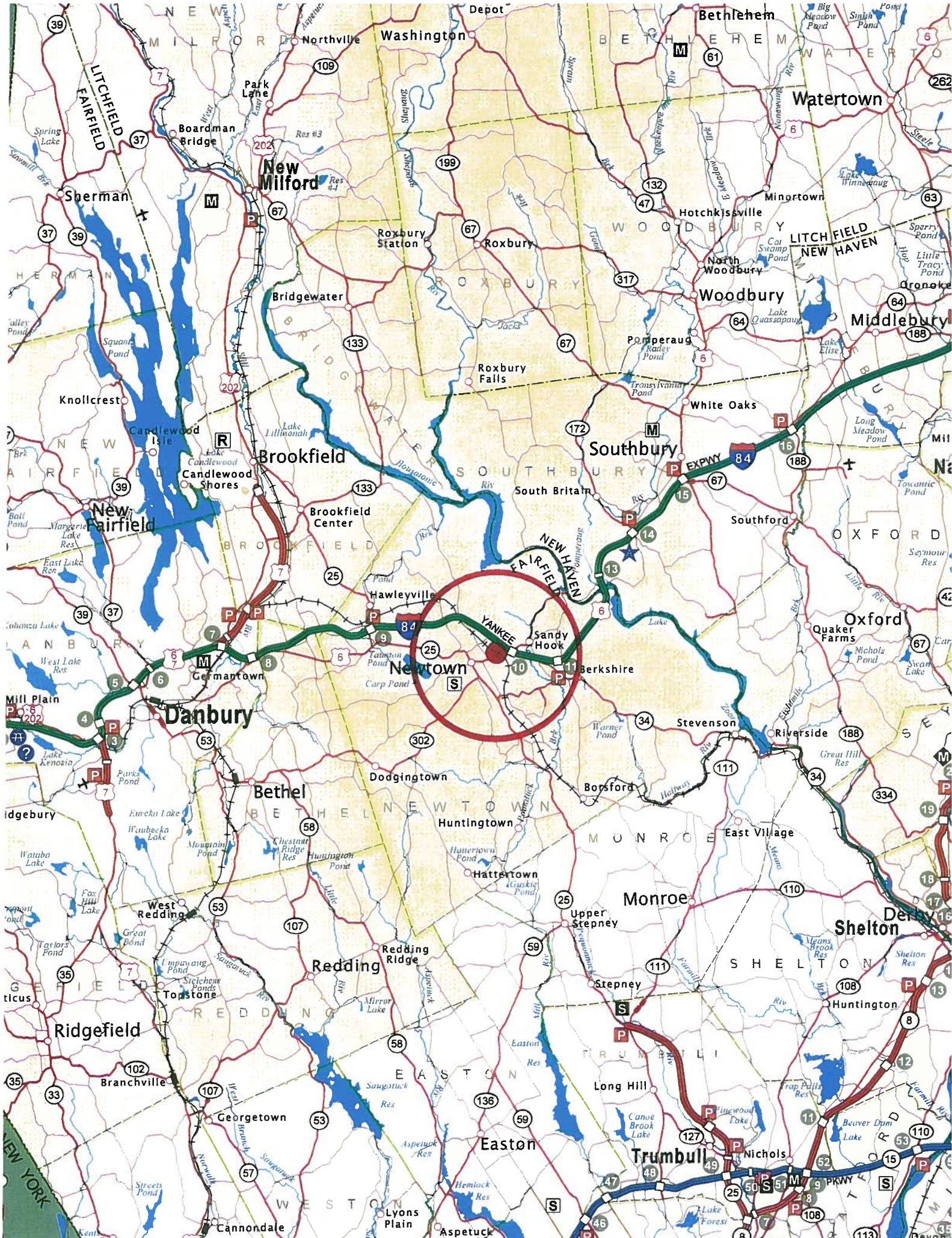
1981 TOWN PLAN POLICY

By the early eighties Town officials were well aware of the growing Route 6 traffic problem in their midst. The 1981 Newtown Plan of Development stated "Negotiations should be initiated with the State of Connecticut for a complete redesign of Church Hill Road from Main Street to I-84."

Planning for a limited safety improvement of this part of Route 6 was indeed soon initiated by CT DOT.

EARLY 1980S ACCIDENT RATES

CT DOT accident rate data from this period is available. This valuable information is contained in annual CT DOT Traffic Accident Surveillance Reports, or TASRs.



In those reports, each state roadway in each municipality is evaluated for indications of higher than statistically expected accident rates. CT DOT selects high TASR ratings as indicators of priority for remedial action.

CT DOT's TASR traffic hazard rating procedure first determines an actual accident rate for a location. A "critical rate" (some accident experience is inevitable) is then computed and compared to the actual rate.

If the resulting ratio of actual to critical (or expected) rates is 1.00 or above (written as 100% or above herein), and as a further screening process the location has had a minimum of 15 accidents in the three year period evaluated, then the location may be placed on the priority subsection of the TASR known as the SLOSSS for further investigation.

Jumping back historically to old TASR lists, the Route 6 project area from Commerce Drive east to I-84 for the 1980-82 period qualified for special evaluation with a rate of 360% SLOSSS. Then for 1982-84 the rate here was 445% SLOSSS.

This data documents that today's problem had an early start.

MID 1980S SAFETY PROJECT

In 1984 CT DOT undertook a minor redesign and resurfacing project for this segment of Route 6. This was a safety improvement qualifying under the federal "High Hazard Elimination Program."

Resultant cross-sectional widening varied from 2 to 8 feet so that shoulders and turn lanes could be improved. This mid-eighties project resulted in today's turning lane configuration from Commerce Road eastbound to I-84 Exit 10.

However, while funding for this redesign was safety oriented, accident rates from Commerce Road to Exit 10 remained extremely high. The 1987-89 TASR on Route 6 here was a stunning 720%, the highest rate on all state roads in the ten town Greater Danbury Region.

1988 TOWN POLICY UPDATE

Corridor traffic improvement policies for this high volume Route 6 segment were articulated in the Town's 1988 Center Area Traffic Plan. Route 6 remained a point of dissatisfaction, the 1988 traffic study recommending widening of Route 6 from 2 to a consistent 4 lanes the entire length from Queen Street easterly to I-84.

1993 TOWN PLAN UPDATE

The 1993 Newtown Plan of Development stated that "In the future, under current conditions, the intersection of Commerce Road and Route 6 is expected to operate at unacceptable conditions." The 1993 Plan then designated Church Hill Road (Route 6) as an area of "special traffic concern."

1993 REGIONAL TRAFFIC STUDY

The Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials (HVCEO) 1993 Route 6 Traffic Corridor Study noted the high accident rate here is attributed to "the volume of traffic and the number of driveways serving the numerous developments in this area..."

The collision types indicate vehicles following too closely as vehicles slow down to exit the travelway into the adjacent developments, and conflicting vehicle movements as vehicles exit the development and enter the travelway."

ACCIDENT RATES THRU 1990S

For 1989-91 the CT DOT TASR was a stunning 612% with SLOSSS priority designation, also the highest in the Planning Region. Further, this segment was then the 8th worst location in the entire state.

For the 1992-1994 period the TASR was 454% SLOSSS, which was also the highest in the Region for that time period.

The 1995-97 TASR rate for this busy commercial segment was a massive 519% with a SLOSSS designation, again the worst and most severe of 94 SLOSSS designated sites in the Housatonic Valley Planning Region.

TASR accident data detail has not been made public in recent years. However it is known that the 2005-2007 TASR rate for this segment is 16th from top of 1785 rates calculated for the ten town region.

2000 TRAFFIC STUDY

In 2000 a regional traffic study documented that a significant concentration of the accidents along this section of Route 6 were located from Edmond Road easterly to the I-84 eastbound Exit 10 on and off ramps.

Twenty-nine of the fifty-three accidents occurred within this 250 foot section which features commercial driveways serving a gas station and diner, both on the south side of Route 6.

TOWN REQUEST OF 2000

On 4/12/2000 the Town of Newtown formally requested CT DOT to undertake an improvement study to address the chronic Route 6 traffic safety problem.

IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT DEVELOPS IN 2002

Correspondence from CT DOT dated 2/1/2002 reviewed the problematic traffic situation. As requested, the Department prepared a conceptual traffic improvement plan that relocated Edmond Road westerly such that it would create an interchange with Route 6 directly across from Commerce Road – eliminating the historic core of the safety problem described earlier.

The plan would "provide a longer westbound left turn lane into Commerce Road and an additional eastbound through lane on Route 6. The relocation of Edmond Road should help to reduce angle type collisions and improve the accessibility for the high percentage of trucks that enter and exit Edmond Road."

Solutions were coming into clearer focus.

2002 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Early in 2002 CT DOT conducted two stakeholder involvement meetings in Newtown. Representatives of businesses adjacent to or near the project were the primary attendees. Seventeen persons attended the first meeting and twelve the second.

This outreach was preliminary, not a substitute for the formal public informational meeting still required for this project as of early 2011. But as noted below, planning for this project has been deactivated by CT DOT as state priority for use of federal roadway improvement funds was not evident.

EARMARK FUNDS OBTAINED IN 2005

This was a landmark year for Route 6 safety, as Congresswoman Nancy Johnson obtained two Congressional Earmarks to fund implementation.

In obtaining Nancy Johnson's support, the municipal project fact sheet provided to her stated "Route 6 in Newtown from I-84 Exit 10 to Commerce Road has the worst highway safety record of any state roadway in the entire ten town Greater Danbury Area."

The fact sheet also stated that "While all area communities compete for roadway improvement funds, the severity of Newtown's Route 6 problem should give it special consideration."

The first is Federal Earmark Serial Number 1249: \$1.6 million for relocation of Edmond Road in Newtown and construction of additional turning lanes at Route 6 and Commerce and Edmond Roads.

The second is Federal Earmark Serial Number 3866: \$2.0 million for construction and expansion of roads to relieve congestion on Route 6 between Commerce Road and I-84 in Newtown.

CT DOT reactivated preliminary planning for this project after the federal earmarks were confirmed.

EDMOND ROAD BECOMES A PUBLIC WAY IN 2006

CT DOT informed Newtown by a letter dated 3/31/2005 that for this project to proceed it would be necessary for a portion of private Edmond Road in the vicinity of Route 6 to first become a public road.

A regional staff memo dated 4/4/2005 to Town officials passed along the CT DOT view that "they need to see progress with the Town taking over ownership of Edmond Road, a litmus test and reality check of sorts." This significant municipal action was then completed in January of 2006.

The Town then formally certified to CT DOT "that it had received the recorded statutory warranty deed for ownership of that portion of Edmond Road in the DOT project area that was formerly private."

PLANNING HALTED IN 2009

As of early 2009 the scope of the improvement project was being refined within the Project Development Unit of CT DOT. The last meeting of the Development Unit with Newtown officials was held in Newtown on 2/24/2009. Two types of median options were under review.

It was agreed then that CT DOT staff would proceed with a more detailed design of the improvement project and would return to the Town, possibly within six months, to conduct a public informational meeting on the project.

Note that the Town has not yet supported the details of this project as the CT DOT planning to produce them has been delayed.

NEWTOWN PERSPECTIVE IN 2011

Newtown requests reactivation of the CT DOT planning process, examining the relocation of Edmond Road coupled with Route 6 safety improvements.

But CT DOT planning will not be reactivated until there is a high level decision to fund the results of such CT DOT planning. The merits of this project warrant such a decision.

While all area communities compete for roadway improvement funds, the severity of Newtown's Route 6 problem should give it special consideration.

**SECTION 3
LETTERS OF SUPPORT**

LETTERS ATTACHED

3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT 06470
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rob.sibley@newtown-ct.gov



*Robert Sibley
Deputy Director
Planning and Land Use*

TOWN OF NEWTOWN

January 21, 2011

Town of Newtown
Ms. E. Patricia Llodra, First Selectman
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, Ct 06470

RE: Traffic Improvements on Rte 6 – Environmental Benefits

Dear Ms. Llodra,

I have reviewed the plans associated with traffic safety improvements on route 6 in Newtown, CT. I have the following comments on the environmental impacts and possible benefits from the proposed work.

The current proposed design is to re-align Edmond Road with Commerce Drive and remove the existing Edmond Road. The environmental impacts of this type activity will be realized through non-point source pollutants, such as stormwater quantity and quality. It will also be realized through the disturbance and restoration of wetlands and watercourses.

The installation of new stormwater systems on the proposed road will result in stormwater quality improvements. Edmond Road currently has no stormwater system, the existing road simply ponds stormwater into inadequate drainage areas thus concentrating the pollutants it discharges. The proposed road would include detention systems and catch basins designed to improve water quality. In addition, the new system would also address the amount of storm water released during storm events, thus reducing flooding potential.

The installation of the new road will require the filling of wetlands, and it would create wetlands along the route of the existing road when it is removed. This will result in a net zero loss or even increase the amount of wetlands in these areas. The re-alignment of Edmond Road will also move the new road farther from Tom Brook. Currently the existing road runs to within 80 feet of the watercourse. The proposed location of the new road will place it over 300 feet from Tom Brook. This new riparian buffer is critical to any improvement to the stream.

It is my opinion that the proposed design for the traffic safety improvements on Route 6 in Newtown will result in a positive net environmental impact. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Robert Sibley
Deputy Director of Planning and Land Use

Department of
Police Services
Three Main Street
Newtown, CT 06470



Michael K. Kehoe
Chief of Police
Tel. (203) 426-5841
Fax (203) 270-4247

TOWN OF NEWTOWN

January 24, 2011

Mr. Jeffery A. Parker
Commissioner, CONNDOT
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, Conn. 06131-7546

Re: CT DOT Project 0096-0192

Dear Commissioner Parker:

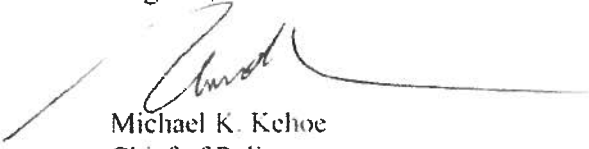
The Newtown Police Commission acting as the local traffic authority within the Town of Newtown has had long standing traffic safety concerns about the above named project. The roadway in question and its intersections with Edmond Road and I-84 have been the scene of numerous accidents over many years.

The intersections mentioned are extremely busy and U. S. Route 6 (Church Hill Road) services over 16,000 cars per day. The accident rate for the area is very high as compared to other intersections within our region. The average accident rate for reported accidents on this stretch of roadway is 9.2 per million vehicles: far exceeding the statewide average of 3.7 for similar roadways.

After closer examination of both reported and non-reported accidents, the average goes up to 36.2 accidents per million vehicles which is nearly 10 times the state average. It is important for the safety of the Connecticut motoring public that this roadway project be fully funded.

It is the Police Commission's belief that this project merits urgency funding and top priority status for the facts and circumstances mentioned. I thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Regards,



Michael K. Kehoe
Chief of Police

Cc: Newtown Police Commission
Files

michael.kehoe@newtown-ct.gov

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ELIZABETH STOCKER, AICP
DIRECTOR

TOWN OF NEWTOWN

OFFICE OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

March 1, 2011

Mrs. E. Patricia Llodra
First Selectman, Town of Newtown
3 Primrose Street
Newtown, CT 06470

Re: Safety Improvements to Edmond Road and Church Hill Road (Rt. 6) at I-84 Exit 10

Dear First Selectman Llodra;

This letter is in support of the planned improvements to Church Hill Road (Rt. 6) in the vicinity of Interchange 10 of I-84 and the realignment of Edmond Road with Commerce Road.

In addition to the interchange traffic and the major cross town function that Church Hill Road performs serving as the gateway to the Borough of Newtown and Sandy Hook Center, this area of Newtown has a very high concentration of business enterprises. The businesses vary in type and size and include gas stations, restaurants, a post office, car repair shop, day care center, fitness club, numerous manufacturing facilities and service businesses with corporate fleets. Not only is this area a large employment center, it also functions as a major hub for commerce.

I am continually in touch with business owners and managers of business enterprises that operate in Newtown. Often we discuss the various issues that are of concern to their business operations and quite often the traffic safety issues of Church Hill Road become a subject of these discussions.

In terms of importance, I think you will agree that this area of Newtown operates as an economic hub due to the shear concentration of economic activity that occurs in a relatively small geographic area. The concentration of jobs, business enterprises and commerce that takes place here is not matched by any other location in Newtown.

As such, traffic safety improvements in this area of Newtown will have a positive economic impact on our community, the region and the State of Connecticut in terms of people's welfare, on the gross domestic product (GDP) of our state, as well as enhancing productivity. The improvements will help preserve existing jobs and business enterprises, will help attract new business enterprises and will help maintain and enhance an existing and important economic hub within the Town of Newtown.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Stocker, AICP
Director of Economic and Community Development