

To the members of Planning & Zoning Commission:

Maureen Giusti has informed me that Planning & Zoning will be discussing possible demolition of 861 Farmington Avenue at your meeting April 16th. The historic community in Berlin has promoted the preservation of this building ever since we were asked to participate in the initial downtown planning workshop meetings. Results of those workshops overwhelmingly showed that keeping a small town historic look to our downtown was imperative. No one wanted to see a design that did not include preservation of buildings like 861 that have local historic merit. As we've illustrated before, the design of that brick building specifically mirrors and compliments the original Kensington Fire Station. Both were built with Berlin Brick - an iconic building material produced here when Berlin was the center of the brick industry.

While this building is not on the state or national registers of historic properties, we would say within our town history this building has historical significance as the original Star Restaurant, an iconic political and community meeting place from the days when politicians of both parties regularly broke bread together. Also, to have two similar brick buildings in close proximity lends a sense of place to the newer development that will rise behind these buildings. It is against all enlightened downtown planning to demolish buildings with historic character. We've all learned a lot since the urban renewal days that destroyed New Britain and other downtowns.

When the town first talked about buying 861, we were assured numerous times there was no plan to tear down the building. It was to be sold to Newport who would be under legal obligation to restore and rent it. Now that the remediation of the Kensington Village site has become a bit more complicated, the town wants to demolish the building. We ask that you respect the input of all of us who spent hours of our time helping to shape what a revitalized downtown should look like. We ask that you follow the POCD mandate to preserve our heritage, and the CLG (Certified Legal Government) standards the town agreed to for promoting historic preservation.

This building should be restored and reused. It has local historical/architectural significance and will contribute to preserving a sense of place on Farmington Avenue.

Thank you for listening.

Lorraine Stub
Vice Chair, Historic District Commission Secretary, Berlin Historical Society