



Township of South Orange Village

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
101 SOUTH ORANGE AVENUE
SOUTH ORANGE, NJ 07079

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September 2, 2014

Dear Village President and Trustees,

The Historic Preservation Commission would like to emphasize the importance of preserving South Orange Village Hall as a building owned and run by South Orange Village. We realize there are challenges in the renovation of the building, but the long-term value of saving this historic building goes way beyond the cost of its renovation.

Village Hall is the heart of the Village. It is our iconic architectural structure, and its function as the municipal center of the Village is of utmost importance. It reminds us every day about the history of this town, of families settling here and raising their families for many generations. There is so much to be said about having the legacy of this architectural gem. It is showcased on many of our documents, is used as emblems and in logos, and has been documented in books about the history of our town and the area. That classic building on that beautifully situated corner of Scotland Road and South Orange Avenue would have a very different feel if Village Hall became a hotel or a restaurant.

There are 565 towns in New Jersey, many of them very nice. And yet we all chose to live in South Orange, drawn by the beauty and charm of a community where the downtown was alive and well and vibrant, where the Village maintained its cultural and historic character, and where many buildings were repurposed for the 21st century.

South Orange is a beautiful, unique and wonderful place to live, full of charm, history and a sense of place. People move here from many areas because they value the quaintness and warmth of this small town nestled up against South Mountain.

Think about the kind of place that future generations will visit and come to know. Yes, we could save money at this moment in time, but we need to take the long view. We want future generations to come into our downtown and admire these historic buildings, of which Village Hall is the centerpiece. We should plan to give tours of Village Hall, to talk about its origins as a firehouse, to show them where horses and fire wagons were kept.

This is the richness of historic properties, they connect us to our past and enrich us all. And this does not even begin to address the workmanship that is evident in the building, in some areas displaying craftsmanship which is lost to us today.

The research is clear about the importance of historic preservation. Let us share a few excerpts from published material on this topic with you:

"Economically, historic preservation revitalizes downtown communities. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has demonstrated that historic preservation "provides affordable housing; a viable alternative to urban sprawl and generates jobs through support of small businesses."

A 2009 Rutgers University study on the economic revitalization impact of historic structures on communities found that, "In 2008 alone, historic rehabilitation created 58,000 new jobs. Additionally, three quarters of the economic benefits generated by rehabilitation remains in the local communities and states where the projects are located. This reflects the fact that labor and materials for historic rehabilitations tend to be hired or purchased locally."

Coupled with these tangible economic benefits, historic preservation and rehabilitation revitalizes a sense of place. This sense of place, once the hallmark of every community, has been lost in the exodus to suburban areas and the anonymity they offer. Preservation-based downtown development and revitalization reconnect us with the sense of community through time worn and nostalgic structures."

– Casper, Wyoming Star Tribune, http://trib.com/opinion/columns/why-historic-preservation-matters/article_5ca9fb38-1697-56f6-a82e-044819bdcca5.html

"The town is one of only a few in New Jersey to retain gas light street illumination (others include Riverton, Palmyra, Glen Ridge and some parts of Orange). The gaslight -- together with the distinctive Village Hall -- has long been the symbol of South Orange."

– Wikipedia entry about South Orange, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Orange,_New_Jersey

And here is what the **South Orange Village Vision Plan** draft document said:

"Notable downtown buildings from the earlier historic periods are the Village Hall, Fire Station, and Train Station. While the Fire Station and Village Hall buildings South Orange Vision Plan may not be assumed as models for improvements in downtown buildings and properties, the high quality design and construction of these buildings could be used as the measuring standard for new construction. In addition, the recent improvements for commercial spaces at the Train Station could also be used as a measuring standard."

– Appendix A of the 2009 Cecil Report "South Orange Vision Plan and Design guidelines," page 71-72.

"The South Orange Village Hall was built to accommodate village and the new fire and police departments. Architects Rossiter and Wright of New York City designed this unique building, which became a recognized landmark of South Orange. The January 20, 1894 issue of The American Architect and Building News featured a two-page article of a rendering of the Scotland Road façade and plans for both floors. The half-timber construction suggests the style of work completed in England and Germany during the Elizabethan period. The American Architect and Building News described the building: "The foundation will be stone and the walls of the first story will be of brick with pressed-brick corners... The balance of the exterior will be in half-timber work with Portland cement on wire-lath between the panels." The article commented that the 50-foot tower was "surmounted by a belfry, beneath which the fire hose may be hung to dry." The article concludes, "The entire building will be heated by steam and lit by gas."

– from *Images of America, South Orange*, by Naoma Welk

The following caption was published in the book *Images of America, South Orange*, and includes the following local legend:

"It has been said that the concept of the first Nancy Drew mystery, The Secret of the Old Clock (1930) was inspired by the South Orange Village Hall clock. Edward Stratemeyer, who lived in neighboring Maplewood, founded the Stratemeyer Syndicate in the early 1900s and produced more than 1,200 books,

including Tom Swift, The Bobbsey Twins, Nancy Drew, and The Hardy Boys. With the success of the first series, The Hardy Boys, Stratemeyer sent plot outlines of a new girls' mystery series in 1929 to a ghostwriter who completed the books. In 1930, Simon & Schuster published the first Nancy Drew mystery. It was written under the pen name of Carolyn Keene. The same year that The Secret of the Old Clock was published, Edward Stratemeyer died. (Courtesy South Orange Public Library)

– from *Images of America, South Orange*, by Naoma Welk

The U.S. Congress crafted these reasons for saving and preserving historic buildings:

Purposes of the National Historic Preservation Act

Section 110(d) of the National Historic Preservation Act (the Act) calls on all Federal agencies, consistent with their mission and mandates, to carry out their activities in accordance with the purposes of the Act and to consider programs and projects that will further the purposes of the Act. The purposes of the Act are set forth in sections 1 and 2. These sections are directly germane to all Federal preservation programs:

Section 1 (b): The Congress finds and declares that –

- (1) the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage;*
- (2) the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people;*
- (3) historic properties significant to the Nation's heritage are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency;*
- (4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans.*

“Historic preservation is attracting attention from the economic development community for other reasons as well; the economic literature shows that historic preservation contributes significantly to local and regional economies through rehabilitation construction activity, housing production, heritage tourism and downtown revitalization.”

– Lahr, M. L., Listokin, D., et al., *Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Nebraska*. Center for Urban Policy Research. E.J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. New Brunswick, NJ. October 2007.

(Retrieved from: http://recon.rutgers.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2014/03/Nebraska_Hist_Pres_Econ.pdf)

Research specific to New Jersey from the **Rutgers Center for Urban Policy Research** states:

“...[These research models] ... reveal that the annual historic rehabilitation activity in New Jersey returns significantly more to the nation in terms of income and, hence, wealth than it costs to undertake. Nationwide, the \$123 million New Jersey investment creates about 4,600 new jobs, \$156 million in additional income, and over \$207 million in total wealth. A little over 50 percent of each of these measures accumulates in New Jersey itself.”

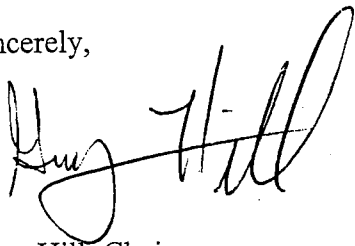
– Lahr, M. L., Listokin, D., et al., *Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in New Jersey*. (p. 37). Center for Urban Policy and Research. E.J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. New Brunswick, NJ. December, 1997.

(Retrieved from: http://www.state.nj.us/dca/njht/publ/ec_imp.pdf)

We believe that Village Hall is not beyond restoration. We have the architect's plans already and should move forward with the renovation as planned. While a preservation easement can save the facade, we do not want to put its preservation at risk. This building is not only the icon of South Orange, it also represents Village Government and Village history. Is it more fiscally responsible to sell this historic building when South Orange has already spent money on architectural plans, architect's fee, community charrettes to review the plans, asbestos abatement, and installing a geothermal heating/cooling system?

Let us be true to our own values and vision – what is a better symbol of our commitment to preserving the character of our town than keeping this building as our own? We urge you to reconsider the possibility of putting this building on the market to developers. The positive economic impact on South Orange associated with rehabilitating and maintaining Village Hall cannot be overlooked when considering its future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gary Hill". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Gary Hill, Chairman

On behalf of The South Orange Historic Preservation Commission