



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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### Determination of Effect on Historic Properties

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**Author:** C. Scott Speal **Date:** November 14, 2023

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**Project:** State No.: 153-125  
F.A.P. No.: PEDS(229)  
Project Title: Steele Brook Greenway  
Town: Watertown

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**Finding of Effect:** No Historic Properties Affected

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#### *Project Description:*

The Town of Watertown, with funding support from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and technical and logistical support from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), proposes extension of the Steele Brook Greenway within its jurisdictional purview. This undertaking will involve construction of a 12-foot-wide greenway segment/multi-use path with stone dust or paved surface from French Street in the northwest to the existing trail terminus at UNICO Field at the southeast for a distance of approximately 3,700 linear feet. This greenway segment will include a new prefabricated pedestrian bridge over Steele Brook to the southeast of French Street. The project also includes minor drainage improvements, fencing, landscaping, a new trailhead parking lot southeast of French Street, expansion of the southeastern end of the UNICO Field parking lot, and a crosswalk with Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacons at French Street.

Under the provisions of the Programmatic Agreement executed between CTDOT, FHWA, the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Officer (CT SHPO), and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regarding compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) for minor transportation projects<sup>1</sup>, the Office of Environmental Planning (OEP) intends to make a determination of effect on historic properties for the described undertaking.

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<sup>1</sup> *Programmatic Agreement among the Federal Highway Administration, the Connecticut  
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## ***Resources Potentially Affected:***

### ***Above Ground Architectural***

The NPGallery digital asset management database maintained by the National Park Service was consulted for the purpose of locating any historic properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in the project vicinity. No NRHP-listed resources were found to exist in the immediate project area. The nearest is the Watertown Center Historic District located nearly half a mile north of the northern project limits. The present undertaking will have no foreseeable effect on that resource.

A series of historic maps and aerial photographs obtained from the University of Connecticut Map and Geographical Information Center was examined to assess the potential for previously unidentified historic properties to be located within the project area of potential effect (APE). The 1930 Griswold-Spiess Map of reconstructed Native settlement in Connecticut circa 1625 depicts no concentrations of indigenous population in the area during the period of European Contact. The 1811 Warren Map of Connecticut likewise presents no development in the immediate project vicinity during the late Federal Period, though a couple of mills apparently had been established slightly downstream along Steele Brook by that time.

The 1854 Hopkins Map of Litchfield County depicts the precursor of French Street in place at the northern project limit by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century with Steele Brook more or less along its present course. There is no evidence of a railroad in place at that time, but a rural residence associated with ‘T. Dayton’ is depicted at the northernmost limits on the east side of Steele Brook along French Street in close proximity to the project APE. Fairchild Series aerial photos from 1934 (Figure 1) reveal that a railroad line was in place by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century running predominantly through cleared agricultural fields. The landscape immediately along the railbed appears to have been at a relatively level grade with a minimum of development—including in the area where the new parking lot is proposed. The ‘T. Dayton’ house appears to still stand in these photographs, albeit most likely outside the present project APE to the east side of the brook.

Recourse to spatial layers and records maintained by Tyler City Station—an online rail enthusiast website—reveals that the abandoned segment of railroad affected by the present undertaking was constructed ca. 1870 as part of the Waterbury & Watertown Railroad. According to the Watertown Historical Society rail operations began in 1870, became part of the Naugatuck Line in 1875, and were acquired by the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad in 1877. At its peak around 1914, the line ran up to 12 trains a day, mostly carrying

workers between Watertown and Waterbury. Passenger service ended in 1924, though freight operations continued under the auspices of Penn Central Railroad until 1974. Much of the associated rail infrastructure was reportedly removed later that year<sup>2</sup>.



Figure 1: Fairchild Series aerial photo from 1934, depicting Steele Brook and the railroad coursing diagonally from lower right to upper left.

### *Below Ground Archaeological*

Digital site records maintained by the Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA), as well as OEP's own internally developed cultural resource geodatabase, were consulted for the purpose of identifying any previously known archaeological sites within the APE. No previously documented archaeological resources were found to exist in the project vicinity. No formal archaeological surveys, however, appear to have ever been conducted in the immediate project area.

A predictive site model developed internally by OEP based upon U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service soil classifications was examined to assess the potential of the project area to contain as-yet-undocumented archaeological

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<sup>2</sup> Watertown History Museum website: [NewsletterWinter2017real.pages \(watertownhistorymuseum.org\)](https://www.watertownhistorymuseum.org), accessed August 2021.

resources. Most of the APE falls upon Pootatuck and Hinckley Fine Sandy Loams, Limerick and Lim Soils, and periodically wet fluvaquents along Steele Brook predicted to be high in archaeological potential. The soil classifications, however, evidently do not take into account disturbance from railroad construction during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, removal of the rail features during the 20<sup>th</sup>, nor more recent grading for the Unico ball fields toward the southern project limits. In light of the extensive disturbance across the project APE, OEP saw archaeological potential within the project APE as low. Later re-routing of the proposed trail course off of the former railbed and around the east side of the ballfields, however, placed the proposed route on soils of moderate predicted potential.

Recent roadside and aerial photographs were consulted to assess the likely present state of soil integrity within areas to be affected by ground disturbance as well as proximity to structures that may potentially be NRHP-eligible. This visual review indicated that the landform at the north end of the alignment where the new parking lot is proposed was graded and paved with gravel for use as some type of staging area or dump for vehicular equipment from the early 2000's through 2016. The former railroad bridge across Steele Brook here had been removed prior to 1991.

A field review of the project APE conducted by qualified OEP cultural resource staff on August 20<sup>th</sup> of 2021 essentially confirmed the above conclusions. The former railroad itself is not seen as NRHP-eligible given the prior removal of virtually all rail-associated features from the APE aside from the railbed itself. Re-routing of the southernmost aspect of the multi-use path around the east side of the UNICO ball fields, later in 2022 however, led OEP to request a formal Phase Ia field assessment survey of the entire project APE.

The requested Phase Ia assessment survey was conducted by Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) operating out of Westport, Connecticut, in August of 2023. After a complete walkover and background assessment, HPI concluded that “significant disturbance across the natural landform and the removal of all railroad-related features, the project site has a low Precontact and historic period archaeological sensitivity. Additionally, project plans indicate that there will be only limited areas where existing landforms will be slightly graded or cut down to create a more level greenway path. The deepest subsurface impacts will be at the new pedestrian bridge crossing Steele Brook, where foundations will extend 4-5 feet below grade for the abutments. According to soil borings in these areas, the depth of the planned impacts will not extend beneath the thick stratum of fill soil on either side of Steele Brook. Given these factors, HPI recommends that no further archaeological studies are warranted for the proposed project.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Phase Ia Archaeological Assessment, Steele Brook Greenway, Town of Watertown, Litchfield County, Connecticut, State Project Number 153-125.* Historical Perspectives, Inc. (2023), report on file at CTDOT OEP.

***Determination of Effect:***

Section 106 mandated consultation was initiated with Federally-recognized Native American Tribal authorities with ancestral ties to the State of Connecticut for this undertaking in September of 2021. Consultation was not closed with the Tribes, however, until July of 2022 due to the ACHP-recommended 'Covid Pause'. None of the consulted Tribes expressed any concerns with the undertaking by the time of closure.

Given the extent of previous ground disturbance documented in the course of a formal field assessment survey, and the lack of structures likely to be considered eligible for the NRHP found to exist within the project APE, OEP hereby determines that there will be *no historic properties affected* in association with the present undertaking. With this determination, FHWA, through OEP, has concluded its responsibility to consider the potential effects of the described project on cultural resources under Section 106 of the NHPA via the provisions of the Programmatic Agreement referenced above.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Speal', with a horizontal line underneath it.

C. Scott Speal  
National Register Specialist  
Office of Environmental Planning  
Connecticut Department of Transportation