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February 15, 2005

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Noel H. Merrihew III
Town of Elizabethtown
7563 Court Street
P.O. Box 265
Elizabethtown, NY 12932

Re: Otis Road Bridge, BIN #3301650

Dear Supervisor Merrihew,

It has come to my attention that the Town is contemplating replacing the Otis Road Bridge. While I understand that the Town has to be concerned about the safety and adequacy of its roads and bridges, because this is a National Register eligible bridge, this is an instance where the Town should make a special effort to preserve the bridge in its present location and to repair it so that it can meet the current needs of the road's traffic. I am writing to express our support for the retention and preservation of this bridge and to offer our help to do so.

As you may know, Adirondack Architectural Heritage (AARCH) is the private nonprofit, historic preservation organization for the Adirondack Park. AARCH has a membership of nearly 1100 members and is dedicated to protecting and preserving the irreplaceable architectural heritage, historic places, and communities of the Adirondack region. We have had a long interest in preservation of the region's few remaining historic bridges. In 1991, I wrote *Crossing the River: Historic Bridges of the Ausable River*, as a way of drawing public attention to this rare group of historic bridges. In 1999, I was responsible for placing sixteen Ausable River bridges on the National Register of Historic Places. This thematic nomination, the first of its type in New York State, recognized this exceeding rare collection of historic bridges in Clinton and Essex Counties. AARCH has also continues to draw attention to these spans through an annual tour we sponsor, "Historic Bridges of the Ausable River," in which we take participants by us to visit all of the river's historic spans.

We have been helpful in several historic bridge preservation efforts in the region and are willing to assist with the preservation of the Otis Road Bridge, as well. Along with the Essex County Planning Office, the Essex County Department of Public Works, and local covered bridge enthusiasts, we helped find a solution for the long impasse over the future of the Jay Covered Bridge. Now, as you know, this

bridge is being restored and will be put back in place once the new downstream crossing is constructed. We've had an even greater role in the preservation of the Bow Bridge in Hadley, a rare lenticular truss bridge owned by Saratoga County. In this case, we were instrumental in rallying support for the preservation of the bridge; found grant funds for an engineering study of the bridge; and wrote, on behalf of the county, the successful \$1.2 million grant application (Federal T-21 Transportation Enhancements Program) that is funding its rehabilitation.

The Otis Road Bridge, constructed in 1914, is certainly worthy of our best efforts to preserve it. It is a rare surviving example of an early 20th century Warren pony truss bridge that is remarkably intact and has retained many of its original features. This kind of simple iron bridge, once common across the American landscape, is now an increasingly rare sight. The region's historic bridges are an asset that residents can be proud of and are a thrill for visitors to see and discover. They add character to our communities and make our communities better places to live and visit.

The preservation of the Otis Road Bridge has several things going for it. First, the bridge serves a little used, secondary road and does not need to be able to carry significant loads. This will likely mean that, by doing regular maintenance and by inserting or replacing existing steel components of the bridge, as needed, it can continue to be used for many years to come and be kept in service at a reasonable cost. Second, the preservation of the Otis Road Bridge seems to have the support of the local residents that use it, as to them it is part of the history and charm of the historic Otis Mountain camps.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on this matter. We stand ready to help and support the Town in any way possible to ensure that this bridge is used and enjoyed by many generations to come.

Sincerely,

Steven Engelhart
Executive Director

Cc: Fred Buck, Essex County Department of Public Works