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January 13, 2015

Hon. Chris Baumann, Mayor, and  
Members of the Mendham Township Committee  
2 West Main Street  
P.O. Box 520  
Brookside, NJ 07926

Dear Mayor Baumann and honorable members of the Mendham Township Committee:

I have been an active community resident of Mendham Borough and Mendham Township for 40 years. During that time I have been impressed by the determination and ability of the Mendhams to protect our irreplaceable heritage of historic structures and preserve natural land. Which leads to my current disappointment with the decisions recently taken by the Mendham Township Committee regarding the fate of Pitney Farm.

In 2009, the Township Committee made the decision to purchase Pitney Farm for reuse to meet municipality needs. The Committee now appears to want to sell off portions of the property for fiscal reasons. The municipal costs for Pitney Farm to date have been within the budgeted amounts. The municipal needs – for an expanded library, community meeting space, or other identified need – did not go away and will have to be met at some point in the not too distant future. With funding available from both public and private sources, as demonstrated by existing projects in other New Jersey communities, why is the Township Committee seeking to get rid of centrally located land that it already owns so that – down the road – it can pay a great deal more to purchase higher priced real estate to meet those municipal needs that are not going to disappear? And why, when the Council committed itself to the protection of this pre-Revolutionary gem through its 2009 purchase of the 12 acre parcel, is it now allowing this irreplaceable historic treasure to deteriorate?

To date, two Pitney Farm study committees (the Pitney Farm Property Transition Committee in 2011 and the Pitney Farm Public Purpose Study Committee in 2014), as well as professional architectural, engineering, and planning experts assisting these committees, have made lengthy studies and well-thought out recommendations for the reuse of this irreplaceable property, with careful consideration to avoid the need to use additional municipal financial resources – all of which recommendations have seemingly been set aside by the Township Committee.

Numerous examples of successfully-funded community development projects – funded through non-municipal sources – exist throughout the state. The 2014 Pitney Farm Study Committee report sites several such successes of which two are: Greenwood Gardens in Essex County, a 28-room mansion built in 1906, which was restored and repurposed for \$5 million from the NJ Historic Trust and a mix of private and public fundraising. And Iviswold Castle in Bergen County, an 1887 estate, which is a magnificent example of adaptive reuse that was funded through NJ Historic Trust and other fundraising. The Pitney Farm Public Purpose Study Committee, firmly insisting on “Funds before Shovels,” has supported proper fiscal management of any Pitney Farm initiative, recommending that at least 75% of the funds needed to meet the final goal of the total capital campaign be in place prior to advancing any new construction or significant renovation. This record of successful fundraising from

non-municipal sources in other NJ municipalities, combined with the prudent fiscal policy set out by the Pitney Farm Study Committee are what is needed to deal with the identified community infrastructure needs in the Mendhams, not kicking these problems down the road to a time and place that will prove to be far more expensive than using property that is currently owned by the municipality and sources of outside funding that are currently available.

For almost 300 years, the Pitney Farm property and buildings have been at the center of life in the Mendhams. Down the years, its owners have fulfilled key leadership rolls in New Jersey and the nation. The Mendham Township Committee publicly committed to protecting this property when it voted to purchase it from Mrs. Pitney in 2009. They committed Mendham Township to being wise stewards of this irreplaceable historic home. Having commissioned and received the considered counsel of two study groups and of the pro bono consultants: Gensler Architects, Bohler Engineering and Michael Graces & Associates, who have laid out not only needed reuses for the property but ways to finance these reuses without recourse to municipal funding, as well as the 2008 Municipal Facilities Siting Analysis report and even of the 2002 Master Plan which all counseled the reuse of Pitney Farm for municipal purposes, the Township Committee would need to show compelling reasons to go against these recommendations. I have not seen any such convincing reasons from the Township Committee.

Protecting Pitney Farm as a publicly owned place is in the Township's best long-term interests, but tragically, Pitney Farm – a historically registered property deemed of national significance – is deteriorating every day that the Mendham Township Committee denies approval for its reuse to address identified municipal needs and for the grant process that would fund this initiative through non-municipal sources. I urge the Mendham Township Committee to reconsider its previous decision and to take steps to protect this irreplaceable historic property as recommended by the Pitney Farm Study Committee by making the fiscally prudent decision that does not sacrifice long-term municipal fiscal health for short-term public relations.

If your decisions, in addition to costing Mendham Township more in the long-run, result in the irreparable deterioration of what has already been judged to be a national historic treasure, any excuses that focus on short-term, relatively insignificant municipal costs, will not stand. The loss of an irreplaceable piece of Mendham's, New Jersey's, and the nation's history will be your legacy.

Yours truly,

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