

## NEW HAVEN CITY PLAN COMMISSION ADVISORY REPORT

**RE:** FARMINGTON CANAL GREENWAY, Designation of the New Haven section of the Heritage Trail as the "William Lanson Section" (Alders Perez, M. Jones, Jackson-Brooks, Shah, S. Rodriguez, Goldson, Castro, Paolillo and K. Jones on behalf of the Amistad Committee).

**REPORT:** 1437-20

**ADVICE:** Approval of Designation of a Specific Location (see Advice below)

### BACKGROUND

William Lanson, who was born in New Haven in 1776, played a significant role in the development of Long Wharf (known as Union Wharf prior to 1737) and, consequently, in the expansion of commerce and the development of the City. The wharf was extended in stages between the years 1731 and 1776 with funds appropriated by the General Assembly, private investors and citizen contributions but remained inadequate owing to the shallow depth of the harbor.

William Lanson was the engineer in charge of extending the wharf to deep water during the period between 1810 and 1812. Upon completion of the wharf extension it reached 3480 feet into the harbor and earned recognition as the longest such structure in the United States. Aside from achieving the record length the wharf was a critical element of the city's commercial life and played an important role in its growth and development. Lanson was also one of the contractors for the Farmington Canal. The Canal investors used local contractors and as a heavy construction contractor, Lanson was one of several working in New Haven on the project. Research to determine the location and extent of his work is underway.

### PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

William Lanson occupies a notable position both in the history of New Haven and in the history of its African American community. He is associated with a number of engineering and business ventures that were based in New Haven but he is perhaps most generally recognized for his extension of Long Wharf and for his involvement in the building of the Farmington Canal.

The Commission notes that the development of the New Haven portion of the Farmington Canal Greenway not only enhances bicycling and hiking opportunities but also serves to remind us of the history of the city's social and industrial development. The story of William Lanson and the other major contributors to the development of the harbor and the Farmington Canal will remain closely connected to the present greenway and will add to our appreciation of New Haven's rich history.

The Connecticut Freedom Trail and Amistad Committee have already given the City two plaques that are to be placed at appropriate locations as the Greenway is completed, one near Long Wharf Pier as there is clear documentation that Lanson had extended the pier, and a second in another yet unspecified location associated with Lanson along the Greenway.

To avoid confusion by changing the designation of the New Haven portion of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, the Commission believes that a specific location to honor William Lanson should be identified where appropriate interpretive signage and plaques could be placed.

### ADVICE

The Commission considers that it is appropriate to recognize the contributions of William Lanson to the development of the Farmington Canal by associating his name with a specific location on the New Haven portion of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail.

**ADOPTED:** February 17, 2010  
Edward Mattison  
Chair

**ATTEST:**   
Karyn M. Gilvarg, AIA  
Executive Director