



March 27, 2009

Senator Toni Harp, co-chairman
Representative John Geragosian, co-chairman
Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Testimony of Christopher Wigren, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation:

My name is Christopher Wigren, and I am Deputy Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust is Connecticut's statewide nonprofit preservation organization, established by Special Act of the Connecticut General Assembly in 1975 (SA 93-75). It is committed to protecting and nourishing the vitality of significant buildings and landscapes through grants, loans, on-site technical preservation assistance, educational programs and publications.

I am here to oppose HB 6363, which calls for merging the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism (CCT) into the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD).

I am also here to oppose SB 828, "An Act concerning State Revenue," specifically Section 1(w), lines 103-107, which calls for transferring \$12,000,000 from the land protection, affordable housing, and historic preservation account to the General Fund in fiscal years ending in 2010 and 2011.

Starting with **HB 6363**, the Connecticut Trust's concern is for the CCT's Historic Preservation and Museums Division, which serves as Connecticut's federally mandated State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Among other things, the SHPO plays a crucial role in stimulating economic activity.

- It processes nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, which allows properties to qualify for federal rehabilitation tax credits, a crucial part of the funding for many redevelopment projects.
- It administers federal rehabilitation tax credits, overseeing design and construction.
- Under federal and state law, it reviews federally- or state-funded projects for their effects on historic resources (see the National Historic Preservation Act and the state Connecticut Environmental Policy Act, Section 22a-1a-3(a)(4)).

With the influx of federal stimulus funds, especially for transportation and housing, these reviews must be done to put stimulus funding to work in Connecticut. This means that the SHPO's project review work load can be expected to increase dramatically. Burying the SHPO within DECD, and distracting it with questions of departmental reorganization, will prevent it from performing these crucial reviews speedily and efficiently.

The SHPO's mandated responsibilities include review of any construction projects generated by DECD. For the SHPO to be housed within DECD could result in a conflict of interest, as defined by the National Park Service, and could lead to loss of SHPO's federal funding. For this reason, the General Assembly has voted down proposals to merge the SHPO with agencies like DECD—not once, but three times in the past 35 years.

Connecticut can make a critical statement about historic preservation as a key tool for our state's recovery by keeping a separate, visible and independent presence for historic preservation in the form of the State Historic Preservation Office. Cutting its staff and burying it in DECD doesn't save a dime and presents the real possibility of loss of federal funds, and it could cause delays in use of stimulus funding. Please oppose this provision of HB 6363.

As for **SB 828**, diverting funds from the Community Investment Act would spell the end of a short but intense and highly successful period when more than \$10 million in state and private funds have been invested in Connecticut's historic buildings, landscapes, neighborhoods and downtowns. CIA funds have gone to historic town halls and libraries, to historic sites, and to neighborhood houses being restored for affordable housing.

Just one example CIA investment in Historic Preservation is the use of restoration funds, administered by the Commission on Culture and Tourism, to rehabilitate Old Saybrook's historic former town hall as the Katherine Hepburn Cultural Arts Center, envisioned as a cultural anchor for Southeastern Connecticut. In this project, **CIA investment of just \$200,000 has leveraged a total investment of \$3,344,692.**

Unlike new construction, where a large percentage of the cost goes for materials, usually from out of state, in historic rehab projects 60-70 percent of the total budget goes for labor, including plumbers, electricians, carpenters, roofers and the like. For the Hepburn Cultural Center, that means approximately \$2.175 million for labor, or 75 jobs created (using standard estimates of 36.1 jobs per \$1 million on construction costs on historic rehab projects).

At the Connecticut Trust, we believe that a high priority must be placed on a Connecticut Stimulus Plan that maximizes federal dollars by incorporating historic preservation and its labor intensive, green building methods as a key component.

We need a plan that delivers effective and efficient Stimulus to our State's economy. Historic Preservation does this. It delivers on Job Creation. It delivers on Green Building/Energy Saving Practices. It delivers on increasing property values and taxes. It delivers on creating affordable housing. This is what the Community Investment Act does for Connecticut.

Please oppose Section 1w in the Governor's Bill 828.

I would be happy to answer questions.