



February 24, 2011

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**Testimony Re: HB 1023, AN ACT CONCERNING THE USE OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES AND VACANT GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

My name is Helen Higgins, and I serve as Executive Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. The Trust is Connecticut's non-profit statewide preservation organization, established by Special Act of the Connecticut General Assembly in 1975 (SA 93-75), and committed to protecting and nourishing the vitality of significant buildings and landscapes through grants, loans, on-site technical preservation assistance, educational programs and publications. The Trust is a statutory partner of the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.

We have been pressing the case that investment in our historic resources is a critical component for economic recovery in our state – this kind of investment creates jobs, stimulates private investment and contributes, in the final analysis, to enhanced community character.

Right now, both Connecticut-based and out-of-state developers are looking to invest in our state. They are looking for the kinds of opportunities that the historic tax credits help create. However our two existing state historic tax credits have restrictive eligibility standards and restrictive re-use standards. This bill addresses those restrictions.

Here are examples of buildings not currently eligible to use the state historic tax credit:

Post Offices: The main post offices in Norwich and Greenwich—major downtown buildings – are slated to be closed and sold. Tax credits would provide much needed incentives to developers.

Former Churches: Historic Immaculate Conception Church – really a cathedral – on Park St in Hartford was converted to a homeless shelter years ago. It is now planning for rehab and a new use as a community center. State tax credits would make a big difference in this project.

Late 19<sup>th</sup> century mixed use development: Park St is also where many buildings were originally built to be mixed use, residential/commercial and as a result cannot qualify for the state credit. Similar neighborhoods exist in downtown New Britain and South Norwalk.

Cultural buildings: Danbury's Palace Theater, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has all the plans, marketing studies, feasibility studies to be rehabbed and re-opened. Eligibility of cultural places for the state historic tax credit would definitely move this project and several other theater projects forward.

Former Schools: National Register listed Washington St School in Hartford was converted years ago to housing; it needs updates and more rehab and it is not eligible for state credits.

Historic residential developments: Nine buildings comprising Horace Bushnell apartments on Vine St in Hartford are slated for rehab and are about to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places in order to be eligible for the federal historic tax credit. They are not eligible for the state credit.

Town Halls: Watertown would like to find a new use for, perhaps sell, its historic town hall. A major building in the center of Watertown's historic district, its slate roof repair is just one of its many restoration issues. Abandoned town halls across the state are in similar predicaments.

This is just a small sampling of the missed opportunities for investment in historic buildings in our state because we have a restrictive historic tax credit.

The intent of this bill is to supply incentives to the rehabilitation of historic buildings. The bill amends two original historic tax credit statutes.

- The language of the bill referring to Sec. 10-416b needs opening up further to clarify as eligible historic mixed use structures, housing units of more than 4 units, and cultural entities.
- For clarity, and to avoid developer double dipping, applicants can only apply to one program, either 416a or 416b, per project.
- The words certified historic need to be added to the words government structures.
- Further, all administration of historic tax credits needs to be done by specialized staff from the State Historic Preservation Office, as required by statute for the federal historic tax credit.. So depending on a merger of the Commission on Culture and Tourism with the Department of Economic and Community Development the particular language needs to clarify State Historic Preservation Office as the administering agent within either agency.



## Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation Results Based Accountability

Input: From 2003 through 2010 over \$2.65 million in state funds have been re-granted through four Connecticut Trust funding vehicles:

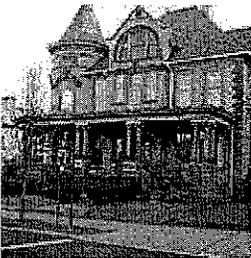
- **Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants (HPTAG)**
- **Historic Building Financing Fund for affordable housing projects**
- **Barns Grant**
- **Community Cultural Planning Grants**

Indicators:

- Local jobs have been created
- Private investment has been stimulated
- Historic places have been preserved and used
- Community interest in preservation is increasing

Outcomes:

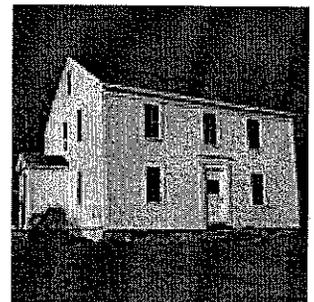
- Historic preservation activity results in economic growth in CT, through job creation and private investment
  - Local Jobs – 1076
  - Private/other investment: \$8.6 million
- Historic places that are preserved and used enhance community character
  - 321 preservation planning, barns restoration and affordable housing restoration grants to 91 towns and cities between 2003 and the end of 2010
  - 85% of planning/pre-development grants from 2007-2008 have resulted in actual restoration/construction projects. (40 pre-development grants/34 in construction or completed)
- Community Interest in Preservation is increasing: Examples from across the state:



In New Britain, we have long recognized and taken great pride in the historic assets that grace our downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. We are grateful for the CT Trust assistance, especially the Community Cultural Planning Grant that gave us the opportunity to finally begin the process necessary to ensure that these resources are preserved for future generations.

—Steven P. Schiller, AICP, City Planner, New Britain.

Eastford's town-owned 1806 Union Society of Phoenixville House was to be demolished in 2005 to make way for an addition to the town hall. But, Connecticut Trust's field staff and its Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants have led to the building being saved. Currently it is being restored for the town to use a public meeting space. This is one of only two Union Society buildings in Connecticut, and is a place where, for 150 years, every-one



was welcome to attend activities, regardless of ethnic origin, spiritual belief, or gender.  
*Carol Davidge, Eastford*

The CT Trust and its grants have been invaluable to historic preservation efforts in Westport...from evaluating a historic barn, to assistance with grant funding application for a preservation plan for a State Archaeological Preserve, to advice on any number of other issues. Trust staff are a simple phone call away and their expertise is essential to our work.

—*Maggie Feczko, Chairman, Westport Historic District Commission*



The CT Trust's field staff and Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants have been a tremendously valuable resource to the Hazardville Institute Conservancy Society. As a group of mainly non-professional volunteers, they have helped guide us to determine the logical step-by-step process of restoring our building for municipal and private use. In 2002 we received a \$500 mini-grant from the Trust which allowed us to have a Hazardous Materials Testing/Study performed. This was a critical first step in our journey. In August 2010, through the Trust's assistance and guidance and a grant, we completed a full development plan to update and restructure our goals. The process of conducting the study forced our group to evaluate our goals, develop a mission statement, formulate an adaptive re-use and restoration plan and have a financial analysis done. The grant gave us the opportunity to work with design and construction professionals and essentially map out a blue print to complete the initial phase of our mission: restoration of the Hazardville Institute building. We are now ready to apply for a Restoration Fund grant from the Commission on Culture and Tourism.

—*Gretchen Pfeifer-Hall, Chairman, Hazardville Institute Conservancy Society, Enfield*



The CT Trust's Community Cultural Planning Grant allowed us to actively engage our community and bring their ideas together with proven results from other cities to come up with a road map for taking our revitalization efforts to the next level. Ideas generated included proposals to better utilize our historic waterfront, restore two-way traffic to many downtown streets, and reconfigure urban renewal-era street and parking areas to integrate the adjacent area of historic residences into the renewal happening in downtown.

—*Harry A. Smith, AICP, City Planner, New London*

### **Connecticut Trust Partners**

- **Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism**
- **Connecticut Humanities Council**
- **Connecticut Housing Finance Authority**
- **National Trust for Historic Preservation**
- **Connecticut League of History Organizations**
- **Local preservation organizations/historical societies**
- **Connecticut Main St Center**
- **Municipalities**
- **Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Connecticut Housing Coalition, Working lands Alliance, Connecticut Farmland Trust**

