



**Greater New Britain
Arts Alliance**
Linking People and the Arts

March 11, 2013

Planning & Development Committee
Senator Steve Cassano, co-chairman
Representative Jason Rojas, co-chairman

In Support of SB 960, an Act Authorizing the Establishment of Historic Preservation Commissions

My name is Stephen Hard. I am Executive Director of the Greater New Britain Arts Alliance. I served on the Ad Hoc Historic Preservation Steering Committee that guided the passage of New Britain's Historic Preservation Ordinance in 2011

We need SB 960 to give legal standing to historic preservation because individuals, businesses and corporations frequently do not focus on the broader picture or the long-range implications of their plans. Connecticut and New England history, reflected in our built environment, makes our State a distinctive and desirable place to live and visit. Replacing a porch railing on the front of a house with something not in keeping with the historic period of the home, by itself, does little, if any, harm. Insensitive renovations of a significant number of properties in a neighborhood over an extended period of time, on the other hand, can obliterate the attractiveness and historic quality of a neighborhood and severely impact property values. In New Britain we have too many streets of once charming multi-family homes where historic architectural integrity has been almost wholly obliterated by well intentioned, but uninformed, exterior renovations. The fact is that renovations that may seem in the best interest of an individual property owner, within a broader and more long-range context, can be part of the devastation of a neighborhood, drastically reducing the value of everyone's property.

From a commercial perspective, New Britain's downtown could be the poster child for how disregard for historic preservation ends up reducing attractiveness, diminishing the value of investments, and squandering financial and community resources. New Britain's Strand Theater, comparable to the Bushnell in Hartford and the Palace Theater in Waterbury, was torn down in 1972 to build a two-story strip mall. While the Bushnell and the Palace have both been extensively renovated and are poised for their next hundred years, in New Britain our downtown strip mall spent decades in derelict condition as an ugly eyesore driving down property values. It was only recently demolished to make way for another building. The new building is nice enough, but it will never last as long as the Strand could have, and it will never exert on the minds and hearts of the people who experience it the positive memories the Strand continues to exert over 40 years after its destruction.

We have laws that protect our natural environment. These laws have become well accepted even as natural environmental regulations can be seen as needlessly obstructionistic by those who would prefer to avoid them. SB 960 will not prevent progress, rather it will ensure that changes to our built environments represent improvements, and do not simply reflect narrowly focused priorities and short-term gain.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony. I hope I can count on you to strongly support SB 960.