



March 9, 2015

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee  
Senator John Fonfara, co-chair  
Representative Jeffrey Berger, co-chair

**Testimony on S.B. No. 946 AN ACT CONCERNING REVENUE ITEMS TO IMPLEMENT THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET specifically Sec. 29, the 18 month elimination of the Community Investment Act (CIA)**

I am Brad Schide Circuit Rider for the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and I am testifying against the elimination of funding for CIA. I coordinate a program called the Vibrant Community Initiative (VCI), which is funded by the Community Investment Act through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). This program is threatened with elimination if CIA funds are eliminated.

VCI focuses on the most critical questions concerning our towns and cities:

How do we foster compact, walkable, distinctive places in our historic city, town and villages?

What are the key changes that need to be made at the municipal level to encourage revitalization of communities?

How can historic preservation be a primary tool for downtown and community revitalization?

The CT Trust has provided 17 VCI grants to municipalities around the state, all targeted for action plans for historic resources. VCI can assist in looking at a building rehabilitation, its capital cost, its design, zoning issues, and building codes, as well as evaluate an overall preservation plan for downtowns or neighborhoods. Examples include:

**New London** - VCI team produced architectural drawings, code reviews, capital funding and rehab plans to revitalize three historic buildings on Bank Street in downtown. Since the study's completion, a non profit developer, utilizing the VCI plans, is currently seeking redevelopment of the properties.

"We are grateful for the VCI study grant because without it, we would not be where we are in downtown development and planning," said Harry Smith, Planner in New London.

**Clinton** - VCI team produced a Village District Zoning amendment to permit flexibility in uses and adaptive reuse for the former and now vacant Unilever industrial facility near a train station. Team also created a new National Register of Historic Places district that included the former industrial facility and other historic assets in the area.

"The VCI program gave us the structure and reason to change the zoning for the area, and, through the National Register process, provided an incentive to the owner to rehab the property with the use of the historic tax credits," said Alan Kravitz, Vice Chair of the town's Planning and Zoning Commission.

**Ansonia** – The City is using VCI funded consultants to prepare for the rehabilitation of a city owned historic building downtown, providing design and code review, capital funding and operating costs, evaluating zoning changes to promote the revitalization effort.

"VCI is helping our City position itself into the future," said Sheila O'Malley, Economic Development Director for the City, "the VCI grant is helping us create a destination and a unique place to live by giving us a plan for a very important building downtown."

All of the above examples show that Connecticut cities and towns want to rethink their approach to economic development and seek incremental change by utilizing existing resources and buildings, rather than demolition or large scale public projects. They want to create places that people want to both live and work which leads to jobs and economic development.

VCI, funded through the CIA, is a program helps municipalities find a new economic development in our communities, one that uses/preserves historic resources.

But this program is now threatened by the elimination of CIA dedicated funds.