



**STATEMENT OF JOHN SIMONE  
PRESIDENT & CEO  
CONNECTICUT MAIN STREET CENTER  
MARCH 9, 2015**

**BEFORE THE FINANCE, REVENUE AND BONDING COMMITTEE  
S.B. NO. 946, "AN ACT CONCERNING REVENUE ITEMS TO IMPLEMENT THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET"**

Chairman Berger and Chairman Fonfara, members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee, I am John Simone, President & CEO of the Connecticut Main Street Center (CMSC). CMSC is a statewide non-profit whose mission is to inspire great Connecticut downtowns, Main Street by Main Street. We provide education, advocacy and technical assistance on creating and managing vibrant historic downtowns and village centers. We have a statewide network of nearly sixty member communities to whom we offer customized guidance on downtown management and revitalization.

I am here to urge you to save one of the most successful and popular Acts passed by this legislative body in recent history – the Community Investment Act.

Under the CIA, a \$40 recording fee is collected on every real estate transaction in the state, then distributed in support of four key areas: 1) preserving farmland 2) protecting open spaces, 3) historic preservation and 4) creating affordable housing. This program has received national attention for progressively using land-use fees to support comprehensive land-use planning and development. For every historic downtown we revitalize – bringing older vacant buildings back to life, contributing to the tax rolls and providing homes and workplaces for our citizens – we take pressure off developing our open spaces and working farms.

Calling for what is essentially a total sweep of the CIA's funds for the next two years is akin to signaling the program's death knell. Beyond compromising the state's most charming characteristics – its scenic working farms, bucolic village centers and historic downtowns – SB 946 also takes an economic step backward. Since its inception in 2006, the grants and programs funded through the CIA provided support to nearly all 169 Connecticut towns and created some 4,000 jobs. For our downtowns, S.B. 946 means the loss of one of the only state programs that funds essential community planning efforts – the bedrock of downtown revitalization.

For CMSC, the passage of S.B. 946 means the end of our Preservation of Place (POP) grant program. To date, we provided 51 grants totaling \$446,000, which leveraged an investment of \$1.2 million in our downtowns. As an example of the tremendous impact these grants have, one of our members, Putnam, used a series of POP grants to help their downtown recover from the decline of its antiques base as a result of online shopping. Its downtown is stronger than ever thanks to five competitive POP grants including: a Parking and Buildout Analysis; a Walkability Audit; a community-led downtown visioning and action plan that led to the creation of a downtown task force and new policies and plans to support future growth; a Wayfinding and Signage Design Plan; and most recently, new design standards to help building owners undertake property renovations.

As a result, downtown Putnam is teeming with people who enjoy public art, outdoor dining and events throughout the year. Redeveloped blighted properties are again contributing to downtown's vitality and tax rolls. Additionally, historic mills adjacent to the downtown, vacant for decades, are being redeveloped for housing. Delpha Very, Putnam's Director of Economic and Community Development, attributes our CIA-funded Preservation of Place grants as the stimulus for the downtown's remarkable turn-around.



The Community Investment Act also provides the source funds for our award-winning Come Home to Downtown program. This program offers technical assistance and guidance on rehabilitating small, under-utilized downtown properties into housing above commercial space. This type of real estate deal is not only the hardest to do, it is at the core of Transit-Oriented Development, the lynchpin of the state's \$1.5 billion investment in CTfastrak and the Hartford Line (the commuter rail line between New Haven and Springfield).

Almost ten years ago, a broad coalition worked with bi-partisan legislative leadership to craft a fund that is brilliant in its concept – land-use fees to support a cross section of sustainable land-use initiatives. While we applaud the Governor's proposal to "lock box" transportation revenues for transportation initiatives, we view CIA funds as just as critical and in need of safeguarding. The CIA supports our Infrastructure of Place – pristine open spaces, vibrant historic town centers, working farms and housing choices for everyone that are the intersection of sustainable economic development and a sustainable quality of life. While investing in a world class transportation infrastructure is important, without CIA funds we'll end up with roads and trains to places no one wants to go.

If we want to make transformative investments in our communities in an era of diminishing government resources, we need sustainable revenue sources that are as predictable as possible. The CIA provides these funds; the programs it funds are working, and it does so without siphoning any revenue from the general budget. In fact, it adds to the general budget as the jobs it creates pay income taxes and the farms, housing and development it supports add to the tax rolls. The CIA provides economic stimulus and community development tools that help us:

- Meet the growing demand for housing and transportation choices in walkable, compact mixed-use neighborhoods.
- Protect our environment by reducing the state's reliance on fossil fuel.
- Keep our communities and the state competitive in a global economy.

For these reasons, CMSC urges you to protect the Community Investment Act and oppose any sweep of its funds.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.