

575 Leetes Island Road
Guilford, Connecticut 06437
March 7, 2015

To the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee
Senator John W. Fonfara
Representative Jeffrey J. Berger

Re: Testimony Regarding Elimination of the Community Investment Act

Dear Sirs/Mesdames:

I am writing to you today to express my strong opposition to the Governor's proposal to sweep the funds designated under current law in the Community Investment Act ("CIA"), to benefit Connecticut's historic preservation and open space communities, among others, into the General Fund to close this year and next's budget shortfalls.

To do so would be both violative of the express purpose of the Community Investment Act, which was passed with broad bipartisan support in 2005, as well as tragically shortsighted insofar as the effects are almost certainly to do profound and lasting damage to those very communities meant specifically to be benefited under the CIA. This legislature made a very sound decision in 2005 to create a dedicated funding stream for historic preservation, agricultural land preservation, open space support and support for affordable housing, when it linked monies generated by a transfer fee on the sale of land and improvements to provide a guaranteed funding stream for those very beneficiaries most closely involved with the preservation and support of land and structures in our state.

Essentially, this legislature wisely created a closed funding loop whereby economic activity generated by land and building transactions would be plowed back into programs and organizations whose sole mission is to further improve and preserve those same resources for current and future Connecticut residents. Like the state's Highway Trust Funds, which our governor would like to see used only for transportation-related projects, as envisioned in the Highway Trust Fund legislation, the CIA funds ought never to be raided to close funding shortfalls they did nothing to create.

By protecting the CIA funds from such redirection, the legislature insures that their vital uses continue uninterruptedly, and obviate the need for their various constituencies to descend on Hartford to seek line-item budget funding. Their being self-funded is a huge positive for the state, both in providing certainty to the communities and programs supported by CIA funds that that support will always be there, and in spinning-off a number of very important programs to be essentially self-funded and not a burden on the General Fund.

The governor has indicated that this year he would like to focus on the state's transportation and transportation infrastructure needs, which is a worthy and significant goal. To do so, he would like guaranteed infrastructure spending support, generated by transportation users, to be plowed back into transportation-related projects. And that is precisely how the CIA funds generated by the transfer fee should be treated, to provide critical support for our state's *cultural* infrastructure, as evidenced by the vital work performed by organizations like the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and the Guilford Land Conservation Trust, both of whom rely for the vast majority of their program and operations support on CIA funding.

If this committee votes to sweep the funds generated by the CIA into the General Fund, critical services and resources needed by both organizations will vanish. Unlike some funding needs, which may possibly be delayed from time to time without permanent damaging effects, to interrupt the work of these two organizations would have lasting repercussions on historic buildings that could be lost forever, or precious open space that is snapped up for development, never again to be open and wild, for all our citizens to enjoy in the years to come.

The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation's vital support for historic preservation in the state, through its technical grants, Circuit Rider technical assistance, and grants to protect, rehabilitate and preserve historic structures in our state, cannot function on a stop and start basis. Continuity and dependability of funding is a critical component of providing those services, as well as insuring that the professionals who provide them are here in our state, working to preserve those resources.

Given the governor's stated desire to make tourism a bigger component of our economy in Connecticut, it would be terribly shortsighted were this committee to de-fund the very efforts which create vibrant, unique places and historic structures which those visitors coming to Connecticut increasingly for heritage tourism purposes travel here to see and to experience. We should not squander those significant resources only recently restored to tourism development in our state, and invested over the last several years by the governor and his administration, by critically weakening the cultural infrastructure which creates the destinations our heritage tourists wish to visit.

Similarly, the importance of CIA funding to open space advocates such as the Guilford Land Conservation Trust cannot be overstated. To take just a few examples, CIA funding streams have been crucial to its ability to protect the following precious natural resources in our community:

(1.) The Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program has helped the Guilford Land Conservation Trust protect inholdings within State Forest land that would not otherwise have been protected. In 2012, the program leveraged the money donated by hundreds of local GLCT supporters to protect what was an outstanding 17.5 acre property at the heart of the Westwoods Forest. This forest is one of the few remaining intact coastal forests.

(2.) In 2007 and 2008 this grant program supported the Broomstick Ledges acquisition, a 141-acre purchase that would not have been possible without these funds. That land is the main view from Bluff Head, one of the State's most popular and spectacular vistas. It is also now a critical connection in a greenway corridor that spans several towns and thousands of acres and hosts multiple State-listed species of conservation concern.

None of these critical acquisitions would have been possible had CIA funding been diverted to General Fund needs. And once such opportunities are lost, they may well be lost forever, as development pressures force them into a developed use rather than a preserved, natural space.

Please protect Connecticut's cultural infrastructure and the organizations and professionals who keep it alive, thriving, and contributing to economic growth in our state. Do not allow CIA funds to be diverted from the valuable purposes they were originally designed to serve.

Very truly,

Robert S. Vavasour
Lewis E. Burgess