OPPOSITION to Sections 2 through 5, Senate Bill 1107

AN ACT CONCERNING THE TERMS OF TRUSTEES OF THE CONNECTICUT TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND CONSTRUCTION INVOLVING HISTORIC STRUCTURES

To: The Hon. Mae Flexer, Co-Chair, the Hon. Daniel J. Fox, Co-Chair, the Hon. Will Haskell, Vice Chair, the Hon. Michael Winkler, Vice Chair, the Hon. Rob Sampson, Ranking Member, the Hon. Mike France, Ranking Member and the members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

On behalf of the Board of Directors and members of Connecticut Preservation Action, the advocacy group representing historic preservation organizations and interests across the state, I would like to register our opposition to Sections 2 through 5 of Senate Bill 1107. We are opposed to this legislation for the following reasons:

- **Although the language in this bill provides a narrower scope of impact than a similar bill raised earlier this session in the Planning and Development Committee (HB 6552), removing the protections afforded under the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act (CEPA) to any town can have irreversible, negative impacts.** Overriding these protections will, in essence, allow the state to unfairly sanction the demolition of historic structures that a local community considers to be important and meaningful to their community and history.

- **Since 1982, the Connecticut Environmental Protection Act has recognized that our historic and cultural resources are just as worthy of our protection as our natural resources.** The legislation proposed in SB 1107 not only violates the public trust that these assets will be protected but sets a dangerous precedent and opens the door for other exemptions to our environmental protection laws. Exceptions to the protection of our historic sites and structures – the assets that most often define the unique character of our towns and cities – should be opposed to the same degree that decreasing the protections of our air and water would be.
• Eliminating the ability of the Historic Preservation Council to request the assistance of the Attorney General to prevent the unreasonable destruction of historic properties is also a violation of the public trust. The structure of the Historic Preservation Council insures that the entire community is heard when a historic building is in danger of demolition. It is only in instances where a prudent and feasible alternative to the destruction of an irreplaceable historic asset is readily available that the Council will ask for the involvement of the Attorney General’s office.

• Our distressed municipalities are already burdened with the legacy of failed development ideas. Protections currently afforded for our historic properties allow communities the space and time needed to make sure that developments requiring the destruction of irreplaceable buildings can be properly and openly considered. Consider the two-block area to the east of Hartford’s Union Station. Each and every open surface parking lot that you see is a failed development scheme where developers required the demolition of a historic building. Contrast that to the invigorating development currently happening in the same area - all involving the rehabilitation and reuse of historic buildings.

• SB 1107 will turn Opportunity Zones into Opportunistic Zones. The exemption of historic properties in Opportunity Zones from protection against unreasonable destruction will ultimately undermine the goal of revitalization. This legislation not only encourages demolition at a time when we, as a state, are struggling with landfills being filled to capacity, but also runs counter to Senate Bill 570 that seeks to provide robust resources in Opportunity Zones.

Connecticut Preservation Action respectfully requests that Sections 2 through 5 of SB 1107 not be favorably voted out from this committee.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or be in need of any further information regarding this or any other legislation regarding historic preservation.

Yours sincerely,

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