



NORTHEAST PRESERVATION NEWS

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Statewide Main Street Programs

CT: Connecticut Main Street Center
DE: Delaware Main Street Program
MA (Boston): Boston Main Streets
ME: Maine Downtown Center
NH: New Hampshire Main Street Center
NJ: Main Street New Jersey
PA: Office of Community Development, Pennsylvania Downtown Center
VT: Vermont Downtown Program

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New Coalition Works to Save RI Tax Credit

Historic preservation tax credits can be a key tool in the preservation of historic resources. The National Trust, through its Public Policy department and Regional Offices, advocates for the adoption and protection of state tax credits, which are often modeled on the federal program and sometimes include assistance to private homeowners.

Six states in the Northeast have adopted historic preservation tax credits. While states like New York and New Jersey are aggressively pursuing adoption by their legislatures, other states are working to strengthen their programs. Massachusetts—where the Northeast Office helped to draft the language of the state's program—capped their credit originally but has already raised that cap once and is considering raising it again or eliminating the cap altogether. Connecticut, which has a historic homeowners credit, now has

an additional credit before the legislature for multi-unit rental housing.

Rhode Island arguably has the most effective state tax credit for historic preservation in the entire country. Adopted in 2002, the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Investment Tax Credit Program provides a 30 percent credit against state income tax for substantial rehab of depreciable historic properties. Intended by lawmakers to be a catalyst for urban revitalization, the program has been successful beyond anyone's wildest expectations. It has attracted preservation developers from within and outside the state, who have invested nearly \$800 million in 189 structures and created more than 3,000 new units of housing in 21 of the state's 39 cities and towns.

Beyond the numbers, the transformation of

Continued on page 2.

Committed to Preserving "America's Sistine Chapel"

It's "All-Hands-on-Deck" now to aid the efforts of a grassroots group that is committed to assuring that their beloved church building continues to play a role in community life in Woonsocket, RI. A former Catholic church built between 1913 and 1917 by French-Canadian mill workers who donated their earnings each week, St. Ann's is graced with stained glass windows imported from Chartres, France, and true frescoes covering nearly every plastered surface.

"St. Ann's is the Sistine Chapel of North America," suggested Wendy Nicholas of the Trust's Northeast Office. "There is no other place in our nation with such quantity of brilliant frescoes. It is critical that this building be protected from the elements to assure that this treasure is never lost."

The new nonprofit, the *St. Ann's Arts & Cultural Center*, was formed and successfully negotiated a 99-year lease of the building from the Diocese. With grants from the *Antoinette Downing Preservation Fund of the National Trust* and Preserve Rhode Island, the board hired Edwards & Kelsey to assess the building's condition and identify necessary repairs. They convened a charrette to explore different reuse scenarios and business models. Now, they're raising funds to address the priority problems, notably repairing the slate roof, gutters and downspouts and re-pointing of the twin towers, visible from so many



One of the remarkable frescoes in the former church.

vantage points in Woonsocket.

Lowe's Charitable & Educational Foundation and the National Trust recently awarded \$100,000 for restoration work at St. Ann's. The Northeast Office, including Advisors Karen Jessup and Richard Youngken, Preserve Rhode Island, the Blackstone River Valley Heritage Corridor Commission, and the Blackstone Tourism Council are all now working to assist and support the St. Ann's Board.

“Dozen Distinctive Destinations” Announced

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has announced its list of “Dozen Distinctive Destinations,” three of which are in the Northeast Region. In every community selected for the list, residents have taken forceful action to protect their town’s character and sense of place.

Saranac Lake, NY



The former Will Rogers Hotel in Saranac Lake.

Nestled among pristine lakes, evergreen forests and nearby mountains, this former logging community was reinvented in 1876 when a physician in the last stages of tuberculosis arrived to live out his final months. Happily, he not only survived but was restored, and Saranac Lake began a new chapter as one of the country’s pioneering health resorts. The village grew into a thriving community, home to a world-renowned sanatorium, bustling hotels and “cure cottages,” large boarding houses sporting several wide porches, many of which are still prominent landmarks around town. Today, the downtown is charmingly preserved with period architecture and a host of restaurants, shops and art galleries and a variety of delightful accommodations.

West Chester, PA



West Chester at night. Photo credit: Rick Davis

Although this former Quaker town, incorporated in 1799, is only 1.8 square

miles, it’s teeming with 19th-century charm. Nearly 90 percent of the picture-perfect borough – with its lovely town center and famed brick sidewalks – is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. West Chester today is a university and residential community with fine examples of Victorian and Greek Revival architecture. The borough’s small size means that West Chester is a walkable community, home to dozens of outstanding restaurants, art galleries and retail shops. There are also numerous attractions nearby, including Longwood Gardens, the Brandywine River Museum and the Brandywine Battlefield.

Lewes, DE



Lewes. Photo credit: The Lewes Historical Society

First settled by the Dutch in 1631, this small hamlet is happy to be known as the “first town in the first state.” Home to generations of fishermen and river pilots, Lewes is fiercely proud of its colorful maritime heritage and its charming, diverse collection of well-preserved historic homes, some dating back to the 1660s. Within an area of about a half-mile square, visitors will find an enchanting historic district, as well as museums, antique shops, art galleries, fine restaurants and several inns and charming B&Bs. Lewes is also home to the 5,193-acre Cape Henlopen State Park, created by William Penn in 1682 and given to the settlers of Lewes, a bequest that became the young nation’s first public lands.

To date, there are 84 Dozen Distinctive Destinations located in 41 states throughout the country. Residents have worked hard to preserve the historic and scenic assets of their communities, with rewards that transcend town limits. For the complete list and information on all of these places, visit www.nationaltrust.org.

RI Tax Credit, continued

derelict areas of Rhode Island’s cities has been most remarkable. Abandoned mill buildings in Pawtucket, West Warwick, and Woonsocket have been reclaimed for housing, attracting new residents to these areas and returning buildings to the tax rolls. Adaptive reuse of 19th- and early 20th-century office buildings and former department stores in downtown Providence has taken off, with blocks of historic downtown now converted into loft apartments, boutique hotels, and artists’ live/work space. These projects had all languished on the drawing boards for years until the passage of the preservation tax credit.

Part of Rhode Island’s formula for success is the fact that the General Assembly designed the historic preservation credit to be *predictable*. It is not subject to an annual cap or to a competitive selection process. If you rehab a qualified historic building, following the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, you get the tax credit.

In January, however, Rhode Island Governor Donald Carcieri inserted uncertainty into the development arena by signaling his desire to tinker with the tax credit during the budget process. Uncertainty is what developers hate most. Immediately following the Governor’s remarks, developers began to put preservation projects on hold and the wheels of community revitalization slowed.

In reaction, 36 organizations have formed the Coalition for Neighborhood & Economic Renewal to stave off changes that would diminish the credit’s effectiveness. Groups include the National Trust and a host of smart growth, affordable housing, preservation and environmental organizations, plus chambers of commerce, cities and towns, and private developers. For more information, go to www.growsmartri.com.

National Trust President Richard Moe, in his keynote address to the annual meeting of the Providence Foundation, said, “I understand there is talk of reducing the rehab tax credit. This would be a huge mistake. Grow Smart Rhode Island calls the credit ‘the single best economic development and neighborhood revitalization tool the state has seen in decades’—and they’re absolutely right. It would be short-sighted to cripple or discard a program that has done so much to bring new investment—and new economic life—to this city.”

