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FEDERAL UPDATE

Senate Considers Conservation Block Grants Included in Energy Bill

The Senate began debate this week on language creating a program of energy efficiency conservation block grants contained in H.R. 3221, the “Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Tax Act of 2007.” These grants would be available to State or local eligible units of government to conduct a wide range of energy efficiency activities that could benefit older and historic buildings, including:

- Grants to nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies for energy retrofits as well as development and implementation of energy efficiency programs and technologies for buildings and facilities of nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies.
- Development and implementation of building codes and inspection services for public, commercial, industrial, and single and multifamily residential buildings to promote energy efficiency.
- Promotion of greater participation and efficiency rates for material conservation programs, including source reduction, recycling, and recycled content procurement programs that lead to increases in energy efficiency.

The National Trust is interested in seeing these block grants be made widely available to older and historic buildings as part of its on-going efforts to support historic preservation and sustainability, all the while ensuring that funding for activities such as energy efficiency retrofits, for example, do not harm the historic integrity of these structures.

The energy efficiency block grant program authorizes up to \$2 billion from Fiscal Years 2008 through 2012.

House Leadership Rejects Earmarks Moratorium Proposal

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) this week indicated that the House would conduct business as usual regarding the consideration of earmarks in the House despite continuing pressure from the House GOP to impose a year-long moratorium on such spending. In addition, lawmakers’ appetites for earmarks appeared unabated last month as the House Appropriations Committee extended its deadline for earmark requests to March 24 after a flood of requests arrived on the original March 19 deadline. This bodes well for heavily earmarked historic preservation programs – such as Save America’s Treasures (SAT) and the Enhancements Program under the Department of Transportation – which were potentially threatened by the proposed moratorium.

In addition, momentum for a House earmark moratorium lost steam after the

Key Historic
Preservation and
Conservation
Titles Caught in
Dispute Over
Offsets Spending
in Farm Bill
Reauthorization

Senate voted, 29-71, on March 13 to reject a proposal by Sen. Jim DeMint (R-SC) that would have imposed a one-year earmark ban in that chamber. A Republican substitute amendment to the House version of the budget resolution that included a moratorium was also defeated, 157-263.

Farm Bill Resolution Up to Chairmen of Tax-Writing Committees

Tax committee chairmen — Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) and Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT) — are in sharp disagreement over offsets for an additional \$10 billion in funding for the Farm Bill (HR 2419) reauthorization pending in conference, which also contains important historic preservation and conservation titles crucial to rural heritage.

Baucus and Rangel have been thrust into the limelight in the Farm Bill negotiations largely because the Agriculture committees in both chambers must comply with pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) rules — i.e., they cannot spend any more money over the \$280 billion baseline contained in the reauthorization bill unless it is offset with spending cuts or tax increases, which must originate in the Ways and Means and Finance committees.

However, Rangel and Baucus have had a hard time agreeing on offsets and spending cuts to support the extra \$10 billion the Agriculture committees want to spend on the measure. With no specific funding plan to offset the extra spending in sight, Rangel, the House leadership and Agriculture committee leaders may run out of time to make sure the financing deal can be sold in the House. To make matters worse, lawmakers have only until April 18th to complete their conference negotiations. If not in place by then, a one-year extension of the existing Farm Bill authorization will probably take place.

The National Trust is continuing to work with congressional staff to ensure historic preservation language supported by the Trust and its partners is included in the final farm bill.

STATE & LOCAL UPDATE

Massachusetts Voters To Decide on Adopting Community Preservation Act

Five Additional
Municipalities to
Vote on Adopting
Community
Preservation Act
in Massachusetts

Municipal elections will take place next week in South Hadley, Stoughton, Granville, West Bridgewater and Seekonk, Massachusetts, to adopt the Community Preservation Act (CPA) which supports local open space conservation, historic preservation, affordable housing, and the development of outdoor recreational facilities by instituting a small surcharge on local property tax bills. The citizens of these communities will be voting to add a small surcharge (varying from 1% to 3%) to property taxes for the purpose of creating a local Community Preservation Fund and qualifying for state matching funds.

To date, 127 communities in Massachusetts have adopted the CPA and have used the program to successfully acquire, create and preserve open space and land for recreational uses, to acquire and preserve historic buildings and landscapes, and to create, preserve and support affordable housing.