



# Preservation League *of* NYS

## **Testimony of the Preservation League of New York State at the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing of the Environmental Conservation Committees**

**Tuesday, February 1, 2022**

### **Testimony given by Katie Eggers Comeau, Vice President for Policy and Preservation Preservation League of New York State**

Chairwoman Krueger, Chairwoman Weinstein, and distinguished members of the Senate and Assembly, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today on the topic of historic preservation and the New York State FY 2023 Budget.

As New York State's only statewide historic preservation nonprofit organization, the Preservation League of New York State invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth, and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development, and education programs across the state and partner with local preservation organizations throughout New York.

My testimony today includes comments on the importance of historic preservation in climate change mitigation efforts, support of the legislatively proposed extension of the New York State Historic Tax Credit, and support for the Governor's proposed budgets for the New York State Council on the Arts, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and the Environmental Protection Fund.

#### Climate Change and the Green Economy

The Preservation League welcomes the Governor's emphasis on combating climate change, and we support her prioritization of green energy, resiliency, and mitigation efforts. Historic preservation has a critical role to play in developing a greener, more resilient future for our state. The reuse of existing buildings, as an alternative to demolition and new construction, has quantifiable environmental benefits in keeping valuable building materials out of landfills, recapturing embodied energy, reducing the need for greenfield development, and reusing rather than duplicating existing infrastructure. The reuse of historic buildings, including appropriate measures to improve their energy performance, is thus a critically important, and effective, mitigation measure. After all, building reuse as an alternative to demolition is recycling at the largest possible scale. In addition, the preservation trades are



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excellent examples of green jobs, as the tradespeople and craftspeople with the skills to appropriately repair, restore, weatherize, and improve existing buildings are helping to ensure that these assets remain in productive use rather than going to waste. The League stands ready to work with the Governor, the Legislature, and agency staff to ensure that programs aimed at combating climate change do so in a way that protects and capitalizes on our historic resources and the contributions they make to this critical effort.

## Reauthorizing the NYS Historic Tax Credits

Since 2007, the New York State Historic Tax Credit has been a valuable tool for the revitalization of New York's main streets and neighborhoods. Historic tax credits have a proven track record of revitalizing historic buildings and neighborhoods throughout New York State, particularly in upstate communities where their use leverages significant federal funding in economically challenged neighborhoods. The historic tax credits are particularly valuable in retaining and creating affordable housing options.

The New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit Programs are currently authorized until December 31, 2024. As that date approaches, those who wish to utilize the credits may wonder if they will be available when they are ready to proceed with their projects. To provide greater certainty to those who want to utilize the credits, we ask the Legislature to support an early reauthorization of the New York State Rehabilitation Tax Credit Programs through December 31, 2031. Extending these credits will ensure that reinvestment in our urban cores, downtown, neighborhoods, and Main Streets will continue.

## Preservation of Debar Pond Lodge

The Preservation League is partnering with colleagues at Adirondack Architectural Heritage and the Debar Pond Institute in support of a land exchange amendment that will safeguard the future of Debar Pond Lodge, a historic Adirondack lodge built around 1940 and set on the shore of Debar Pond in the town of Duane, Franklin County. Designed by notable Adirondack architect William Distin, Debar Pond Lodge is one of the largest log buildings in the Adirondacks, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its architectural significance. The nonprofit Debar Pond Institute proposes to donate over 400 acres of wild forest land to the State, to be added to the Adirondack Forest Preserve, in exchange for the State transferring a six-acre parcel, encompassing the lodge and outbuildings, to the Institute. The Debar Pond Institute will use the property for a variety of public environmental and cultural programming. The public will retain access to the shoreline of Debar Pond, which will retain its wild character. We consider this a win-win that retains a magnificent piece of



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Adirondack architecture, enhances the Forest Preserve, and offers new recreational and cultural opportunities.

## Capital Investment at OPRHP and DEC

The Governor's proposed investment in capital projects at both OPRHP and DEC is greatly appreciated. The importance of parks and outdoor recreational opportunities to the health and well-being of New York State residents has never been more obvious than over the last two years. We support the increased funding for infrastructure improvements and particularly look forward to seeing the results of additional investment in New York State Historic Sites, as well as historic buildings and structures located within our NYS Parks.

## Environmental Protection Fund

The Preservation League strongly supports the Governor's proposed increase in funding for the Environmental Protection Fund to a record level of \$400 million. We particularly note the significance of the historic preservation grants, which in recent years have funded projects including municipal and nonprofit restoration of courthouses, town halls, libraries, historic houses of worship that frequently serve multiple functions, and nonprofit arts and cultural centers. These grants then leverage private fundraising to preserve community anchors and centers of cultural tourism, and often have a catalytic impact on their communities.

## NYSCA Funding

The Preservation League enjoys a longstanding partnership with the New York State Council on the Arts, and knows the importance of their work to promote and sustain arts and cultural programming and facilities, particularly given the ongoing challenges arts institutions face due to COVID-19. We support the Governor's proposal to continue funding NYSCA's core grantmaking programming at existing levels and to provide additional recovery funds for arts organizations and for capital projects.

Thank you for your time and attention today and for inviting the Preservation League to testify. We are happy to provide additional information about the above testimony or any other historic preservation issue at the Committee's request.