

Historic and Green: A New Climate Agenda

Ideas for Statewide Action

Nearly 200 attorneys, planners, preservationists, environmentalists, students, and legislators convened in Hartford in January 2020 to discuss how Connecticut can become **a leader in forging common ground among preservationists and environmentalists**, given unprecedented threats to our communities, including from strained budgets and climate change.

Each group starts from a similar perspective. Both oppose the waste of materials associated with needless demolition. Both herald energy efficiency inherent in older buildings. All agree that resiliency and disaster planning are essential in protecting our most distinctive neighborhoods.

The State legislature has recognized its role in harmonizing the values of these two groups. For example, state law prevents local historic commissions from rejecting solar panels absent a compelling reason. The Connecticut Environmental Protection Act protects environmental assets and National Register properties from unreasonable destruction. In addition, the Community Investment Act funds the preservation of both open space and historic buildings. Meanwhile, the State Historic Preservation Office has started documenting historic sites at risk of sea level rise, and Connecticut includes historic resources in hazard mitigation planning.

More, however, should be done. The below notes, taken by conference organizer and Preservation Connecticut Chair Sara C. Bronin, summarize applicable suggestions from attendees. **It's up to you to prioritize these ideas and push to realize them.**

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Enabling Authority Ideas

State government gives local governments their powers sometimes expressly.

- Allow local governments to enact **deconstruction and demolition-by-neglect laws**
- Revise enabling statutes for preservation and blight to include **demolition-by-neglect**

Funding Ideas

State government determines how funding will be allocated to State properties, and also offers grant funding, rebates, and tax credits to private parties.

- Ensure the State devotes adequate funding to maintenance of **State-owned historic sites**
- For the **Community Investment Act (CIA)**:
 - Maintain or increase funding for the CIA
 - Put CIA funding in a lockbox
- Fight to protect **energy efficiency funds** that reduce energy use and improve usability of historic buildings
- **Fund alternatives to demolition** of buildings, when local laws have delayed demolition

- For the **homeowner tax credit**:
 - Expand the program so more people have the incentive to preserve their homes
 - Lower the \$15,000 minimum so the credit can be more frequently used in low-income neighborhoods

Regulatory Ideas

State government protects environmental and historic resources by providing rights of legal action, establishing standards for historic preservation projects, and safeguarding our right to clean air, water, and land.

- Protect the **Connecticut Environmental Protection Act** from attempts to erode language or reduce protection for environmental and historic resources
- Consider codifying a “**light**” **version of the Secretary of the Interior Standards** and tie such standards to State tax credits or village districts
- Change the State constitution to add a “**Green Amendment**” giving people the right to clean air, water, and land
- **Ban artificial turf**, which degrades our historic and natural landscapes
- For State-required **10-year local plans**:
 - Require local governments to include archaeological resources in planning
 - Create templates for town plans to make them more affordable and likely to be prepared to a high standard

Administrative Ideas

State government can modify its programs and processes to ensure greater harmony and protection for natural and historic resources.

- Create a **State Department of Planning**, separate from OPM
- Give private entities the ability to force the State to divest neglected State-owned properties through a “**right to contest**” (like the UK)
- Expand **documentation** of archaeological and other historic resources threatened by climate change
- Consider **preservation/conservation restrictions** for deaccessioned State properties
- **Coordinate programs and projects**, from building codes to government reviews

Education Ideas

Beyond legal change, we can all work to improve education and engagement.

- Develop **sustainability guidelines** for local historic commissioners
- **Publicize** SHPO grants for archaeological and other historic resources
- Develop **demolition-by-neglect and deconstruction model ordinances**
- Initiate a **monthly roundtable** for commissioners (wetlands, historic, planning)
- Create a **pattern book** of CT building types (e.g., the 3-family house) for new construction to foster infill, instead of sprawl
- Communicate the benefits of preservation through **journalism, social media, & schools**

