

The Governor's Proposed Budget and Historic Preservation

Preservation Pennsylvania responds to the Executive Budget

On Wednesday, Governor Rendell delivered his annual budget speech to the legislature. Given the state of the economy, everyone was braced for cuts to important programs. Indeed, some of the most important programs that fund historic preservation have been eliminated. This is a critical time in our state and our nation. With those many issues in mind, there were some positive elements to the budget that could bring about some significant and needed changes to the state.



First, using a combination of state funds and the anticipated economic stimulus funds, an emphasis on repairing our existing infrastructure is to be commended. Along with the importance of roads, bridges and water systems, we must not forget that one of the most massive elements of our infrastructure is our buildings. Our communities are filled with vacant and underutilized buildings that can be rehabilitated and put into new uses providing housing, office and

retail space and public uses. Rehabilitation of our existing building stock makes good economic sense, putting people to work and revitalizing our many older and historic communities. Representative Robert Freeman (D-136) has just introduced House Bill 42 which will provide grants and tax credits for property owners to rehabilitate historic buildings in our communities. This legislation will provide, for the first time, grants to private homeowners for repairing and rehabilitating their older homes. In addition, developers who undertake some of the larger projects using vacant commercial and industrial buildings can receive a tax credit similar to the federal historic tax credit program. Even though Pennsylvania is one of the greatest users of the federal tax credit, we are one of only a handful of states that does not have a companion program at the state level. Thirty-seven other states have already recognized the value of this important incentive. Our older and historic communities are vital to the future of our state. When we care for the buildings we already have, communities become vibrant places in which people want to live, work and play.

A second important point is the Governor's proposal to adopt a green buildings code for Pennsylvania. Long before "green building" and "sustainability" were common everyday terms, historic preservationists recognized that reusing an existing building was much more energy efficient than demolishing an existing building, hauling the debris to the landfill and building a new building. The Governor specifically mentioned that we need to decrease the amount of debris going to landfills. Preservation Pennsylvania embraces this idea and encourages legislators to remember the great value that existing buildings in



Pennsylvania offer. Historic buildings are not only an important part of our individual histories; they represent a huge amount of embodied energy. A completed building contains the energy used to manufacture or extract the building materials, transport them to the construction site and assemble them into a structure. When these buildings are demolished, that energy is wasted and additional energy is used to transport that demolition waste to the landfill. A green building code makes excellent sense and we encourage the Governor and the legislature to remember the value of our existing buildings, most of which can be easily retrofitted to be even more energy efficient, and to preserve the value of that embedded energy. The greenest building is the one that is already built.

A third point emphasized by Governor Rendell was his desire to decrease the number of school districts in Pennsylvania.

Preservation Pennsylvania has long recognized the difficulty in preserving older and existing schools in a state where so many local school boards are making independent decisions. We have had great success working with the Department of Education to allow older and historic schools to compete fairly with new construction when applying for the state reimbursements. We have many success stories where existing buildings have been beautifully rehabilitated



and are still serving as schools. Renovating an existing school maintains that "embodied" energy and can help promote better air quality by decreasing vehicle miles traveled. While many schools are being successfully rehabilitated, it does not change the fact that we are still losing our neighborhood schools at an alarming rate. While not every school can be reused and preserved, neighborhood schools are a key element of a strong community. Locating schools in walkable neighborhoods helps reduce sprawl, protects open space, decreases dependence on automobiles, fights childhood obesity and helps maintain strong communities.



We agree with the Governor that consolidation of school districts in Pennsylvania does not mean larger schools. Smaller neighborhood schools work. The most important element is to educate our school districts on the value of rehabilitating existing school buildings and the importance of locating new schools in walkable communities. School district consolidation when combined with smart school siting policies can greatly improve the success of our students and maintain the sense of community that makes Pennsylvania a strong and vibrant place.

Although we support some of the initiatives introduced in the Governor's budget, we are concerned with the proposed program cuts that will eliminate funding to the very important programs that help to protect and preserve the strong sense of place in Pennsylvania. The 2010 budget as proposed cuts many historic preservation programs completely. All PHMC grant programs funded by the state have been eliminated including Project Grants for historic preservation, local history, archives and records management and museum projects as well as General Operating Support Grants for statewide organizations, museums and historical societies. For Preservation Pennsylvania, it means a 20% loss of our operating budget and the elimination of the Technical Assistance Grant program. Funding to the State Heritage Areas has also been cut which will result in not only a loss in operating funds for each Heritage Area, but also the elimination of the funds frequently used as grants to smaller organizations in each of the twelve Heritage Areas.

The proposed program cuts are very disturbing because as a state we have consistently supported and promoted our important historic places. Pennsylvania plays a strong role in our nation's history and heritage tourism represents a major portion of our state's economy. When the Governor chooses to cut the grant funding that helps to repair, maintain and preserve our historic places and the organizations that care for them, it sends a very strong message that these places are not important. In a recent poll completed by Penn State Harrisburg, 89.7% of the respondents indicated that they experience and support Pennsylvania history by visiting historic sites. History is important to not only those visiting from outside the state, but to our own residents. Cutting programs that fund these places, especially in tough economic times, is a bad decision. Some of these organizations will not survive. Historic sites will close and these historic places will deteriorate. Hard-working people will lose their jobs. In a time when we should be capitalizing on our assets and encouraging heritage tourism, the state is turning its back on a huge opportunity to improve and maintain the very places that matter to not only tourists, but to our own citizens.



We all recognize that the next few years will be difficult, but we need to remember how much Pennsylvania's existing infrastructure - houses, schools, churches, bridges - contribute to the sense of what is great about our state.

If we continually work to repair, protect, preserve and improve what we already have, Pennsylvania can only grow stronger.

[Learn more about the 2009-2010 Executive Budget](#)

[2009-10 Proposed Budget](#)

[Governor Rendell's 2009-10 Executive Budget Address](#)

WATCH the Governor's Speech and Commentary at PCN TV

Preservation Pennsylvania, through creative partnerships, targeted educational and advocacy programs, advisory assistance, and special projects, assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize the historic resources they want to preserve for the future.

Preservation Pennsylvania (PPA) is the Commonwealth's only statewide, private non-profit, membership organization dedicated to the protection of historically and architecturally significant properties.

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