

Hon. Nancy V. Ahern
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Good evening, members of the Commission on Enhancing Agency Outcomes. Thank you for this opportunity to address you here in New Haven.

You have the daunting task of determining "efficiency and accountability in state government" as it pertains to various plans to merge agencies under several deficit-mitigation proposals. While economy in government is something I, as a Republican, applaud in principle and recognize is particularly important now, I am here to ask you please not to recommend merging the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism (CCCT, which includes in its Historic Preservation Division the State Historic Preservation Office) with the Department of Economic and Community Development or, for that matter, anything else.

I am board secretary of the New Haven Preservation Trust, which has received \$132,846, including a \$75,000 Basic Operating Support matching grant, from CCCT, and a member of the Connecticut and National Trusts for Historic Preservation. I live in a state and national historic district, where homeowners who renovate their houses are eligible for state income tax credits administered by CCCT. And I live in a city where both not-for-profit and for-profit developers also are eligible for tax credits to restore historic properties. Altogether, some \$670,148 have come here to New Haven. All have been ably administered by CCCT.

Keep in mind, these tax credits cost the state nothing until all the improvements have been satisfactorily completed – and by then the value of the property has increased, swelling the municipality's grand list and easing pressure on the state to provide local financial aid. While the renovations are being done, employment is provided to architects, contractors, builders, painters and all the workers involved in the building trades, who pay state income tax from their salaries and state sales tax from the supplies they buy. Altogether, the revenue generated by this rehabilitation and the restored historic building stock exceeds in value, both real and esthetic, the tax credit itself. This is real economy!

I suppose one might respond that the important duties of CCCT would be transferred to the new agency, but I am dubious – particularly if historic restoration has to compete in the same department with economic development. Because, even though we all know that the greenest building is the one already built, developers and preservationists frequently disagree. In fact, three previous proposals to merge the Historic Preservation Division with other departments/agencies ultimately were rejected because projects within the very department/agency itself would have had to be reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office.

Ironically, CCCT, itself a product of mergers, was only recently created after years of state study and considerable taxpayer expense. And – guess what? – it works! To disrupt everything all over again simply would be foolish. Conversely, the merger proposal offers no larger vision; no study has predicted positive outcomes; no goals have been stated; and no financial savings have been claimed.

Important to keep in mind is the fact that a State Historic Preservation Office is required by federal law. So you can't simply merge it into oblivion. And it receives funding from the federal government, unlike some federal mandates. The office administers a wide range of mandated federal and state programs that protect and preserve Connecticut's historic resources including:

- Environmental review of all federally and state funded projects,
- Statewide historic preservation planning,
- National and State Registers of Historic Places,
- Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit and three state tax credit programs,
- Grants-in-aid to municipalities and nonprofit organizations including more than \$5.5 million from the Community Investment Act,
- Certification of local town and city governments as federally designated Certified Local Governments,
- Historic structure special consideration in State Building Code and Americans with Disabilities Act,
- Lead paint abatement for historic structures,
- Planning assistance and grants to local decision-makers (elected officials, town planners, citizens),
- Statewide Historic Resource Inventory, an ever-expanding database on historic buildings, districts, and archaeological sites available to the public,
- Designation and promotion of the Connecticut African-American Freedom Trail,
- Designation of state Archaeological Preserves,
- Historic cemetery/gravestone protection.

I'm sure you agree that's an impressive list.

Part of the proposed merger plan is the layoff of six federally funded employees. The presumption is that three remaining employees could do all of the above in addition to what they're doing now. If we must consider state employee layoffs, and the Governor has said she hopes we will not, let's at least start with ones the state pays for, not the federal government.

Finally, remember that federal economic stimulus money is coming, and the federal government is still going to require review for every project to be declared "shovel ready." Unlike Connecticut, most other states are hiring more staff to deal with the reviews. A longer review lead time, because of understaffing, will be a very significant roadblock to economic recovery. If reviews can't be done in-state, we will stand in line with others for reviews by federal staff in Washington.

Please help keep Connecticut first in line for federal stimulus funding by preserving the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Nancy Taber".