Great Preservation Opportunities

In the midst of economic turmoil, protecting and reusing our built heritage continues to be good for the economy, good for the environment, and good for the quality of life. This year we present four great opportunities for preservation in Connecticut’s towns, cities, and countryside:

- A new study commissioned by the State Historic Preservation Office shows how preservation projects bring economic benefits to their communities.

- Improvements to the state’s de-accessioning process can improve the chances that surplus historic properties will continue to be used and valued.

- As the Postal Service moves to close more post offices, expansion of the state historic rehabilitation tax credit offers new options for reusing them and other historic government buildings.

- While the greenest building is one that’s already built, the energy efficiency of many historic buildings could be improved. Two new resources dispel myths and offer guidance to property owners and local officials.

Read about Great Preservation Opportunities, beginning on page 4.
The end of June marked a major milestone in our Historic Barns of Connecticut project. Todd Levine, director of the project, led researchers Charlotte Hitchcock, Manjusha Patnaik, Nathan Nietering, and an assortment of others to complete two thousand Historic Resource Inventory forms (HRIs) on barns across the state. The total number of barns surveyed by the end of June was 7,800. These achievements were celebrated by delivery of a print copy of eight volumes of the HRIs to the State Historic Preservation Office and with a festive Hoedown in the Trust’s backyard, complete with Ragweed, a bluegrass band led by restoration contractor Christopher Wuerth. Also at the Hoedown, Renard Thompson, a timber framer, demonstrated old methods of creating mortise and tenon beams, and Brenda Milkosky led a group in a miniature barn-raising.

We want to thank the generous sponsors of the Hoedown:
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• Crosskey Architects
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• Gilley Design Associates, Architects
It was a wonderful afternoon, and we’re grateful that they helped make it possible.

The beginning of July also brought a change to our staff as we welcomed Charlotte Hitchcock of New Haven as Lead Researcher for the final phase of our Historic Barns of Connecticut project, once again funded by the State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development, with funds from the Community Investment Act of the State of Connecticut. Charlotte has been involved with the barns project for a number of years, both as a volunteer and a paid consultant, and brings her skills as an architect to her role as researcher. She and Todd Levine, director of the project, will prepare 200 nominations of historic barns to the State Register of Historic Places.

Assisting them will be historic consultant Jan Cunningham, 2011 recipient of the Janet Jainschigg Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation. Jan is researching and writing the context statement for Historic Barns of Connecticut that will include a statewide history of agriculture. The criteria she develops for significant historic barn types will guide Charlotte and Todd in their selection of barns to nominate.

In July we concluded our first year of partnership with the 1772 Foundation, assisting them with their program that offered up to $15,000 in matching grants to nonprofit historical museums for exterior repair work on their historic buildings. The 1772 Foundation awarded nineteen grants for a total of $195,000. We look forward to continuing our partnership with 1772 in 2012.

As we go to press we are uncertain about the level of funding we will be able to offer for our Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants (HPTAGs). Since we receive funds from the Connecticut General Assembly, we are subject to the uncertainties of the new budget. We will let you know as soon as we know about our status.

—Helen Higgins

The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit statewide membership organization established by a special act of the State Legislature in 1975. Working with local preservation groups and individuals as well as statewide organizations, it encourages, advocates and facilitates historic preservation throughout Connecticut.

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Grants Help Preserve Historic Religious Buildings

by Nathan Nietering

Historically, houses of worship have been community icons and meeting places, and most continue to be so today. Many occupy prominent places within towns, often on the town green or at an important corner, making them integral not only to the culture of the community but to its skyline as well.

The Trust has been able to help preserve historic houses of worship in Connecticut through its Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants (HPTAGs). HPTAGs support community plans for the preservation, restoration and rehabilitation of historic buildings with funding from the Connecticut General Assembly, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and the State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development (SHPO). Recipients often use the grants to assess a building’s repair needs and to set priorities for addressing them.

Between 2003 and 2010, twenty-five religious sites received HPTAGs, including churches from several denominations, spread across much of the state. The popularity of the grants with sacred places is increasing; in the first half of 2011 another seven churches received grants, three of them repeat applicants who received funding for additional or next-phase projects.

Because of this popularity the Trust recently surveyed religious organizations that received HPTAGs, to determine the results of the grants. Of the twenty-five religious recipients, eighteen participated, ranging from small churches in sleepy rural villages to large urban churches that serve not only their own congregation but multiple social and service organizations as well.

Monetary results

It is impossible to calculate the full value of work that resulted from each grant. From the moment a conditions assessment or a capital needs survey is completed, better and more informed decisions are made in regard to each religious structure. Building committees, clerics, and janitorial staff take better and more knowledgeable care of their historic sites. Investments range from a single donated can of paint to a large stabilization or restoration project costing many hundreds of thousands of dollars and employing many experts and specialists.

From 2003 to 2010 the Connecticut Trust awarded a total of $268,527 in HPTAG funds to religious organizations. Recipients put up a total of $282,581 in matching funds, for an initial total of $551,108. But the work done under the grants made possible at least $6,771,900 in subsequent work. Adding in the matching funds, this means every dollar granted by the Connecticut Trust leveraged $26.27 in HPTAG and post-HPTAG investment, not counting volunteer hours and donated materials.

Several of the churches which received HPTAG funds have gone on to apply for or plan to apply for “bricks and mortar” funding from the SHPO’s Historic Restoration Fund. To date, the HRF has allocated at least $152,000 to religious sites that previously received HPTAG funds.

(continued on page 12)
Great Preservation Opportunities

Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation

Whether or not to reuse historic buildings often hinges on economics, say decision makers—by which they mean a comparison of the direct cost of rehabilitation versus the direct cost of new construction. A new study from the State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development (SHPO), shows that there’s more to the economics of preservation than that.

In June SHPO released Investment in Connecticut: The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation, written by Place Economics, of Washington, D.C. Donovan Rypkema, the principal of Place Economics, is considered the nation’s leading expert on the economics of historic preservation. The report concludes that preservation programs have significant economic benefits for Connecticut, including:

- creating jobs and generating revenue for the state, cities, and towns,
- leveraging scarce public dollars,
- encouraging development that creates sustainable growth, and
- adding to the community quality of towns and cities.

Of these benefits, perhaps the one of greatest concern in the current economy is job creation. The report explains that preservation work creates jobs in three ways:

- direct jobs: a carpenter working on a preservation project
- indirect jobs: the clerk at the lumber yard that sells lumber for the preservation project
- induced jobs: the auto dealer who sells a car to the carpenter for wages received for the preservation project

The report shows that preservation projects create more jobs than other activities. For every one million dollars spent, historic rehabilitation creates 14.4 direct and indirect jobs; in contrast, the same amount spent on new construction creates only 11.9 jobs. One million dollars spent on historic rehabilitation would generate $831,896 in salaries and wages; new construction, only $726,659. This means more money in the pockets of Connecticut workers and their families. In addition, part of this money comes back to the state and to towns in the form of taxes, reducing the actual public expenditure.

In Connecticut, the state and federal governments issued $450 million in state and federal rehabilitation tax credits between 2000 and 2010. That investment created 4,224 direct jobs, 782 indirect jobs and 1,554 induced jobs—a total of 6,560 jobs. The same amount of money invested in new construction would have created about one thousand fewer jobs.

Because of the labor-intensive nature of rehabilitation work, more than 80 percent of that figure—$377 million—ended up in the pockets of workers as salaries and wages. For new construction a larger portion of the total investment would have gone for materials, usually imported from out of state.

**Two cases**

For towns and cities weighing reuse of historic buildings, this study offers an important new opportunity to evaluate the broader implications of preservation decisions. Even though the up-front costs may often be higher, the promise of additional economic benefits may make rehabilitation the better option.

One example is found in Greenwich, where the town continues to pursue plans to demolish its Central Fire Station, part of the Greenwich Municipal Center National Register district (see CPN, March/April 2011). The town proposes replacing the building with a new fire station that will meet modern codes and perhaps reuse pieces from the historic structure.

According to materials from the town, a primary reason for this approach is that it will cost less—$20.5 million versus $28.9 million to update and renovate the historic building.

Based on the SHPO economic impact report, the new construction will generate 244 direct and indirect jobs and pay workers $14.9 million in wages and salaries. Renovating the building will have a much larger impact on the economy, generating 416 direct and indirect jobs and putting $24 million into workers’ pockets.

Of course there are other issues to be considered, such as the town’s promise, in 2004, to preserve the fire station as a condition for receiving zoning variances for another project. And the economic benefit figures given here are only rough approximations. But they serve as a reminder that the town needs to consider all the implications of its decision before it tears down an historic building. A careful investigation could show that rehabbing the building would provide a greater economic benefit to the community.

For private developers, bottom-line costs are the only deciding factor. Generating jobs in the community doesn’t help make a project profitable. But the potential economic benefit to a community could justify public investment in private rehabilitation projects.

In Rockville, Marc S. Levine Real Estate Interests and The Architecture and Development Studio LLC are redevelop-
ing the Roosevelt Mill as 77 apartments, to be called Loom City Lofts. The mill, a former textile factory built in 1906 and an important early example of reinforced concrete construction, is part of the Rockville National Register district. It has been vacant for many years as the town sought a viable redevelopment option.

Public investment in the project is substantial: the state Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) granted $1.2 million for predevelopment site work; the town of Vernon has approved real estate tax abatements for 25 years; and the project is slated to receive $4.8 million in federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits, as well as low-income housing tax credits, a mortgage loan from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority and an additional DECD subsidy.

This level of public investment is based on the expectation of significant benefits from the project. According to the figures in the SHPO study, the $10 million estimated construction budget should generate 144 direct and indirect jobs, and pay workers $8.3 million in salaries and wages. In addition, the renovated building will further stabilize a neighborhood that has experienced some

(continued on page 12)

"I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future."

John F. Kennedy - October 26, 1963

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Surplus State-Owned Properties

Over the years, the taxpayers of Connecticut have invested in a wide range of facilities for public uses. Designed to be functional, long-lasting, and dignified, many of these public properties are historically significant and important parts of the state’s landscape. When these facilities are no longer needed by the state, there is an opportunity to convert them to other uses.

However, the state’s de-accessioning process, which must vet potential developers while avoiding any possibility of favoritism, can be extremely time-consuming. There must be public advertisements, competitive proposals, and review by at least four bodies: the State Properties Review Board, two legislative committees, and the Attorney General’s office. All this takes time, and in the process the last agency to use the property is expected to maintain it—needless to say, that often is not a priority.

Some important sites have suffered from drawn-out processes. It took so long to find a developer for the Preston portion of the former Norwich State Hospital that most of the historic hospital buildings are now considered too deteriorated to use. There are similar fears at the Seaside Center, in Waterford, where the state’s preferred developer asked the town to modify its zoning regulations so he could demolish historic buildings if he believes they are too deteriorated (see CPN, July/August 2011). Waterford turned down the developer’s request, but that he made it highlights the issue.

Unfortunately, the state de-accessioning process does not take historic status into account. Two properties recently put up for proposals—the Litchfield Jail, in Litchfield, and the Nathan Hale Hotel, in Willimantic—are listed on the National Register, but none of the state’s materials mention that (they do disclose that the jail property is zoned “historic business”). Reporting that a property has historic designation and might qualify for rehabilitation tax credits or other benefits, could help to attract bidders.

Deaccessioned historic properties also receive no protection from the state. An employee responsible for overseeing property disposal felt that preservation restrictions would make finding buyers too difficult and would reduce sales prices. “We’re fortunate to sell anything as it is,” he said. “Our goal is to sell the property and get as much money as possible for the taxpayers.”

What’s next? The Department of Public Works is currently preparing to put the former Mystic Oral School, in Groton, up for bids. The school, which closed in 1980, sits on a large, mostly wooded, property overlooking the Mystic River. The campus includes several large brick buildings constructed between 1911 and 1940 and
good examples of institutional Colonial Revival design. As a long-running public institution and one of the last publicly operated educational facilities for the deaf that taught lip-reading rather than sign language as a primary means of communication, the school appears to be eligible for State or National Register listing.

Over the years, the people of Connecticut have invested in substantial and well-designed public institutions, many of which are significant works of architecture and significant elements of the social and governmental landscape. The public investment these sites represent consists not only of the money expended to purchase land and construct facilities—often of a higher quality than similar private institutions. It also consists of the public will and effort invested in creating public institutions, and in designing and planning them to operate efficiently and to be visible expressions of the worthy ends which they embodied.

In order to protect this substantial investment, several improvements can be made to the State’s de-accessioning process:

Advertisements should disclose any historic designation and describe potential consequences of designation, such as local historic district regulation, eligibility for tax benefits, and potential flexibility in meeting code requirements.

The State Historic Preservation Office should review properties to be sold and where appropriate put in place preservation restrictions to protect significant buildings, structures, and landscapes. As an alternative, towns could be encouraged to create local historic districts or local historic properties, with assistance from the State Historic Preservation Office and cooperation by the state agency responsible for the property.

Towns should receive assistance in considering historic character in deciding whether to exercise their right of first refusal. The Connecticut Circuit Riders or the State Historic Preservation Office could deliver this.

Properties to be sold should receive adequate maintenance during the disposition process. In some cases this may require more than minimal maintenance. Agencies need adequate resources to do this. Or, DPW could take responsibility for properties in the disposition process, using a percentage taken from the sale of any state property to create a maintenance fund.

For more information:
Department of Public Works, Sale of State Property: go to www.ct.gov/dpw/ and click on “Surplus Property.” [Note: DPW is currently being consolidated with the Department of Administrative Services.]
Preserving Post Offices

In the face of operating deficits, the United States Postal Service has announced plans to close hundreds of post offices across the country. In many cases, the loss of these important institutions will hurt community life, and residents and local officials are trying to find ways to keep the offices open. But it’s clear that many post offices will close, and communities have an opportunity now to encourage that the buildings continue to serve the public good.

Post offices are often important local landmarks. Many are on the National Register, either individually or as part of historic districts. Many more could qualify for National or State Register listing. They serve important roles as local symbols of the federal government and as places where citizens meet, exchange news, and carry out the business of being a community.

The rapid growth of electronic communications and the proliferation of private delivery companies have changed the Postal Service’s business prospects and led to the announced closings, predominantly station and branch offices. In Connecticut, sites being considered include the Barnum and Noble branches, in Bridgeport; Blue Hills and Old State House, in Hartford; Baybrook, Kilby and Westville, in New Haven; Trolley Square in East Haven; and Glenbrook and West Avenue in Stamford.

In other cases, the USPS is consolidating operations and merging offices. In Greenwich, the main post office was recently sold to a private developer, and postal operations will move to a smaller site nearby.

In Norwich, the Postal Service plans to move most of its downtown functions to an existing facility three miles out of town, on the Bozrah town line, and sell the downtown building, which was built in 1905 and is listed on the National Register, both individually and as part of the Downtown Norwich district. Its lobby is decorated with a New Deal mural titled “Taking Up Arms—1776,” painted in 1940 by George Kanelous.

(continued on page 13)
New Resources on Sustainability

The greenest building is one that’s already built,” say preservationists. But there still is a need to improve the efficiency of many old buildings, or to plan renovations that conserve natural resources, and it’s not always easy to know what is really sustainable. Two new publications offer information and assistance to anyone who wants to make their historic green buildings even greener.

The National Park Service has released *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and Illustrated Guidelines on Sustainability for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. The 34-page booklet offers specific guidelines, with illustrations, for sustainable rehabilitation of historic buildings. The guidelines cover a wide range of topics, from maintenance to windows to solar technology and water efficiency, indicating Recommended and Not Recommended treatments.

The guidelines point out that the first step in enhancing the sustainability of an historic building is to understand how it was designed to operate: “Historic building construction methods and materials often maximized natural sources of heating, lighting and ventilation to respond to local climatic conditions. The key to a successful rehabilitation project is to identify and understand any lost original and existing energy-efficient aspects of the historic building…”

A second publication is *Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy and Historic Preservation: A Guide for Historic District Commissions*, prepared by Clean Air-Cool Planet, a nonprofit organization dedicated to finding practical solutions to global climate change. The group, which has an office in New Canaan, has a particular interest in historic preservation and sustainability.

The first section of Clean Air-Cool Planet’s book is specifically addressed to local historic district commissions, and offers information on integrating preservation with other local efforts for sustainability and energy efficiency. The second section provides practical information for homeowners and can be used within or outside of designated historic districts. As an appendix, the book includes sustainability guidelines from Nantucket.

Both publications can be downloaded at no charge from the organizations’ websites:


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East Haddam. The state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) still hopes to find someone to operate the historic Sunrise resort in the Moodus section of East Haddam.

Founded in 1916, Sunrise was among the largest of the 30-plus summer resorts that flourished in Moodus, giving the area the nickname, “The Catskills of Connecticut.” Over the years, the camp went by many names—Elm Camp, Ted Hilton’s, Frank Davis’. It offered swimming, canoeing, games, social activities, and, of course, food. A brochure from the 1950s promised “Outdoor Sports, Peaceful Rest, Wonderful Food.”

DEEP acquired the 144-acre property in 2008, in order to protect the land from development. The state hoped to lease the site to a private operator, who would continue to run it as an adjunct to nearby Machimoodus State Park. However, none of the proposals submitted proved feasible.

Since then, the property has been left to decay. Vandals burned a barn, stole copper pipes and air conditioners, and ransacked buildings. Weeds have grown up, and buildings are deteriorating. A study done for DEEP by Fuss and O’Neill engineers concludes that many of the 82 structures on the property do not meet modern codes and would have to be demolished or substantially renovated.

Susan W. Frechette, deputy commissioner of DEEP, says that the department plans to put out a new request for proposals. For more on the resorts of Moodus, visit: http://www.simonpure.com/resorts.

Hartford. Representative John Larson has re-launched the effort to make Coltsville a national park. On July 12 the Hartford-area legislator introduced H. R. 2504, the Coltsville National Historical Park Act of 2011.

Larson introduced a similar bill in 2010, but it did not pass, in large part because the National Park Service did not endorse the proposal, based on concerns about the stalled Coltsville development and the developer’s financial difficulties. Now, a new developer is making progress toward straightening out the mess, and the Park Service is expected to support the proposal.

As with the earlier version, the new bill sets certain criteria to be met before the park can be formally designated, including the donation of land and space within the East Armory for park administration and

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visitor services, a written agreement governing land use within the park, and assurance of the financial viability of developers operating within the park boundaries.

The result will be an example of a new type of national park, one that has been increasingly popular in recent years. Not simply federal land and exhibition buildings, the Coltsville park will outline an historic area that will contain the mixed-used development already going on in the armory buildings. Apartments, businesses, restaurants and other attractions will share the neighborhood with the park facilities, each generating activity to reinforce the other.

The proposed park has two goals: commemoration and economic revitalization. “The Coltsville National Historical Park Act of 2011 is designed to preserve the important story of Samuel Colt and boost our economy by revitalizing downtown Hartford,” Larson and Senator Joseph Lieberman wrote, in an op-ed piece in the Hartford Courant. “A recent National Parks Conservation Association study found every federal dollar invested in national parks generates at least $4 in benefits to state and local economies. Connecticut deserves this boost.”


Jet Lowe, Historic American Engineering Record, 2005

Historic steam engines in the East Armory Building, would be among the attractions of a national park at Coltsville.

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Grants Help Preserve Historic Churches, cont’d from page 3

The benefits of planning

The benefits are not just monetary. Church representatives repeatedly said how helpful it was to have a realistic, educated, and prioritized document from which to begin making informed decisions. Too often, property committees are aware of their buildings’ many needs—from window caulking to serious masonry re-pointing—but they have no idea what to do first. In many cases, new coats of paint were being applied, so to speak, while less obvious structural problems were going ignored because they were not immediately obvious. By having a planning document, building committees could prioritize work and think about how best to raise funds for it. In a few cases, having a planning document led to the creation of a scheduled maintenance plan for the church.

Receiving grants gave churches both reassurance and accountability. Attention from the Trust shows each church that its problems and goals are important. And receiving funds from an external source forces a church to follow through. The Trust’s funds force action. They also force awareness. Problems no longer can fester unobserved. With a planning document or assessment in hand, a building committee can honestly and openly make the congregation aware of the situation.

The Connecticut Trust’s HPTAG program is helping religious sites across the state. Without these funds, many of these projects would have been impossible. These funds lead to the restoration and revitalization of not only the church buildings themselves, but also the communities of which they are a part.

Considering that more than $25 is invested for every $1 of initial Connecticut Trust HPTAG funding, the total investment generated by the HPTAGs awarded since the program’s inception is staggering. The program is actively contributing to the creation of jobs and investment in historic sites in Connecticut.

Economic Impacts, cont’d from page 5

Nathan Nietering is a recent graduate of the Historic Preservation Program at Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti. In addition to the HPTAG study, he has served as a consultant on the Trust’s statewide survey of historic barns.

For more information on the Trust’s Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants, visit http://cttrust.org/index.cgi/119.

The foundation of Christ Episcopal Church, Sharon, has been damaged by water infiltration. A grant from the Connecticut Trust helped the church to plan repairs to the building and regrading to eliminate the problem.

Norwich city officials have expressed concern about the fate of the downtown post office building and questioned the ability of downtown residents to get to the remote new location. They, like officials in many other communities, hope to keep their full-service facility, but it is unlikely that many of the targeted offices will remain open.

However, closing a post office, even a branch, takes time, so communities will have an opportunity to make plans for reusing significant buildings. One thing they can do is initiate historic designation to allow buildings to qualify for preservation incentives. The recently expanded Connecticut historic rehabilitation tax credits represent a significant new opportunity for renovating historic post offices. The credits originally were conceived to encourage the conversion of historic commercial or industrial buildings to residential or mixed residential and commercial use. This year the General Assembly approved language broadening the types of buildings which qualify for the credit to include, among other things, government buildings.

Communities also have time to consider what kind of use would compliment surrounding areas, to make sure proper zoning is in place. And they can alert potential developers so they can have plans in place when buildings become available. The Connecticut Circuit Riders are available to help towns and cities to ensure that historic post office buildings continue to serve their communities.
**New Haven.** Three once-threatened buildings on Crown Street have been successfully renovated as apartments and commercial space. Constructed between 1875 and 1910 for stores, offices or warehouse space, they are contributing structures in the Ninth Square National Register district, an area that has seen a successful revitalization effort since the 1990s.

But while new residents and shopping opportunities gradually filled the surrounding blocks, these structures remained empty. In 2008, the Trust listed them as a Great Preservation Opportunity, after developer David Nyberg began demolition, supposedly for renovation but without a building permit. Nyberg had to stop work, leaving the buildings in unstable condition.

PMC Property Group, from Philadelphia, took over the project and in July unveiled the newly-rehabbed buildings. They now contain 65 apartments plus one street-level commercial space. As of mid-July, four apartments had been rented.

With funding in part through historic rehabilitation tax credits, PMC restored the exteriors of the buildings. They repaired surviving original windows or, where necessary, replicated them—a crucial element to restoring the lively appearance of the facades. Inside, the apartments boast many original materials, such as wood floors and beams and brick walls. Each unit is a bit different from the others, giving them a level of individuality not found in new construction.

Members of the New Haven Preservation Trust and the New Haven Urban Design League Local, who had rallied in 2008 to secure and protect the buildings, praised the results.

“Aside from the fact that these buildings have been brought back from the brink of destruction ... it’s also a great win for everyone in the city with more productive properties and more people living downtown,” said Pedro Soto, president of the New Haven Preservation Trust.  

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Chester-Hadlyme and Glastonbury-Rocky Hill.
Connecticut’s two historic river ferries apparently escaped the threat of being closed down in August, but their long-term future remains uncertain.

Governor Dannell Malloy included eliminating ferry service as part of a package of possible cuts to make up the state’s budget deficit after state employee unions rejected a concessions package that was supposed to save the state $1.6 billion dollars. When the unions agreed to the concessions package on August 18, the Department of Transportation (DOT) announced that ferry service would be reinstated.

Both ferries, one operating between Chester and the Hadlyme section of Haddam and the other between Glastonbury and Rocky Hill, date to colonial times. The Glastonbury-Rocky Hill ferry has been running since 1655 and is thought to be the oldest continuously operating ferry in the nation. The Chester-Hadlyme ferry has operated since 1769.

Three of the four ferry landings are part of National Register districts, and the routes of both are parts of state-designated scenic roads, Routes 148 and 160.

The closure of the ferries, originally set for August 25, inspired widespread opposition. Proponents argued that the ferries are integral and important parts of the state’s transportation network, used by commuters, emergency vehicles, and tourists. They also pointed to a statute that requires DOT to operate and maintain both ferries.

The ferries lose about $500,000 per year. Instead of eliminating service, supporters suggested raising fares or selling advertising space on the ferry boats.

In July, the town of Lyme filed suit to prevent the closure of the Chester-Hadlyme ferry, arguing that the state had not gone through the hearing and public information process required to close a section of a state route or make changes to a scenic road.

Judge Henry J. Cohn dismissed the suit in early August. Soon after, DOT filed papers to begin the hearing process, with a public comment period lasting until September 5. As CPN goes to press, the hearings are still scheduled to take place, but the focus is changed to finding more secure funding for the ferries.

Updates on the ferry story can be found at http://hadlymehall.com/index.html.
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Standing in Mark Twain’s Footprints

Infinity Hall, a restored opera house in Norfolk’s National Register district, gained visibility this summer as the site of a seven-part concert series broadcast by Connecticut Public Television. The Shingle Style building, constructed in 1883, originally contained shops on the ground floor and a public hall above—a common arrangement in the 19th century. The design included shingles in a variety of shapes, quirky windows scattered seemingly at random across the walls, and a tower with a curvy roof and a little balcony hollowed out of one corner. During the years, the building went downhill, the hall sat empty, and the decaying tower had to be removed. Fortunately, it was renovated in 2008. Performances take place once more on the original proscenium stage, a restaurant occupies the ground floor, and the reconstructed tower once again is a local landmark.

For “Infinity Hall Live,” eight concerts were broadcast on CPTV on Fridays in July and August. The performers clearly appreciated the historic space. “I love playing rooms like this,” said folk-rock artist Jonathan Edwards.

“Acoustic music sounds best in a place like this. And these wooden rooms take on a musicality of their own.”

For musician Ed Kowalczyk, it was the room’s association with great performers of the past: “I’m just excited to be able to stand on the stage where Mark Twain performed… How often does a guy get to do that in his career?”

Infinity Hall, in Norfolk, was featured in a new public television concert series.