Preserving Street Trees

All across Connecticut, citizens are protesting drastic tree pruning and removal by the state’s major electric companies, United Illuminating (UI) and Connecticut Light and Power (CL&P), along streets and roadways. Since 2011, a series of devastating storms has downed trees and interrupted electric, telephone, and cable service to customers all across Connecticut, leaving them in the cold and dark. In response to the storms, CL&P has expanded its use of what it calls “Enhanced Tree Trimming” (ETT) and engaged in more aggressive tree cutting, which it calls “Enhanced Tree Removal” (ETR). UI is also beginning to use ETT and ETR instead of its prior pruning standards, which left U- or V-shaped openings in the trees for the lines. The results of this pruning could be awkward, but it did at least preserve a tree canopy.

While the objections have for the most part been couched in terms of beauty, property values or environmental impact, trees are an integral part of Connecticut’s historic landscape as well. Since the late 18th century citizens have planted trees to line streets and roads, frame buildings, and ornament landscapes (see page 16). From the elms of the New Haven Green to sugar maples along country lanes, trees represent...
Connecticut Trust Launches New Revolving Fund

Preservation takes money. Money to buy historic properties, money to repair or renovate them, money to maintain them. With the receipt of a $250,000 grant from the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority (CHFA), the Connecticut Trust has officially launched a new program to provide money for preservation projects, the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation Revolving Fund.

The revolving fund is designed to support preservation in two ways. The first is by purchasing options—to hold historic properties until a long-term preservation solution and a preservation-minded buyer can be found. The second way is making bridge loans for renovating historic buildings, often in cases where the developers will receive grants or tax credits once the work is finished. In either case, as money is received back, as borrowers repay loans or purchasers reimburse options costs, money will be returned to the fund to be used again and again.

The Connecticut Trust is building the fund with a combination of grants and equity. The grant from CHFA is dedicated to loans for projects that will create affordable housing units in historic buildings. Once the Trust sells the Thomas Lyman house (see page 7), the proceeds also will go into the revolving fund for other kinds of preservation projects.

The Trust has developed its revolving fund with advice and grants from The 1772 Foundation, which has been fostering preservation revolving funds across the country by providing support for feasibility studies, regional meetings, the publication of a National Trust “bluebook” on revolving funds, fellowships to study revolving funds, a website devoted to the topic, and preservation-focused real estate development training.

According to Mary Anthony, the 1772 Foundation’s executive director, “Unlike the traditional preservationists with whom we worked, who reacted to development, revolving fund directors were taking on the role of real estate developer; buying or optioning historic properties, ensuring their ongoing protection through preservation easements, restoring them and then putting them back into the hands of private owners to steward.”

This ability to initiate action, rather than wait for threats to arise, gives revolving funds the potential to re-shape the preservation movement. In addition to well-established revolving funds like those operating in North Carolina, in Macon, Georgia, or in Providence, Rhode Island, a number of state and local preservation organizations are considering starting new funds.

For the Connecticut Trust, this is the second try at establishing a revolving fund. The Trust had a fund in the 1980s, but it fell victim to an economic downturn that struck just after the Trust bought an endangered property. This time, the fund’s guidelines are more narrowly drawn to reduce risk. Importantly, the Trust does not intend to buy and hold properties, as it did in the ‘80s.

As CPN goes to press, Connecticut Circuit Rider Brad Schide is actively working in several towns and cities to

continued on page 8

The Connecticut Trust’s new revolving fund will help make it possible to renovate more historic buildings like this New Britain apartment house for affordable housing.
From the Executive Director

In spite of weekly snowstorms, the Connecticut Trust has continued to work for historic places throughout Connecticut. This winter has seen the launch of our new historic preservation revolving fund (see page 2); our two newest projects, Creative Places and Making Places, are now well underway; and the Board and staff are beginning work on updating our strategic plan.

When Barbara Bowen joined the Board of Trustees in 2001, she brought to us her experience serving on the Oxford, England, Preservation Trust and the Southbury, Connecticut, Historic District Commission. Quickly we realized she had a gift for library work. Barbara singlehandedly re-catalogued our in-house library, creating a new numbering system and removing books to appropriate places.

Soon thereafter she offered to help us fill a major gap in our archiving work: indexing Connecticut Preservation News. Every few months or so for the past eleven years we have received slips of notepad paper filled with small writing that indexed current CPN articles. This invaluable effort gives us a complete archive for our newsletter, now in its 37th year of continuous publication, and allows us to search for past articles, find what themes we emphasized when, which buildings were endangered in 2004, for example, that still are today, and so on. Barbara retired from this task in February. We thank her very much for all her hard work on our behalf and wish her the best.

Speaking of publications, the Trust recently engaged Richard Selden of Sand Fiddler Marketing to carry out a basic communications audit for us. In addition to Connecticut Preservation News, the Trust offers members and others a variety of preservation information from four web sites, a Facebook page and a Twitter account. Through the audit, we want to learn how effectively we are communicating with you and others: are we having any impact on the way people view preservation in their communities? Are we building a strong constituency for preservation in Connecticut? What is the best way to communicate? We believe the CPN is a very valued and valuable publication but we also know that many now rely on social media to get information. How can we best use social media? This is a question that many nonprofits are struggling with.

Richard’s report will aid the Board of Trustees as it embarks on developing a strategic plan for the Trust for 2014-1017.

The Lyman house in Durham, which was a gift to the Trust from Lillian Hardy of New York City, is still for sale. We are looking for an appreciative buyer and hope you will spread the word among your friends. The house is such an architectural and historic treasure, as acknowledged locally in Durham history and nationally by its individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places. A couple of months ago, two landscape designers, Lucy van Liew of Madison and Christine Darnell of Chester, volunteered to create a design plan for the land around the house. We are looking forward to their ideas. Let us know if you are interested in seeing their plans.

—Helen Higgins

Upcoming Meetings

Connecticut Historic Preservation Council
April 2, 2014, at 9:30 a.m.
May 7, 2014, at 9:30 a.m.
All meetings take place at the State Historic Preservation Office Department of Economic and Community Development Main Conference Room
1 Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor
Hartford, Connecticut
For more information call
(860) 256-2800

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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IRS Clarifies Tax Credit Rules

In December, the Internal Revenue Service issued a new guidance memo which clarifies the rules for investors in federal historic rehabilitation tax credit projects. A revised version followed in January.

The clarification resolved uncertainty which followed a court ruling in August, 2012, disallowing credits to an investor in a tax credit project in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Because of that ruling, investors, not knowing what standards they had to meet, avoided tax credit projects, leaving many in limbo.

One of those projects involved the former Connecticut National Bank building in Hartford (1967), also known as 777 Main Street. The Fairfield architectural and development firm Becker + Becker plans to convert the 26-story tower to apartments. Bruce Becker, the company’s principal, had hoped to have the building ready for occupancy last summer, but it was put on hold by uncertainty over the tax credits; now Becker says he’s looking for occupancy by Labor Day, if all goes well. The $78 million project depends on an expected $15 million in federal and state tax credits to succeed.

In the Atlantic City case, the appellate court ruled that one investor could not receive federal tax credits because the investor was not a bona-fide partner in the project, since the terms of the deal guaranteed a payout whether or not the project made a profit. To address that issue, the new IRS guidelines spell out specific criteria for investing in historic tax credit projects. The rules provide a “safe harbor”—that is, clear minimum requirements to pass muster. It is possible, but not certain, that an investor could stretch those limits and still qualify for a credit.

The Historic Tax Credit Coalition, an organization of professionals who work with the federal historic rehabilitation tax credits, consulted with the IRS to draw up the new regulations. The group is seeking further clarification about certain questions but hopes the guidelines will make it possible for developers and investors to go ahead with stalled projects and start new ones.

For more information on rehabilitation tax credits, visit the State Historic Preservation Office website, www.cultureandtourism.org, and click on “Historic Preservation.”

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In October, the Connecticut Trust approved Historic Preservation Technical Assistance Grants, and Maintenance & Repair Grants totaling $165,000 to ten municipalities and nonprofit organizations. The grants will make possible a minimum initial investment of $330,000 in these historic sites.

The grants, intended to encourage and support community efforts in planning for the preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic buildings and places, are part of the Trust’s technical assistance program, in collaboration with and with generous funding from the Connecticut General Assembly and the State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development, through the Community Investment Act. The grants went to:

**ABCD, Inc., and The Mary & Eliza Freeman Center for History and Community, Bridgeport:** $20,000 for an Historic Structure Report and a repair and stabilization plan for the Mary and Eliza Freeman houses (1848, NR).

**Holy Ghost Russian Orthodox Church, Bridgeport:** $20,000 for a condition assessment of the neo-Byzantine style church (1937).

**City of Derby:** $20,000 for design development drawings for restoration of the Sterling Opera House (1889, NR).

**Town of Durham:** $20,000 for pre-construction planning to incorporate two historic houses (1883 and 1877-1881; NR) into plans for a public safety complex.

**Town of Hamden:** $5,000 for stabilization and roof repairs at the Maselli Farm barn (c.1890, SR).

**City of Hartford and Elizabeth Park Conservancy:** $15,000 for maintenance and repair to the Elizabeth Park caretaker’s cottage (NR).

**Stowe Center, Hartford:** $20,000 for architectural and engineering services for environmental and climate control improvements and fire suppression for the Harriet Beecher Stowe House (1871, NHL).

**Town of Newtown and the Edmond Town Hall Board of Managers:** $15,000 for window repair and energy efficiency upgrades at Newtown Town Hall (1929; NR).

**Town of South Windsor:** $15,000 for a feasibility study of the Priest Farm property (1823ff) to accommodate the South Windsor FOOD alliance.

**Town of Weston and Friends of Lachat:** $15,000 for exterior repairs to the David Godfrey farmhouse at Lachat Farm (1770, SR).

For more information on grants, please contact Jane Montanaro at (203) 562-6312 or jmontanaro@cttrust.org.
NORWICH. ▶
The downtown post office (1905, 1938; NR) will remain open, the United States Postal Service announced in late January. For three years the postal service has been pursuing plans to sell or lease the building, move most postal operations out of town, and operate only a small retail operation in the city center. Officials credited the reversal to the high cost of constructing a new facility and the expected difficulty of selling the old building—purely financial reasons. Community members hope the postal service now will make needed repairs to the building, which includes New Deal murals.

SOMERS. ▶
The town Board of Zoning Appeals turned down an application by CVS pharmacy for variances that would allow it to build a big new store with a drive-through window, demolishing a Greek Revival house that is part of the Somers National Register district. Afterward, CVS withdrew all interest in the site. However, the house now is vacant and the owner could try to
raze it to make the site more attractive for other development. Occupying one corner of the town’s main intersection, it’s a prominent spot and important to the character of the historic district. Fortunately, there is space for redevelopment that would reuse the historic house in conjunction with other buildings.

**MILFORD.**

Lauralton Hall school has begun renovating an historic carriage barn (1864, NR) to be the school’s Center for the Visual and Performing Arts. Exterior restoration began in September, 2013, with roofing and masonry repairs. Antoinette Iadarola, the school’s president, said, “We look at this restoration project as an outgrowth of our school’s environmental sustainability efforts. Our students are very focused on being green and this is just one way of reusing materials and resources.” Funding has included Barns and Technical Assistance grants from the Connecticut Trust.

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**FOR SALE**

**Thomas Lyman house, Durham Connecticut, c.1790**

Located on 13 bucolic acres in historic Durham, Connecticut, the Thomas Lyman house is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The landmark house boasts 13 large rooms with high ceilings, complimented by 9 fireplaces and impressive woodwork. 4,150 s.f., 5 bedrooms, 3.2 baths, 2 ponds, an outbuilding and tennis court. **$599,000**

Sale of the Lyman house will provide capital for the Connecticut Trust Revolving Fund.

For information on the house call the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation at (203) 562-6312 or visit www.cttrust.org.

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STONINGTON.  ▼(below)
One of the country’s oldest surviving public works, the stone jetty extending into Stonington Harbor could see repairs soon. It was built in 1828 and fostered Stonington’s development as a port, by protecting the harbor from winds and surges. Now the Borough of Stonington and the Stonington Harbor Management Commission are looking into repairing the jetty, which was severely damaged by the hurricane of 1938. The first step is to determine who exactly owns it.

WETHERSFIELD.  ▼(bottom)
The town planning and zoning commission has approved conversion of the former Masonic lodge (1922, NR) to a two-family home. The lodge, located at the main intersection of Old Wethersfield—across from the Congregational meeting house—is one of three key underused properties that were the subject of a Vibrant Communities Initiative grant from the Connecticut Trust in 2012.

GS Farmer

Charles Clark

Revolving Fund, conc’d from page 2
identify the first revolving fund projects. Using money from CHFA, these projects will be no-interest loans to developers who are undertaking certified rehabilitation of mixed-use or purely residential structures. Since the State historic rehabilitation tax credit program does not issue a voucher until construction is completed and approved, the loans will provide gap capital for construction. The maximum loan will be $150,000 with a term of up to 24 months.

For more information on the Connecticut Trust revolving fund, visit www.cttrust.org or call Brad Schide at (860) 463-0193.

THE 1772 FOUNDATION

2014 Connecticut Historic Preservation Matching Grants

in cooperation with the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

The 1772 Foundation is offering matching grants of up to $15,000 for maintenance and repair of historic buildings, including exterior painting, and surface restoration; installation or upgrade of fire detection, lightning protection or security systems; porch, roof, or window repair or restoration; foundation or sill repair or replacement; and chimney or masonry pointing.

Eligible applicants are 501c3 nonprofit organizations (not churches or schools). To be considered, send a one-page letter of inquiry to 1772@cttrust.org and use “1772 Foundation” in the subject line.

Letters of inquiry will be accepted until May 2, 2014

For more information visit www.cttrust.org or call Jane Montanaro, (203) 562-6312

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The newest version of the LEED system for certifying sustainable construction has made a big step toward in addressing the environmental strengths of historic structures.

LEED, which stands for “Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design,” is a system of quantifying and recognizing sustainability in architecture. Introduced in 2000 and updated periodically, LEED is operated and managed by the U.S. Green Building Council, a private, nonprofit organization.

In the past, preservationists have criticized LEED for concentrating too much on new construction in its point structure and not adequately recognizing environmental benefits of reusing existing buildings.

As Mark Huppert of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Preservation Green Lab reports in the National Trust’s Preservation Leadership Forum blog, LEED v4, released in late 2013, has made substantial progress in addressing this criticism. The revised system adds recognition for historic preservation and adaptive use. For instance it automatically awards points to buildings with historic designation—national, state, or local.

Potentially even more preservation-friendly is a new focus on rating buildings by actual energy performance, rather than pre-determined point systems. This allows building owners and operators to take advantage of historic design features that supported heating, cooling and lighting before piped gas or wired electricity were available—what one preservation consultant calls “original design intelligence.” The benefits of such features can be difficult to generalize, since old buildings differ from each other in varying ways, but they can be measured and, where they meet the goals of LEED, officially recognized.

While these changes provide long-delay recognition of the environmental benefits of older buildings, Huppert points out that they also put a burden on preservationists to make sustainability an integral part of any historic preservation activities.

The challenge for preservationists, Huppert writes, “is that the impacts from resources extracted to operate a building vastly outweigh those from the construction period.” In other words, renovating an existing building uses fewer resources than building a new one, but the energy required to operate a building has a much bigger effect on the environment, and that is often a weak point for older buildings. He concludes that, if preservationists really want to claim that “the greenest building is one that is already built,” then we must put much more effort into updating and retrofitting historic buildings for energy-efficient operation while maintaining their historic character.
The Connecticut Trust’s Preservation Circle Members for 2013

The following people, organizations, and companies gave $100 or more to the Connecticut Trust during 2013. We are grateful for their support.

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$100,000 and above
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development
The 1772 Foundation

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Connecticut Humanities Council

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Irwin Belk Education Foundation
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Close-ups, cont’d from page 16

re-design of its town center. Citizens identified and marked the surviving Wolcott sycamores and replaced other random trees with uniform lines of elms to recreate what was considered to be the town’s authentic Colonial appearance. This effort continued through the century: by 1968, when only the one sycamore survived, the Garden Club marked it with a plaque at its base and replaced the others, bringing the number back up to thirteen.

The garden club’s plaque labels the sycamore as the Connecticut tree, an identification that goes back at least to the early 20th century—it seems more likely that Wolcott simply planted thirteen trees to honor the thirteen states. What’s important is the tree does survive—a living link to our nation’s founding, a highlight in a scenic townscape, and a pioneer of civic improvement.

Today, as utility companies rush to protect power lines, the Wolcott sycamore also stands for what we have to lose. Its survival for more than two centuries pushes us to find the right balance between practical needs of telephone and electric service and the equally real needs to remember our history and improve the places where we live.

—Christopher Wigren

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generations of efforts to shape and improve the state’s landscape.

The work has had an immediate impact on historic areas. In Wethersfield, the town stopped work in August, 2013, after CL&P removed several trees on the Broad Street Green and drastically pruned trees on Hartford Avenue, both in Wethersfield’s local historic district. In Pawcatuck, residents protested CL&P’s plant to remove 50 trees along Moss Street. In Hamden, Mayor Scott Jackson (a trustee of the Connecticut Trust) asked UI to postpone a pilot tree-trimming program after hundreds turned out to oppose the program.

The new standards, ETT and ETR, establish a rigid no-grow zone within eight feet on either side of power lines and extending from the ground to the sky. Any branches or trees within that zone must be removed.

A wide range of advocates, from environmentalists to business owners to preservationists and landscape architects, object that the new guidelines are an overreaction, a drastic, one-size-fits-all approach that fails to take into account the health of individual trees, the differences among species, and effects of trees’ surroundings.

If carried out, activists maintain, the work could drastically harm the character of Connecticut’s streets, towns, and landscapes. In New Haven, the Garden Club of New Haven estimates that the UI plan could result in the loss of about half the city’s street trees.
The Garden Club has taken a leading role in pushing for a more nuanced approach. Mary-Michelle Hirschoff, the Garden Club’s spokesperson (and a former chairman of the Connecticut Trust), points to the State Vegetation Management Task Force’s recommendations, which call for a long-term transition to what it calls a “right tree/right place” roadside forest, one that takes into account the species, condition, growth rate, and location of trees and focuses on removing trees that actually are hazardous because they are dead, extensively decayed or structurally weak.

Few preservation measures directly address street trees, but other means are available. For trees in the public right-of-way, abutting property owners must be notified of proposed tree pruning or removal and have the right to object to the tree warden, for town roads, or to the Department of Transportation, for state highways. The property owner or the electric utility can appeal the tree warden’s or DOT’s decision to the Public Utility Regulatory Authority (PURA). For trees on private property, owners have an absolute right to refuse consent for pruning or removal if they disagree with the company’s plans, except where trees or branches are clearly hazardous—touching wires, for instance.

In addition, the power companies are required to work with town tree wardens, who can refuse permits for removing or pruning trees within public rights-of-way, again subject to appeals to PURA. The Garden Club of New Haven recommends that citizens ask tree wardens to post all trees scheduled for removal or substantial pruning and hold public meetings on planned work.

Finally, towns and cities may consider passing ordinances to govern tree pruning or removal by utilities. In New Haven, alder Michael Stratton has introduced such an ordinance.

In response to public objections, UI delayed implementation of its plans. At the company’s request, PURA will hold technical meetings with both UI and CL&P, as well as public information sessions on March 5 and 6. PURA is expected to issue a final decision soon after the meetings to establish its standards for tree pruning and removal by the utilities.

“The issue is not that we have to choose between keeping trees or protecting the power supply,” says the Garden Club’s Ms. Hirschoff. “It’s really a question of balance—protecting power reliability and retaining the scenic and historic character of our cities and towns, as well as the many other economic, environmental, societal, and health benefits of trees.” It will be PURA’s task to find the proper balance among these public values.

For more information, including summary of the law and recommendations for citizen action, visit http://www.gardenclubofnewhaven.org/.
A Monumental Tree
The Wolcott Sycamore, Litchfield

Towering over Litchfield’s South Street, the massive sycamore tree is a monumental presence—and fittingly so, since it was indeed intended to be a monument. It’s the last survivor of thirteen sycamores planted in 1779 by Oliver Wolcott, Jr. to honor the thirteen states then fighting for independence from Great Britain.

Although there were isolated earlier examples, planting trees other than for their fruit or nuts was uncommon in the 18th century. This was especially true in recently-settled towns like Litchfield, where the grueling effort to clear the forests was still a living memory. A local legend quotes some of Wolcott’s neighbors as complaining, “We no sooner get the woods cleared, than you start fetching them back.” To those early residents, scholar William Butler writes, “treeless streets represented order and man’s dominance over the landscape.”

Despite the complaints, Wolcott’s trees were the harbinger of a new attitude toward nature and a new spirit of improvement that would soon see rows of trees lining the streets and greens of most Connecticut towns and cities, and even along country roads. Within just a few decades, tree-lined streets became one of the most well-known features of the New England landscape, celebrated by poets and painters and carefully maintained and defended by generations of residents.

In the early 20th century, tree-planting also played an important role of Litchfield’s Colonial Revival...