

Preservation Trust of Vermont

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February 2, 2022

TO: Sen. Michael Sirotkin, Chair, Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
Sen. Alison Clarkson, Vice Chair
Sen. Becca Balint
Sen. Randy Brock
Sen. Kesha Ram Hinsdale

Dear Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs,

On behalf of the Preservation Trust of Vermont (PTV) and its board of directors, I am writing in support of S. 202. For over 40 years, PTV has worked across Vermont to build community through the preservation and revitalization of our state's historic buildings, villages, and downtowns. Last year that work included 281 separate projects in 144 communities. We are often a community's "first friend" in their efforts to save a historic building or gathering place that they love. As a result, we have a unique perspective on strategies for increasing community vitality and economic development.

The creative sector is a key driver of Vermont's economy and will be even more so in recovering from the pandemic. In an increasingly online world, downtowns and villages will need to become more experiential, providing consumers with things to do, not just things to buy. We've seen many Vermont downtowns embrace this approach to great success including St. Johnsbury, White River Junction, and Brattleboro. Cultural venues draw people into the downtown and ticket sales have a multiplier effect as visitors extend their stays, shop at local businesses, or eat at a downtown restaurant. The creative sector, however, has experienced significant challenges during the pandemic. Cultural venues were the first to close and will likely be the last businesses to fully recover. This is a sad irony given that performing arts venues, theaters, and museums will be critical in helping our downtowns recover their sense of community and vitality coming out of the pandemic. That's why S. 202 is so important.

S. 202 calls for \$4,000,000 in facility adaptations that would transform the historic cultural infrastructure of our state. Adaptations like air purification systems, HVAC improvements, and the expansion of outdoor seating options will allow cultural venues to protect their audiences and provide them with the sense of security needed for their return. The bill

also calls for \$700,000 for the Creative Spaces Grant program that will incentivize private landlords to provide vacant retail or office space in our downtowns and villages for arts and cultural programming including workshops, events, or pop-up studios and exhibits. Communities like Richford, Lyndonville, or Poultney could see exciting revitalization efforts emerge from this program that will catalyze our historic downtowns to become increasingly dynamic places for both residents and visitors.

Ultimately, this isn't just about recovery, it's about accelerating Vermont's ability to seize the moment. In the coming years, Vermont will experience in-migration the likes of which we have not seen since the back-to-the-land movement of the early 70's. If new Vermonters don't encounter vibrant villages and downtowns, places where there is the cultural and civic infrastructure required to foster a sense of community, they will go elsewhere—most likely sprawling on their way—and fundamentally change the relationship between our historic built environment and working landscape. S. 202 will give the creative sector the tools it needs to seize this moment, to celebrate and welcome all Vermonters — from the very young who have had such an incredibly challenging few years of compromised schooling, to the old who are suffering from loneliness and isolation, to the new Vermonters looking for home. Vermont's villages and downtowns need economic revitalization, but all of us also need fun, we need beauty, and we need to be together as a community. S.202 will help make this happen.

Thank you for your consideration of S. 202 and your leadership during this pivotal time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Doyle". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ben Doyle, President