

SEDHGA March 19, 2025

Testimony of Laura Trieschmann, State Historic Preservation Officer

Points related to Housing Amendment:

- The Division for Historic Preservation routinely provides technical assistance and works with those who receive public funding to help move projects forward. We encourage projects that will help the state to meet its housing goals. We are guided by the rules and regulations of a project's specific funding stack.
- VDHP guides applicants to undertake responsible preservation practices, acknowledging the need to alter or add to a historic building to ensure its successful continued use.
 - As we review plans, we may inquire if changes to plans can be made to preserve significant historic features. Our inquiries are not intended to stop the project, reduce the number of housing units, or limit changes to historic buildings so that they essentially become museums. We have enough museums.
 - We work to find ways for buildings to be used; We do not deny projects, because we do not have that authority.
 - If there is a reasonable explanation why elements of project plans cannot be changed, we seek to balance the losses and changes with what can be preserved and restored.

For example,

- If historic hallways of an apartment building should stay because they are a character-defining feature, can an addition be constructed that allows for the additional square footage needed for housing units.
- If existing windows need to be more energy efficient, can the historic curved or decorative windows be restored and the rest of the windows replaced. If those windows cannot be restored, can we find a quality replacement.
- The Secretary of the Interior's *Rehabilitation Standards*, with its guidance of recommended and not recommended, provides that needed flexibility. These *Standards* are used by every state preservation office in the country.
 - The implementation of the Standards and good preservation ethics are recommended by VDHP. Our mission is to consult.
 - For Act 250, we provide recommendations to the district commissions to consider; for federally funded projects under Section 106, the federal agency provides the determinations for which we concur; for Community

Development Block Grant projects located in historic districts, the review exemption include interior alterations unless there are National Register-listed character-defining features; for the 20% rehabilitation investment tax credit projects, we work with applicants voluntarily seeking this funding to implement the Secretary of the Interior's *Rehabilitation Standards* but the final determinations belong with the National Park Service; for the downtown and village center tax credits related to 25% historic façade work, we restrict our reviews to the exterior of the building.

- Since 2012, 136 Vermont projects have received Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits with more than \$50.3 million in qualified rehabilitation expenditures bringing historic properties back into service; total project costs reached over \$287.5 million. Significantly, these projects have provided 1,062 housing units, both new and rehabilitated.
 - Last year, four completed projects in three Vermont communities were granted \$1.08 million in RITC, leveraging more than \$5.4 million in qualified rehabilitation investment through the employment of contractors and purchasing of materials. Of the completed 2024 projects, three involved rehabilitations for housing, resulting in 18 units of new or rehabilitated housing.
 - The RITC together with the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit are the greatest sources of funding for housing projects in Vermont.
- VDHP has developed an excellent working relationship with the Vermont Division of Fire Safety.
 - We encourage sensitive alterations to buildings to ensure that they are safe and code compliant. This includes encouraging the installation of sprinkler systems and proper egress.
 - We often work with DFS staff to find creative solutions that allow retention of important historic features while ensuring they are code compliant. This is also always done in consultation with building owners, taking their goals into account including building use and project cost.
- Historic buildings can be adapted successfully for a new use or updated for continuing use through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving those features that convey historical, cultural, or architectural significance.
 - Historic preservation is not just to safeguard our cultural heritage, it is also vital to promote community identity, support economic development, and foster education and tourism, all while contributing to a more sustainable future. The greenest building is one that is already existing.
 - Vacant or underutilized buildings are not good preservation ethics nor good for Vermont. The Division for Historic Preservation takes our role in

assisting Vermonters to adaptive use and rehabilitate buildings very seriously and we are dedicated to being a part of the housing solution.