

Opinion: A single action could threaten thousands of CT's historic places

Connecticut mayors and first selectmen familiar with local historic places and all the benefits they bring would lose their ability to influence federal projects



By making our historic places visible and accessible, these resources offer perspective on all the places that could be threatened by the federal rollback of preservation protections. (File photo)



From Bushnell Park in Hartford to [downtown Mystic](#) to the [Farmington Canal](#) running from New Haven to Suffield, Connecticut's historic places are part of our everyday lives.

They contribute to our local economies, our sustainability, and our quality of life. Unfortunately, these places are about to be put at risk from a damaging proposal out of the very federal agency that is supposed to protect them. Washington, D.C. needs to hear the voices of Connecticut residents to strongly oppose this action, before it's too late.

Last month, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, or ACHP, announced its plans to overhaul its regulations for [Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act](#). For decades, that statutory provision has protected historic properties that are on or eligible for the [National Register of Historic Places](#) from hasty and short-sighted federal agency action. In Connecticut alone, there are around 1,600 properties on the National Register, with hundreds if not thousands more eligible for listing. Section 106 requires agencies review the effects of their actions on those historic properties before actually doing something that could harm them.



The Bryan-Andrew House on Old Tavern Road in Orange, Conn. is an example of a cherished historical site. (Courant file photo)

As it stands today, the Section 106 process has largely been successful at ensuring federal agencies avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse effects on our historic places. The ACHP, for example, highlights as a [“success story”](#) the outcomes of the Federal Highway Administration process related to four funded projects to widen and align several Connecticut roads.

Archaeological surveys conducted because of Section 106 revealed the underground existence in Andover and North Branford of four eighteenth-century houses and other artifacts. You can read all about the insights about colonial life yielded by this discovery in an online book.

Similarly, for a federally-funded project to replace an historic brownstone railroad bridge in Norwalk, the State Historic Preservation Office and local advocates were formal participants in the Section 106 process. They convinced the department to salvage the stone, and it is now being used to repair [a historic church](#) in Wethersfield. Many stories like this testify to the power of Section 106 to help agencies make better decisions.

The ACHP has proposed significantly weakening current protections under Section 106: exempting a large number of agency actions and limiting the types of historic properties that merit protection. One of the exemptions would cover federal funding for state

The ACHP is also diminishing public participation. Local elected officials, with whom federal agencies must consult under the agency's current regulations, would no longer be guaranteed a seat at the table. That means Connecticut mayors and first selectmen familiar with local historic places and all the benefits they bring will lose their ability to influence federal projects. Preservation Connecticut, [Connecticut Preservation Action](#), Connecticut Main Street Center and many local preservation organizations and historical societies – which now can petition for “consulting party” status – would no longer be eligible to advise federal agencies. Members of the public would be shut out from participating except in the rarest of circumstances.

We know Connecticut would be hurt disproportionately by this action because our organizations have both worked to document the state's history through maps and surveys that are accessible to the public.

The [National Preservation Atlas](#) is an interactive map that shows nearly 5,000 properties listed on the National Register, State Register, and local registers of historic places. Anyone [can zoom into their town in Connecticut](#) to view historic properties in and around their communities.



Preservation Connecticut's searchable [surveys](#), built in collaboration with the State Historic Preservation Office, exhaustively document historic barns, mills, artistic places, and town greens in every part of the state. Both maps reveal properties that might be considered eligible for the National Register – properties currently protected by Section 106.

Preserving our historic places visible and accessible to those resources is essential to our

A very historic CT house lets you eat like the colonials did. Don't worry, the food is 21st century.

The ACHP has said that it will open its proposal for public comment for just 30 short days, and the agency is not likely to provide advance notice of that comment period. So it's important to prepare now to flood the agency's inbox with stories about the importance of our historic places – and the need for the ACHP to make good on its obligations to protect them.

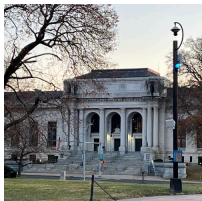
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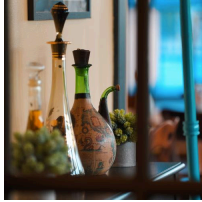
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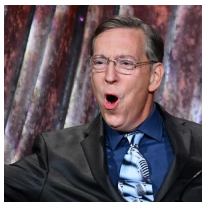
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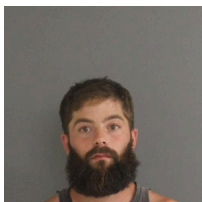
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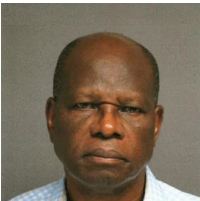
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