



October 30, 2007

Mr. Paul Francis
Director of the Budget and Senior Advisor to the Governor of NYS
State Capitol - Room 113
Albany, NY 12224

Mr. Francis:

The Preservation League of New York State thanks you for this opportunity to comment on the Capital Needs budget of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. As New York's statewide preservation advocacy not-for-profit, the League has welcomed the leadership of Commissioner Carol Ash and new senior staff, who have taken a critically-needed hard look at policy issues and capital needs relative to the State Park system and other resources under the agencies statutory domain.

Among the early achievements of Commissioner Ash's tenure is the appointment of the Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation, Wint Aldrich. This position had been unfilled for several years, and Mr. Aldrich's appointment is aiding the administration in providing integrated oversight to the agencies various historic preservation programs and functions. More recently, the State Historic Preservation Office has undertaken a comprehensive effort to update its five-year plan for historic preservation, a blueprint that recognizes the agency's critical and multifaceted role in safeguarding New York State's historic resources, not just as historic treasures, but as key components of community character, municipal revitalization, and sustainable economic redevelopment.

The legacy of the New York State Park system is nationally recognized for its size, stature, and diversity. While the State Park System's role in providing recreational opportunities and protecting open space is perhaps most widely recognized, New York's thirty-five State Historic Sites. These sites, ranging from the expansive views from the Olana State Historic Site in Hudson to the architectural masterpiece of the Darwin Martin House in Buffalo and on to the austerity of Adirondack farm life at the John Brown Homestead in the Adirondacks.

However, it is not just signature structures or events that represent the historic facets of the New York State Park System. Many working facilities in the State Park System are themselves landmarks, notable for their design and structural features, from murals and architectural castings at the Robert Moses-conceived Jones Beach State Park to the tollhouse at Bear Mountain State Park.

Finally, other historic resources on State Park land are equally compelling components of the park system, such as Hoyt House, a Gothic-Revival house designed by Calvert Vaux on the grounds of the Mills Mansion State Park in Staatsburgh, Dutchess County. Vacant for decades, this contributing property in the Hudson River National Historic Landmark district has suffered vandalism and lack of maintenance, and is deteriorating from exposure to the elements. While a Friends group has formed to plan and secure funding for stabilization, restoration, and adaptive re-use, this extraordinary site is indicative of planning and maintenance too long deferred.

The League understands the magnitude of capital needs that have been outlined here today, and the significant commitment ahead required to meet those needs. We offer our assistance with the public outreach and advocacy necessary to address those needs and steward our State Parks and Historic Sites system well into the 21st Century. That advocacy includes securing additional federal allocations for support for state parks, monies that have been withheld for over two decades even though authorized in the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund legislation, advocacy that should be a priority on the Administration's federal policy agenda.

The capital needs referenced above are needed to address recreational and cultural resources in the New York State Park System. Additional investment is needed to reuse and renew the historic structures that are features in our everyday lives in municipalities throughout New York State. Commissioner Ash and staff have spoken frequently about using the Park System to model best practices and stewardship of the New York's recreational, cultural, and historic resources, and thereby use the State Park System's practices and standards as exemplars of action for municipalities and private owners alike. One piece of legislation that, in effect, extends this legacy into the communities is the NYS Rehabilitation Tax Credit Program.

An expanded Rehabilitation Tax Credit will provide a meaningful level of financial incentive and flexibility to private property owners investing in the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Passage of A.7935-A (Hoyt)/S.5425-A (Padavan) will bring New York's existing rehabilitation tax incentive program in line with "best practices" and program features of highly effective programs in other states. Rhode Island's rehabilitation program was recently hailed as the most effective community and economic revitalization program in state history.

Key changes will benefit downtown commercial districts and residential neighborhoods across New York by guiding new investment back to existing municipal infrastructure, spur tax-base growth by increasing property values, attract new business and vitality to established commercial districts, and encourage the preservation of cultural and historic heritage in communities. Changes to the residential credit extend the program to a greater number of municipalities, aid efforts to counter a growing shortfall in affordable housing, provide for the retention of existing community populations and attract new homeowners to established neighborhoods.

Our thanks for your consideration of our support for this budget proposal - we look forward to working with this administration to secure this funding in 2008 and beyond.

Daniel Mackay

Director of Public Policy
Preservation League of New York State