



HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND THE BIDEN-HARRIS ADMINISTRATION

INTRODUCTION

Historic preservation is an area with more than 50 years of demonstrable support from both sides of the aisle. Using historic preservation as a tool for implementation of important policy goals could be a small but very important step in bridging the recent years of dysfunction and begin an era of healing. While historic preservation does not need to be at the top of the agenda of the Biden-Harris administration, there are several preservation initiatives that, if adopted, would advance the priorities of the new administration. We at PlaceEconomics have identified a baker's dozen actions where preservation is not an end in itself, but a means to assist the Biden-Harris administration in reaching their stated goals. Each of the recommendations start with the question "what public end is meant to be achieved" and then identifies how historic preservation can help reach that end.

BIDEN GOAL: RESTORE DIGNIFIED LEADERSHIP AT HOME AND RESPECTED LEADERSHIP ON THE WORLD STAGE.

Recommendation 1: Rejoin UNESCO

In 2017 the United States informed UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) of its intention to withdraw from the organization that the US helped establish in 1946. The participation of the US in UNESCO is among the best ways to use America's "soft power" to influence other countries by means other than tanks and troops. Rejoining UNESCO would be an important step in reestablishing US leadership in the world.

Recommendation 2: Increase funding for the Ambassadors Fund

The Ambassadors' Fund for Cultural Preservation is a program of the State Department to provide assistance for the protection and preservation of heritage assets in less developed countries. We can attest from the experience of our sister firm – Heritage Strategies International – that the modest amounts awarded through the Ambassadors Fund makes friends for America with a country's citizens, not just its leaders. 2021 will be the 20th anniversary of this extraordinary program and should be accompanied by a doubling of its modest budget.

BIDEN GOAL: CREATE MILLIONS OF GOOD-PAYING JOBS AND TO GIVE AMERICA'S WORKING FAMILIES THE TOOLS, CHOICES, AND FREEDOM THEY NEED TO BUILD BACK BETTER.

Recommendation 3: Pass HTC-GO Legislation

Encouraging the rehabilitation of historic buildings simultaneously creates jobs, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, leverages public expenditures with private investment, and constitutes environmental and fiscal responsibility. The bipartisan Historic Tax Credit Growth and Opportunity Act (HTC-GO) would enhance the existing historic tax credit by encouraging more building reuse and further incentivizing redevelopment in all communities, including smaller and rural communities.

Recommendation 4: Establish Heritage Trades Apprenticeships

The President-elect has already committed "to provide education and training beyond high school, including federally Registered Apprenticeships." Recognizing a skills shortage in the restoration fields, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) has advocated for and adopted a "Traditional Trades Training Policy". This should be quickly integrated into the proposed federally registered apprenticeship program.

BIDEN GOAL: LEAD A CLEAN ENERGY REVOLUTION – TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND LEAD THE WORLD IN ADDRESSING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY.

Recommendation 5: CLG Funds for Climate Change Impact Analysis

While federal policy and leadership is essential, much of the responsibility for addressing climate change impacts will be done at the city level. Historic resources are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Funds should be made available to local government through their Certified Local Government (CLG) participation to conduct assessments followed by plans for resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation of the climate driven adverse impacts on heritage assets.

BIDEN GOAL: ASSURE THAT EVERY AMERICAN HAS ACCESS TO HOUSING THAT IS AFFORDABLE, STABLE, SAFE AND HEALTHY, ACCESSIBLE, ENERGY EFFICIENT AND RESILIENT, AND LOCATED NEAR GOOD SCHOOLS AND WITH A REASONABLE COMMUTE TO THEIR JOBS.

Older and historic properties provide a disproportionate share of unsubsidized affordable housing throughout America. Investment in existing housing to meet America's housing needs is far more cost effective than only building new units of housing. Three actions utilizing historic preservation in particular can advance the Biden-Harris housing goals.

Recommendation 6: Pass Historic Homeowners Tax Credit

Homeownership is crucial for building generational wealth and a path out of poverty. Numerous states have a homeowner component of their historic rehab tax credit. There was federal legislation in Congress nearly twenty years ago, with bipartisan co-signers of more than half the House of Representatives. However, Committee chair resistance precluded the proposal from ever reaching the floor. As it was structured, this tax credit program could encourage reinvestment in deteriorating historic housing with options for current homeowners, new homeowners through down payment assistance, as well as incentivize involvement of developers and lenders.

Recommendation 7: Make reusing existing buildings priority for LIHTC

The need for additional affordable housing is immense, but the resources to provide that housing are certainly limited. Recent comprehensive analysis of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) found that the average cost per unit was \$153,000 for rehabilitation of an existing structure compared to \$209,000 for new construction. The difference of \$56,000 per unit means that four units can be created using existing buildings for every three units with new construction. HUD should direct state housing agencies to give a priority to rehabilitation of existing structures and an additional priority if they are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or included in a local historic district.

Recommendation 8: Prioritize older housing in Affordable Housing Fund

Biden's platform calls for a \$100 Billion Affordable Housing Fund. To reach the goals of "affordable, stable, safe and healthy, energy efficient and resilient, and located near good schools and with a reasonable commute to their jobs" at least half of that amount should be directed to older housing stock for both renters and owner-occupants.

BIDEN GOAL: RESCUE AND REVITALIZE MAIN STREET, BECAUSE SMALL BUSINESSES ARE THE ENGINE OF OUR ECONOMY AND THE LIFEBLOOD OF OUR COMMUNITIES.

Recommendation 9: Provide funding for National Main Street Center

There is an organization that, for more than 40 years has been doing exactly that – rescuing and revitalizing Main Street. That organization is the National Main Street Center. During negotiations for the next round of covid-driven stimulus plans, proposals emerged to provide \$100 million to Main Street, 75% to support Main Street Coordinating programs to be used for training and technical assistance to local entities and direct grants to local entities to support operations or professional development. The other 25% of funding would be dedicated to small business support, facilitated by local Main Street programs, to help small businesses respond to COVID-19 challenges, including online retailing, marketing, and implementing social distancing guidelines.

BIDEN GOAL: PROVIDE AGENCIES WITH THE FUNDING THEY NEED, RESPECT THE INDEPENDENCE AND RELY ON THE EXPERTISE OF CAREER CIVIL SERVANTS, AND HIGHLIGHT THEIR WORK AS CRUCIAL TO OUR GOVERNMENT'S FUNCTIONING.

Recommendation 10: Look to Historic Preservation Officers for Agency Policy Opportunities

Under the National Historic Preservation Act, every federal agency is required to have a Historic Preservation Officer. These are talented civil servants with solid understanding of the untapped potential of historic preservation, but too often much of their time is relegated to simply assuring that their agency is in regulatory compliance with preservation law. The expertise of these career workers needs to be more fully tapped. The Biden-Harris White House should ask that the historic preservation officer in every federal agency within a year submit at least three implementable ideas to their Cabinet Secretary (or agency director) for how historic preservation to be used to meet the Agency's core mission.

Recommendation 11: Appoint experienced preservationist as Chair of ACHP

A major step forward for the management and policies of historic preservation in the federal government was taken when the Chair of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation was made a Presidentially appointed full-time position. As the first full time chair, Aimee Jorjani has performed admirably in the role. Under the Biden-Harris administration, a new Chair is likely to be named. That should be a knowledgeable preservationist with experience in the private, public, and non-profit sectors.

BIDEN GOAL: MOBILIZE AMERICAN INGENUITY TO BUILD A MODERN INFRASTRUCTURE AND AN EQUITABLE, CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE.

Recommendation 12: Reinstate historic preservation as a Transportation Enhancement Activity

Federal funding for the states for transportation usually takes place on a six-year cycle, locking in a reliable source of funds on which state transportation agencies can rely. The multi-year transportation authorization should have been enacted in 2020, but because of Congressional inaction, a one-year extension of the previous act was all that could be passed. A look back at very successful transportation acts will identify ISTEA (Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act) and its successor TEA-21 (Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century) as having a significant impact in broadening the perspective of state transportation agencies beyond just building more highways. Both required that at least 10% of federal transportation

allocations had to be spent on “transportation enhancements” and transportation related historic preservation projects were a specifically authorized category of expenditure. This provision should be included in the multi-year bill that Congress will take up in 2021.

BIDEN GOAL: INVEST OVER \$70 BILLION IN THE HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUS) AND MINORITY-SERVING INSTITUTIONS THAT WILL TRAIN OUR NEXT GENERATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS.

Recommendation 13: Direct HBCU funding toward historic buildings and training

HBCUs are amazing repositories of Black education, history, and accomplishment. Part of the funds should be directed to bricks and mortar restoration of the historic campuses – many suffering from years of deferred maintenance and neglect. Additionally, historic preservation as a field needs to diversify to advance racial equity, and frankly, to be more effective. This requires investment in people. A portion the funds from this HBCUs investment should go towards training Black scholars in the preservation professions, preparing them to be leaders of the historic preservation movement in the future.

CONCLUSION

The recommendations above are certainly not exhaustive of what the incoming administration could do for or with historic preservation. Rather these are ways that historic preservation could be used as a valuable tool to advance priorities that President-elect Biden has already established.

Why should the recommendations above be part of a core strategy for the implementation of the Biden-Harris goals? Here are three reasons:

1. Many of the above recommendations are simply a redirection of existing policies under existing authorities. The recommended actions that do have a fiscal impact have repeatedly demonstrated that they are among the most cost-effective programs of the entire federal government.
2. With scarce resources and immense needs, every action at the federal level should meet more than one goal – getting the most from taxpayers' dollars. Each of the recommendations identifies how historic preservation can help reach the Biden-Harris goals.
3. President-elect Biden has repeatedly stressed the need for bi-partisan action to address America's pressing needs. In fact, his entire career has shown him as capable of "reaching across the aisle." Unfortunately, the years since Biden left the Senate have been years of hyper-partisanship and little effective bi-partisan action. Historic preservation is an area with more than 50 years of demonstrable support from both sides of the aisle. Using historic preservation as a tool for implementation of important policy goals could be a small but very important step in bridging the recent years of dysfunction and begin an era of healing.

We at PlaceEconomics are not political tacticians or have any insights into what might pass when. However, we have seen firsthand the positive economic, social, and environmental impacts historic preservation can have. The proposals above could cost effectively address America's needs, advance the Biden-Harris goals, and build resilience of American towns and cities of all sizes.

President-elect Biden has said, "I will work with Democrats and Republicans and I will work as hard for those who don't support me as for those who do. That's the job of a president. It's a duty of care for everyone." Mr. President let historic preservation help you do that.

Signed,

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PlaceEconomics

PlaceEconomics is a private sector firm with over thirty years experience in the thorough and robust analysis of the economic impacts of historic preservation. We conduct studies, surveys, and workshops in cities and states across the country that are addressing issues of downtown, neighborhood, and commercial district revitalization and the reuse of historic buildings. We specialize in quality, defensible research, and present findings clearly and effectively in formats that can be understood by academics, economists, mayors, city council members, property owners, and local stakeholders alike.