

Weekly Legislative Update for State Historic Preservation Officers

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1. Grassroots Connects with Congress in Iowa

Immediately before leaving DC, the Senate recommended a supplemental spending bill including relief for the Midwest -- without additional funding for the Historic Preservation Fund in flood-affected states. The Senate's legislative idea places much of the federal recovery effort within the Department of House and Urban Development. That chamber's appropriations committee recommended \$1.82 billion for the Community Development Block Grant program to support recovery in disaster areas, including but not exclusively those in the Midwest.

The House will weigh in on this supplemental bill in September during the four remaining weeks on the legislative calendar.

Representative Dave Loebsack (D-IA) is taking on a leadership role to support historic preservation at this very critical time in the supplemental's development. Loebsack, who represents southeastern Iowa, is a cosponsor of the Community Restoration and Revitalization Act (H.R.1043), and signed onto the "Dear Colleague" letter this year that supported increases to Historic Preservation Fund programs in FY2009.

When asked about the requested \$38 million in additional funding for State Historic Preservation Offices in flood-affected Midwest states, Loebsack noted that Congress is not understanding the enormity of the issue. Iowans are a quiet bunch. Squeaky wheels are required now more than ever given slim resources and massive need. There is still, however, a chance for a supplemental Historic Preservation Fund appropriation on the House side yet, with Representative Loebsack's support.

On August 12, the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance (IHPA), led by Preservation Action and IHPA Board member Rod Scott, produced a state and federal tax credit orientation and brown bag luncheon to help flood-affected historic property owners. The gathering took place at the Cedar Rapids Chamber of Commerce. Rod invited Loebsack's Iowa City office manager and scheduler Alicia Trimble to the brown bag luncheon workshop. Forty property owners attended. Rod also learned that Loebsack's staffer is a member of the Iowa City Preservation Commission.

The group helped Rod and Loebsack's staff understand property owners' perspective, and their frustration with existing communication and the knowledge base in different city departments. Property owners also expressed concern with federal policy governing historic places in flood zones.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) advisory bulletin *National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP): Floodplain Management Bulletin, Historic Structures* explains the program as it relates to properties already listed on the National Register or within National Register districts. The NFIP is a subsidized flood insurance program. The insurance premiums charged to historic structures may be considerably less

than what new non-elevated structures built at the same level would receive. Designated historic structures do not have to meet new construction, substantial improvement, or substantial damage requirements.

As the bulletin notes, "flood insurance coverage is required for most mortgage loans and for obtaining federal grants and other financial assistance. The ability to obtain flood insurance coverage is also important to ensuring that historic structures can be repaired and restored after a flood event." The program is extremely important, but requires pre-event designations to work. In Cedar Rapids, the Czech and Slovak village neighborhoods are potential historic districts and highly trafficked tourist zones. These would not be covered by this program. Designation provide neighborhoods' commercial districts with tax credits for rehabilitation.

How potentially eligible districts will be aided by FEMA remains a question. The program's policy also points to the pressing need for comprehensive historic resource inventories everywhere -- but especially in disaster-prone areas.

While Loeb sack is back in the district for the summer recess, his staff is looking to connect him with property owners in existing and potential historic districts. The Cedar Rapids Chamber of Commerce is also looking for innovative partnership opportunities to promote recovery in historic places.

Rod Scott notes that "this is a good model for other cities looking at economic development generally. We're looking at it as a jobs creation model. There are thousands of construction workers out of work. The reconstruction hasn't started. They are still in the process of sanitizing. Commercial buildings are waiting for the tax credit approval ... and we're concerned about the coming winter."

The grassroots in Iowa need your help. Like what happened immediately after 2005's hurricanes down in the Gulf, the community needs teams to come out and gut buildings thoughtfully. Faith-based groups are already doing this. Groups of preservation students are especially welcome to help out. Rod, an experienced contractor specializing in historic properties, would be happy to oversee student groups' targeted demolition work while explaining challenges. This is a great opportunity -- contact Rod Scott at rod.scott@mchsi.com to connect your group with local hands-on needs.

2. New Congressional Report Card

Here's a breakdown of Congressional support for primary historic preservation issues as of now:

<http://www.preservationaction.org/states/8.11.2008report%20card.htm>