

August 21, 2020

Director Pingree, Commissioner Reid, Mr. Stoddard, Ms. Meil, Dr. Shah, Ms. Fuchs, Ms. East, Ms. Boulos, Ms. Leyden, Ms. Leslie, and Members of the Maine Climate Council:

We, the undersigned, thank the Maine Climate Council and the Working Groups for their efforts to prepare Maine and its residents to become more resilient in the face of climate change. The historic preservation sector is deeply concerned about the impact of climate change on our communities and have been closely following your efforts as attendees at many working group and council virtual meetings. Our organizations and businesses consider climate change a top priority. We, like many Mainers, understand the need for immediate action to reduce greenhouse gases, better manage our buildings and make our communities more resilient.

We encourage the Maine Climate Council to acknowledge that we cannot rely on new construction alone to respond to the climate crisis; preservation of our historic building stock is a critical component of Maine's response to the climate crisis. More than half of Maine's building stock is over 40 years old, and we are concerned by language in the Buildings, Infrastructure, and Housing Working Group's report that characterizes Maine's housing as 'outdated'. The use of this term could be misunderstood. Certainly, many mechanical, electrical, and other systems can be outdated in Maine's older building stock, but the buildings themselves are able to be retrofitted for enduring use. The rehabilitation of properties that qualify for historic rehabilitation tax credits, with more than half-a-billion dollars invested in Maine since 2009, demonstrate that good preservation practices result in substantial energy savings. We assume the intent of the word "outdated" was not to imply older buildings should be demolished. We encourage the Maine Climate Council to look at these buildings as assets in developing a climate action plan for Maine's communities including our historic downtowns and neighborhoods, agricultural landscapes, and working waterfronts.

Embodied Energy & Greenhouse Gasses

In the 1970s Maine became a leader by enacting the "Bottle Bill" and changing the culture of recycling in Maine. Maine should build upon its assets and lead yet again, with a plan that recognizes the importance of conserving older and historic buildings for climate resilience. Many newer building materials have short life spans and are produced at a high environmental cost. Measuring the impact of extraction, manufacture, transport, and construction of new materials must be part of the calculation in assessing greenhouse gas savings. This would be a significant step forward towards achieving Maine's climate goals.

National studies have shown that an average three-story brick downtown building has the embodied energy of 1.3 million aluminum cans. In Portland, Oregon a scientific study concluded that a new high-performing single-family house takes 50 years and a commercial building takes 42 years to produce less energy impact than an average-performing existing building of the same kind. If the 1% of their building stock expected to be demolished in the next 10 years was *instead* retrofitted and reused, 15% of their total CO2 reduction targets could be met.¹ In recognition of their embodied energy, the City of Portland, OR also mandates that historic buildings being removed be carefully dismantled so their old-growth wood and other materials can be reused.

¹ *The Greenest Building: Quantifying the Environmental Value of Building Reuse.*
www.preservationnation.org/greenlab

Implementation Strategies & Technical Assistance

Most of Maine's downtowns and intown neighborhoods are listed as National Register Historic Districts and 27 communities participate in the Main Street Maine program. As such, implementation of recommendations for technical assistance, particularly those put forth by the Community Resilience Planning and Coastal & Marine Working Groups, should include the following:

- Maine Historic Preservation Commission
- Greater Portland Landmarks
- Maine Downtown Center
- Other preservation organizations
- Maine Preservation

Our organizations currently help local communities, regional planning associations, and property owners identify vulnerable structures and offer guidance on rehabilitation, energy efficiency improvements, building reuse and adaptation strategies. We also help guide stakeholders in comprehensive and other planning initiatives that affect their community's culture, historic buildings, and heritage sectors.

Historic Preservation is Economic Development

Maine uses its historic buildings to drive economic activity and increase tourism throughout the state. Our historic built environment is as much part of Maine's brand as our natural landscapes. The enormous economic value of our historic assets was highlighted in the Brookings Institution report, "Charting Maine's Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places," over a decade ago. Doing all we can to preserve these assets is more important than ever as other coastal regions that compete with us for tourist dollars are facing these same challenges. Maine needs to be the state that saves its historic character while confronting the challenges of climate change.

Maine faces well-known challenges in responding and adapting to a changing climate, but in working together we can identify and strategize how our older and historic buildings can be assets in developing bold solutions. Our historic communities, downtowns, and buildings are economic and cultural assets, and a rich store of embodied energy. The historic preservation sector is increasingly implementing courses of action that protect and enhance these assets, and we look forward to extending this conversation to members of Maine's Climate Council.

Sincerely,

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Restoring Your Historic House

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cc:

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