

PRESERVE AMERICA FORUM

July 17, 2013

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation

Executive Summary

Background

This year of 2013 marks the 10th anniversary of the announcement of the Preserve America program. The program has resulted in the recognition of 890 communities in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and two territories; 40 Preserve America Steward programs demonstrating noteworthy volunteer stewardship of historic and cultural resources; more than \$21 million dollars in federal matching Preserve America Grants funding 280 projects; and 20 Presidential Awards for exemplary accomplishments in sustainable use and preservation of heritage assets. The program has encouraged creation of a program of youth summits, a national history teacher award, several federal mini-grant programs dedicated to supporting history and preservation, and many other public and private initiatives at the state and local levels. Preserve America has served as both a catalyst for and a public acknowledgment of the value of local and regional historic preservation, heritage tourism, heritage education, and community development using historic assets. It has also been a force in building a more inclusive preservation community.

In this anniversary year, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) determined that it would be useful to offer an opportunity for several local, regional, and national Preserve America program participants and beneficiaries from various parts of the country to share some of their experience. This will assist the ACHP to begin an examination of the future of the Preserve America program within the current Administration's priorities. The dialogue may also assist with our review of the national preservation program as we look back on 50 years of achievement and partnerships under the National Historic Preservation Act.

The Forum

The Preserve America Forum at the July meeting of the ACHP featured presentations by four invited guest panelists:

- Mayor Salvatore Panto, Jr., of Easton, Pennsylvania
- Dr. Robert Billington of the Blackstone River Valley Tourism Council, Rhode Island
- Ms. Kathleen Kilpatrick, the Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer
- Ms. Cheryl Oliver of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

These individuals discussed their varied experience with the Preserve America program, assisted by illustrated PowerPoint presentations. Collectively, the panelists provided the ACHP members, staff, and audience with an excellent understanding of the reach and benefits of the Preserve America program. The discussion centered mostly on the Preserve America Communities designation and the Preserve America Grants, although other program components such as Preserve America Stewards designation and federal agency heritage activities inspired by the Preserve America program were also considered.

In preparing their presentations, the panelists were asked to consider the following questions, which were also shared with the members of the ACHP at the Forum itself.

- How instrumental have federal, state, and local support for historic preservation or cultural heritage appreciation been to your community, state, or program? In what ways has this support bolstered or complemented volunteer activities and the work of non-governmental organizations?
- Has Preserve America recognition, partnership, and assistance (either technical or financial, or both) been valuable from your point of view? What could be improved or enhanced?
- Do you think Preserve America recognition or networking has led to any local changes in attitude, visibility, or ability to get things done that have helped to advance historic preservation and public appreciation for heritage assets? Has it led to additional investment that might not have occurred otherwise?
- What can be done by the ACHP or others to help you and your partners get more out of this sort of program in the future? In addition to funding, what sorts of technical support would be most helpful in order to develop and sustain historic preservation, heritage tourism, heritage education, and related programs?
- Do you have any concerns about Preserve America as it has evolved? How would you like to see it continue or develop differently in the future?
- Do you have any observations to share about encouraging and recognizing corporate and business support for historic preservation and related activities on a local or national basis?

Key points made during the Forum presentations included the following:

- Validation by the federal government of local preservation and related heritage tourism, education, volunteer work, and other efforts is worthwhile and of value to local communities and non-governmental organizations.
- The availability of technical assistance, seed money, capacity building, and encouragement for historic preservation activities are vitally important.
- It is desirable to identify ways to support and facilitate community and organizational networking to share experience and approaches to preservation and related issues.
- While Preserve America embraces all communities and levels of preservation activity, Preserve America can be of particular value to those communities less sophisticated in historic preservation structure, organization, or regulation. Communities can develop a greater understanding of their heritage assets, and develop local preservation values and tools that they are comfortable with and which fit their particular needs and capabilities.
- It is very important to have models of stewardship to emulate.
- It is also valuable to have positive media and other exposure in order to heighten public awareness of heritage values and needs in the community.
- Partnerships and the potential for finding common ground with new partners can be keys to success, coupled with the potential for leveraging small amounts of funding and in-kind support into bigger and longer-term investments in preservation.

What should be done next?

As a result of the presentations and Forum discussion, the ACHP is proposing to take the following steps:

- The ACHP staff will prepare and disseminate a summary of the Preserve America Forum, including the panelists' key points and highlights of the subsequent discussion.
- The ACHP will work with other partners to continue and enhance the Preserve America Communities and Preserve America Stewards components of the program, and seek assistance for renewed promotion starting in FY 2014.
- The ACHP will explore establishment of a community network(s) in consultation with other organizations, including but not necessarily limited to the National Park Service (NPS), the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO), the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, and the National Main Street Center, Inc., a non-profit subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- The ACHP will work with NPS to ensure that designated Preserve America Communities are eligible to apply for any competitive matching historic preservation grants available to local governments which may be appropriated through the Historic Preservation Fund in FY 2014 or future years.
- The ACHP will consult with NPS, NCSHPO, National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and other preservation partners on a competitive grants proposal package as a continuing part of full funding and reauthorization for the Historic Preservation Fund. The package should include community assistance for planning and heritage tourism development consistent with the Preserve America program (Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, P.L. 111-11, Sec. 7302). The ACHP staff will re-explore with NPS the possible conduct of an independent evaluation of previous and current Preserve America Grant projects, as well as refinement of grants performance metrics.
- The ACHP will work with the Departments of the Interior and Commerce as well as Brand USA to include Preserve America Communities in cultural heritage tourism promotion through the National Travel and Tourism Strategy.
- The ACHP will advance a proposal for a Presidential Heritage Award with the Administration which would recognize exceptional preservation achievements while encouraging and honoring efforts to build a more inclusive and diverse national historic preservation program.