Fifty Years of Heritage
So Rich: The National Historic Preservation Act
The Historic Preservation Fund: Expanding on the Foundation We’ve Built Together

CONGRESSMEN EARL BLUMENAUER AND MIKE TURNER

At the heart of every livable community is a sense of place—and its foundation, which is the preservation and celebration of historic spaces and buildings.

It’s hard to overstate the importance of the Historic Preservation Fund (HPF) in communities across the country. The HPF was established by Congress in 1976 to support the initiatives mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and it is the source of the preservation funds awarded to states, tribes, local governments, and nonprofits. As co-chairs of the Historic Preservation Caucus, it is our mission to share the story of the HPF and its broad base of bipartisan support with our colleagues in Congress.

SUSTAINABLE, INCLUSIVE, AND EQUITABLE INVESTMENTS

The HPF has guided federal investment and engagement in historic preservation activity across the country for the past 50 years, celebrating cultural heritage while also looking to the future. Its contributions to our national fabric are far reaching and indelible, and it is one of the most widely supported and high-performing federal grant programs.

“Historic preservation creates an essential link between our past and present. Reauthorizing the HPF ensures that state, tribal, and local preservation programs across the country can carry out this mission so that current and future generations develop a greater understanding and appreciation of our nation’s history.” Congressman Mike Turner
Since the HPF was created, more than $2 billion has been allocated for the national preservation program. These grants leverage local matches to support preservation projects such as surveys and inventories, National Register of Historic Places nominations, preservation education, architectural planning, historic structure reports, community preservation planning, and even brick-and-mortar repairs. A share of this funding goes directly to communities in the form of Certified Local Government grants and is spent at community discretion.

America is in the middle of an urban renaissance, as millennials, aging baby boomers, and job creators alike relocate to cities and downtowns. Historic preservation is not only one of the most exciting aspects of this urban revitalization but also a way to ensure that associated community investments are sustainable, inclusive, and equitable—something we all have a stake in.

Before we came to Congress, we both served our respective hometowns—Portland, Oregon, and Dayton, Ohio—in city government. That experience fostered a lasting appreciation for the power of historic preservation to revitalize communities. The benefits of preservation—tourism, cultural education, private

“It’s inspiring what we’ve been able to achieve in the 50 years since the passage of the NHPA. Now that the Historic Preservation Fund is reauthorized, let’s further mark this anniversary by fully funding the HPF to give tribes, states, and our preservation partners the resources they need to tell our stories. For too long, meager funding has caused historic buildings and sacred spaces to be forgotten or lost forever. Fulfilling the mandate of the NHPA is widely supported—and long overdue—and will leave a legacy of preservation and cultural heritage for generations to come. There is no greater dividend.” Congressman Earl Blumenauer
investment and job creation, local identity, to name a few—have spurred interest in and renewal of the urban center. Encouraging preservation allowed us, as city leaders, to guide development while ensuring that the histories of our communities were preserved for future generations.

In Portland we’ve used preservation funds to save and restore community treasures like the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall and to recognize the history of the lost city of Vanport, a WWII-era shipyard-workers community destroyed by flooding. In Dayton the HPF helped us establish the Wright-Dunbar Village Historic District, recognizing the neighborhood that had once been home to the Wright Brothers and African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar.

EXPANDING THE IMPACT

Over the years, the HPF has been expanded to celebrate the diversity of our nation and the histories of underrepresented communities, which has included the creation of several new competitive grant programs.

While the HPF was initially limited to state grants, in the 1990s Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs) and historically black colleges and universities became eligible for HPF awards, which finally provided necessary support and recognition to some of our most endangered buildings and places. The Save America’s Trea-
sures program (established in 1998 but defunded in 2011) awarded more than $300 million in grants directly to public and private entities for preservation projects like Ellis Island and Rosa Parks’ bus.

In 2014 Congress first funded smaller competitive grants targeted at communities that remain underrepresented on the National Register and among National Historic Landmarks. And as part of a broader Civil Rights Initiative, in 2015 the National Park Service created a new competitive grant program to document and preserve places and stories associated with the Civil Rights struggle.

THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES OUR HERITAGE DESERVES

Unfortunately, these programs can only go so far. Appropriations to more than the HPF have not kept pace with the growing needs of our cultural resources or with the imperative of acknowledging aspects of our nation’s past that have gone unnoticed or ignored too long. While newer grant programs seek to represent and celebrate long-marginalized histories, current funding is a drop in the bucket, leaving critical projects unfunded and the list of endangered spaces growing ever longer.

Though it was initially authorized at $150 million a year, Congress has never appropriated more than $94 million to the HPF—and that figure is a high-water mark that is now 15 years in the past. Indeed, the average appropriation has been less than half the authorized amount, leaving the promise of our preservation programs woefully unfulfilled. For instance, during the last 20 years, the number of THPOs has grown more than 14-fold—from 12 to 170—while funding has remained low, resulting in smaller average grants today than in 1996.

Not only were funds lacking but the HPF had also expired more than a year ago, on September 30, 2015. Fortunately, with the signing of the National Park Service Centennial Act on December 19, 2016, the HPF has been reauthorized through 2023. Now more than ever, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the NHPA, action must be taken to put to use the critical funding that has rehabbed buildings on Main Streets across America, saved tribal landmarks, and restored the sites of the Civil Rights struggle. Reauthorizing the HPF is an apt commemoration of this anniversary.
As we look back on the 50 years of preservation since the 1966 passage of the NHPA, Congress, local governments, and the preservation community must expand on the foundation we’ve built together. 

CONGRESSMAN EARL BLUMENAUER is a lifelong resident of Portland, Oregon. He was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1996.

CONGRESSMAN MIKE TURNER is a lifelong resident of Southwest Ohio. He served as mayor of the city of Dayton for eight years and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2002.

**TAKEAWAY**
Read March 2016 National Trust testimony on the HPF.

**TAKEAWAY**
Read the 2015 *Historic Preservation Fund Annual Report*. 