



January 25, 2021

Sent via email only: governor.lamont@ct.gov

The Honorable Ned Lamont
State Capitol - Office of the Governor
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

RE: Preserve the Community Investment Act

Dear Governor Lamont:

The undersigned organizations would like to thank you again for your protection and continued full funding of the Community Investment Act (CIA) program.

As you are aware, CIA funding provides support for state land use programs for open space conservation, farmland preservation, dairy production, historic preservation and the development of affordable housing. Through a \$40 surcharge on local land recordings the CIA has funded more than 1,400 projects with over \$152 million invested, benefiting every community in the state. This investment has leveraged millions more in private and public dollars, all while preserving and reinvesting in Connecticut's rich character.

We understand and appreciate the fiscal challenges you are dealing with in your efforts to address a budget deficit for the next biennial budget, particularly in light of the pervasive impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on communities across the state. As you prepare the state's budget, we most respectfully request that you preserve CIA funding for its intended purpose – providing a consistent source of dedicated funding outside of the budget, and much needed reinvestment in our state at this most critical time for our state's economy.

The CIA is a proven economic driver – providing a higher quality of life, attracting skilled workers, and leveraging private investment for Connecticut's towns. Investments in land protection support a robust outdoor recreation industry which adds \$3.7 billion to the state's gross domestic product and supports 49,000 jobs. Local farm businesses have contributed to the viability of the \$5.2 billion agricultural industry, generating over

29,000 jobs. CIA has generated over 3,000 jobs in the affordable housing and historic preservation sector. CIA support is directly responsible for saving 157 dairy farm businesses. The fact that these numbers continue to increase is a testament to the success and importance of this program.

Find below brief testimonials from each sector that benefits from the CIA:

Farmland Preservation and Dairy Production

CT's farms and farmland are at the heart of our food systems. CIA funding ensures that our working lands and agricultural producers remain in business and continue to provide healthy, local agricultural products for all of Connecticut's residents. While bond funds are generally used to purchase the actual development rights, CIA funds have been effectively used to make the process of protecting farmland faster and more efficient.

Our dairy farmers serve as the backbone of Connecticut's agricultural sector. Connecticut's dairy farmers and the working lands they maintain support agricultural viability; promote climate change resiliency, adaptation, and mitigation; and help create the beautiful, rural farm landscapes that make Connecticut special. According to the 2017 National Agriculture Statistic Service Census, Connecticut's dairy farmers operate on 63,609 acres, which represents 15% of Connecticut's land in farms and 42% of total cropland.

Since the inception of CIA 15-years ago, this important funding has:

- Permanently protected 167 farms. In the 12-year period prior to CIA's inception, only 47 farms were permanently protected.
- Provided a safety net to our dairy farmers through the Dairy Sustainability Account.
- Supported the Farm Transition Grant Program as well as the Farm Viability Grant Program, together awarding more than \$11 million in grants to over 400 farmers and non-profits and municipalities that support agriculture.

Affordable Housing

CIA dollars have funded affordable housing directly by providing "gap" financing not otherwise available and by supporting important services such as repairing the roof on a homeless shelter, replacing a boiler in a group home, or providing support services for veterans. CIA funding is critical to the state's ability to meet the housing needs of its middle- and low income residents. Specific programs that have been funded through CIA include:

- The Coordinated Access Network (CAN) infrastructure which assists individuals in a coordinated and streamlined way to help them exit homelessness to housing.
- Rapid rehousing efforts to prevent and end homelessness by getting families quickly out of shelters and into apartments.

- A statewide cold weather homelessness response plan to ensure shelter for all persons during our coldest winters.
- A technical assistance program to help Connecticut’s suburban and rural towns develop hundreds of units of affordable housing for seniors and those who work in the community.
- Transit-oriented housing to ensure that affordable rents are located along Connecticut’s growing transit corridors.

Open Space Conservation

The CIA is the only consistent source of funding for the state’s Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (OSWA) – the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection’s matching grant program for land trusts, municipalities, and water companies seeking to conserve open space. With assistance from the OSWA program, 36,000+ acres have been protected through 575+ land conservation projects across the state.

The CIA is the sole source of funding for OSWA’s Urban Green and Community Garden (UGCG) Program, which has provided over \$1 million in financial assistance to targeted investment and/or distressed municipalities, including Bridgeport, Hartford, Enfield, New Haven, Putnam, Norwalk, and New London, for community garden and greenspace development projects.

CIA funding is critical to the viability of these programs, which are essential to the state’s efforts in meeting its land conservation goals, addressing the impacts of the climate crisis, and ensuring that all people have access to opportunities to connect with nature, and the physical and mental health benefits it provides.

Looking ahead, full funding of the CIA:

- Ensures there are sufficient funds for the pending 2020 OSWA and UGCG awards, the most competitive grant round in the history of both programs.
- Allows DEEP to announce the 2021 grant round, with the number of applications expected to equal or exceed the previous two rounds.
- Impacts DEEP’s ability to pay for two land acquisition department staff positions.

Historic Preservation

The Community Investment Act provides necessary and reliable funding to every community in Connecticut to protect and invest in its cultural heritage and revitalize downtowns. Preservation is not just a feel-good exercise:

- Tourism, rehabilitation, maintenance, and related activities have added more than 6,000 jobs and nearly half a billion dollars to the economy in the last decade.
- For every \$100 invested in the rehabilitation of a historic structure, some \$83 ends up in the pockets of Connecticut workers.

CIA provides direct investment through grant programs administered by the State Historic Preservation Office.

- Almost \$24 million awarded in matching grants for bricks-and-mortar projects and pre-development planning leveraging \$48 million investment in communities.
- \$1.5 million a year in smaller grants to nonprofits and municipalities is awarded. Activities include planning for rehabilitation, inventories, State and National Register nominations, COVID-19 Stewardship Relief.
- \$1 million invested in survey and grants of historic industrial complexes documenting more than 1,400 properties and launching the connecticutmills.org website, a tool widely used by developers, municipal leaders, and citizens for thoughtful planning and investment.

During this time, we cannot afford to miss opportunities to reinvest in Connecticut’s downtowns. Connecticut Main Street Center recent analysis shows there is 187 million square foot of vacant and underutilized space in our historic downtowns. Fully developed, these can produce 88,000 units of housing of which 17,600 or more could be affordable, 20,000 new businesses and over \$1 billion in new annual sales and income tax to the state.

The initiatives supported by CIA bolster our infrastructure of place – pristine open spaces, vibrant historic town centers, working farms, and housing choices for everyone. With these assets, working together, we can continue to invest in communities across the state and build a nationally competitive, sustainable economy in Connecticut for the benefit of all residents.

We the undersigned sincerely appreciate your consideration of our request to fully fund the Community Investment Act in the biennial budget. We would be happy to discuss the benefits of the program in more detail.

Sincerely,

Major Supporters of the Community Investment Act (in alphabetical order):

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| Audubon Connecticut | Connecticut Farm Bureau Association |
| Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions | Connecticut Farmland Trust |
| Connecticut Audubon Society | Connecticut Forest & Park Association |
| Connecticut Council of Small Towns | Connecticut Housing Coalition |
| Connecticut Conference of Municipalities | Connecticut Land Conservation Council |
| | Connecticut League of Conservation Voters |

Connecticut Main Street Center	Partnership for Strong Communities
Connecticut Nursery and Landscape Association	Preservation Connecticut
Connecticut Preservation Action	The Nature Conservancy
Connecticut State Grange	The Trust for Public Land
Housatonic Valley Association	United Way of Connecticut
Local Initiatives Support Corporation - Hartford and Connecticut Statewide	Working Lands Alliance, a project of the American Farmland Trust

cc (via email only):

Brian Hurlburt, Commissioner, CT Department of Agriculture

David Lehman, Commissioner, CT Department of Economic and Community Development

Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection

Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Commissioner, CT Department of Housing

Mary Dunne, State Historic Preservation Officer