



# The Local Landmarker

Issue 8, June 2008



*On the Cover: 41 Broad Street in lower Manhattan. This former bank building (constructed in 1928-29) has been converted to a school, using the Federal Tax Credit for Rehabilitation. The former grand banking hall now serves as the school's auditorium, and the cafeteria kitchen is in the former vault. New York City has been a CLG since 1996, but has had a local preservation law since 1965, sparked in part by the loss of Pennsylvania Station. New York City was party to the landmark 1978 Supreme Court ruling that determined that historic preservation was a legitimate use of local power (Penn Central Transportation Co. v. New York City, 438 U.S. 104), thereby opening the door to thousands of new local preservation commissions across the country.*

---

## *From the Coordinator*

### **This issue**

In keeping with looking for ways to provide the best information to member CLGs, this issue of the *Landmarker* contains a reprint from the *Advocacy Training Manual*, produced by National Trust for Historic Preservation's Center for State and Local Policy. The Center for State and Local Policy provides educational materials focused on the specific needs and issues confronting preservation interests. This article was written by Rhonda Sincavage, a program associate in the Center for State and Local Policy, and was originally published by the Center for Preservation Leadership.

Communication with your elected officials is crucial to the success of historic preservation commissions and boards. Although you, by nature of your work, are an integral part of local government, don't forget that not all elected officials may understand or even support your purpose and agree with the importance of your goals. Also, every election has the potential to bring an entirely new slate of local officials who may not have dealt with the commission before. In some instances, officials have actually been voted into office with opposition to a local preservation law as one of their planks! This article will give you some ideas about how to approach and educate local officials so you are hopefully supporting each other's efforts.

### **Training**

Lately I have been doing CLG specific training for commissions and boards, starting with a review of the local law, and moving through decision making and design review. I've been getting a lot from these sessions myself, learning more aspects of local laws and local situations, and so far the attendees have felt the same. Typically, these trainings take about 3 hours. If you are interested in scheduling one of these sessions, please let me know and we can find a date that works for both of us.

As usual, I'll be around the state meeting with member communities and those interested in becoming members. Please let me know what I can do to help as you work to preserve your community's sense of place

**Julian Adams**  
**CLG Coordinator**

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau  
P.O. Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188  
(518) 237-8643, ext, 3281  
Julian.Adams@oprhp.state.ny.us

Listserv:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NYSCLGS/>

---

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation oversees the Certified Local Government program. This office receives federal funding from the National Park Service. Regulations of the U.S. Department of the Interior strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination in the departmental federally assisted programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, age or handicap. Any person who believes he or she has been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility operated by a recipient of federal assistance should write to: Director, Equal Opportunity Program, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, P.O. 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

---

## *Communicating With Elected Officials*

Rhonda Sincavage  
Program Associate, Center for State and Local Policy  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

*Originally published in Advocacy Training Manual by the National Trust's Center for Preservation Leadership. Reprinted with permission.*

Communicating with elected officials is a key component of any advocacy endeavor. And just as it is your responsibility as a citizen to exercise your right to vote, it is just as important to communicate with officials once they take office. Let them know your communities' concerns and interests. Stakeholders promoting many different interests are in regular contact with elected officials, and the historic preservation community must be active on this front as well.

### **Why It Is Necessary to Communicate with Elected Officials**

Historic preservation needs the support of elected officials because they determine policies that affect preservation efforts. For example, elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels make decisions on funding measures and grant programs; support tax incentives to encourage historic preservation and community revitalization (federal tax credits, state tax credits, or local property tax abatement programs); and enact legal protections to protect historic buildings and sites.

Regular communication with elected officials will help secure policies that benefit preservation and will establish a relationship with decision makers as partners in successful preservation initiatives. Relationships with elected officials should be seen as a two-way street. By cultivating these relationships, preservationists know they have an ally

in a decision-making position, and conversely, preservation advocates can be a helpful resource to public officials by providing updates and information about what is happening "on the ground" with their constituents.

### **Know Your Decision Makers**

It is important to do some research on decision makers before starting to build relationships with them and communicating preservation priorities. Knowing what motivates elected officials can be helpful in advocating for a particular cause. Most state governments as well as individual legislators have websites with information on voting records, personal history of elected officials, campaign platforms, and so on. Consider researching the following questions:

- What is the official's background: hometown, school, previous career, outside interests? This helps to identify possible allies who have worked with the official in the past and issues that are important to the official.
- What district does the elected official represent?
- What historic resources are in this district?
- What committee memberships does the official hold? What is the official's seniority? This will help preservation

advocates determine what types of policy the official is actively involved with and the official's relative influence among his or her colleagues.

### **Effective Communication with Elected Officials**

There are many different ways to communicate with elected officials, and the most appropriate depends on each unique situation. In general, communication with elected officials can take place via e-mail, fax, mail, telephone, or face-to-face meetings.

Because personalization to the greatest extent possible is desired, face-to-face meetings are usually preferable, but that doesn't mean that other forms of communication can't be effective. The method you use to communicate is not nearly as important as your message. A thoughtful, personalized, and well-written e-mail, fax, or letter that explains how a preservation issue will directly impact constituents and/or the elected official's district can have nearly the same effect as a personal visit. Avoid form letters or a formulaic response. Make the message your own and have it reflect your genuine passion for the subject. Regardless of the method, elected officials care most about the concerns of their constituents because they want to get reelected!

Communications that hold the most weight with elected officials are from those they represent, so advocates should state clearly in any communications that they are a constituent.

Preservation advocates can build a relationship with elected officials starting with outreach and education programs. From there advocates can advance to specific requests and then—following the hoped-for success—to recognition events.

Even if it is necessary to jump in immediately with a request on a specific issue, advocates should continue to follow up with information to strengthen the relationship.

### **Reach Out**

First communicate the importance of preservation to officials and their staff. Elected officials want and expect to hear from constituents and appreciate their efforts.

If elected officials don't know priorities, they can't effectively represent their constituents or make informed decisions on issues regarding historic preservation. Remember that decision makers are constantly balancing interests of concerned citizens, so make sure elected officials are familiar with preservation issues. A few ways in which to engage elected officials include:

- providing them with current information through newsletters and announcements (be sure to ask permission before adding to e-mail and mail distribution lists),
- inviting them to speak at or attend meetings, and;
- insuring that they are included at preservation events in their district, such as groundbreaking or ribbon-cuttings.

### **Educate**

Next, act as a reliable information resource to elected officials on matters concerning historic preservation. They need to be aware of the many issues that may affect preservation. Although elected officials and their staff tend to have general knowledge on a wide variety of subjects, they rely on experts in the field to guide and educate them when it comes

to the specifics. You should aim to be the “go-to” person for decision makers when they have a question about historic preservation. Some examples of helpful information to provide to your elected officials include:

- background on the history and significance of your community
- general information on state and local preservation organizations
- copies of economic benefit studies and reinvestment statistics
- updates on preservation projects in your community or district

### **Ask**

Once a relationship with elected officials is established and they are familiar with preservation concerns, the next step is to think about specific ways they can advance a preservation agenda. Typical requests would be to ask officials to support or sponsor legislation that would benefit preservation, to vote a certain way on a measure, to include historic preservation in a legislative platform, or to attend an event. Regardless of the request, make sure you clearly communicate what you want them to do and express why their support would benefit preservation. Use local examples to show how the action you are requesting would affect the official’s state, district, or community.

### **Recognize**

It is important to recognize elected officials when their time or actions have benefited historic preservation. In addition to directly thanking decision makers for their efforts, advocates should take the opportunity to acknowledge their support in a more public way. This can be

done at a variety of occasions such as tours, ribbon cuttings, or a press conference. Other options include bestowing an award or honor on the elected official, or by acknowledging decision makers in the press through a letter to the editor. In any case, it is important to let elected officials know that the preservation community appreciates their support of historic preservation and can be counted on to publicly recognize them, whenever it is appropriate.

### **What to Communicate**

Whether by e-mail, letter, phone, or face-to-face, a carefully crafted message conveys to decision makers that historic preservation is very important to your community. Be sure all communication is clear, concise, and direct.

Some effective communication strategies include:

- Identify spokespeople who would be effective at communicating your message. This enables a consistent, persuasive message.
- Develop a short (no more than one-page) briefing to summarize the benefits and expected outcomes of key policies. This can be useful for any type of stakeholder: an elected official, a member of the press, a potential volunteer, or a potential funder.
- Prepare case studies showcasing successful preservation projects in an elected official’s district complete with pictures.
- Have handy a brief “elevator speech” that summarizes your concerns in case you run into an elected official or stakeholder and have the



opportunity for a very brief conversation.

- Distribute letters of support for a specific preservation initiative.

## Conclusion

Successful preservation programs, deserving projects, and worthy causes depend on support from elected officials that have the ability to enact policies. Thankfully, every voice matters in our legislative process and effective communication by preservationists will ensure that the preservation message is heard by decision makers. People involved in preservation care deeply about their communities and their states and the special places that enrich all of our lives. That message is a powerful and compelling one so don't hesitate to promote your cause with determination and persistence. Your community and its heritage deserve nothing less!

The National Trust Center for State and Local Policy helps preservationists influence policy makers in their own communities through training, technical assistance, and promotion of effective advocacy tools. This publication is part of the Center's Advocacy Training Manual.

To receive assistance with your policy issue, the latest information on advocacy techniques, or to order additional copies of this chapter, e-mail the National Trust Center for State and Local Policy at [policy@nthp.org](mailto:policy@nthp.org), call 202-588-6167, or visit [www.nationaltrust.org/advocacy](http://www.nationaltrust.org/advocacy); [www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy/](http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy/)

This project is made possible, in part, through the generous support of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund.

Other resources from the National Trust for Historic Preservation:

*A Blueprint for Lobbying* by Susan West Montgomery

National Trust for Historic Preservation:  
[www.preservationbooks.org](http://www.preservationbooks.org)

*Effective Communications for Preservation Nonprofit Organizations* by Richard McPherson, Debra Ashmore, and Timothy Oleary  
National Trust for Historic Preservation:  
[www.preservationbooks.org](http://www.preservationbooks.org)



*41 Broad Street exterior*

## *Featured Resources*

*Advocacy Guru*, Advocacy Associates, LLC: [www.advocacyguru.com](http://www.advocacyguru.com)

*Citizens Building Communities*, League of Women Voters is designed to help users understand some of the basics and guide them to resources so that they can foster dialogues at their community level. 2005, LWVEF, Pub # 2070, \$4.95 plus shipping and handling; [www.lwv.org](http://www.lwv.org)

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Center for State and Local Policy  
[www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy/](http://www.preservationnation.org/resources/public-policy/center-for-state-local-policy/)

Preservation Action: [www.preservationaction.org](http://www.preservationaction.org)

An online search for “communication with elected officials” will bring up a variety of websites with guidelines for special interest groups which are good models.



*The former banking hall of 41 Broad Street, converted into the school auditorium. This type of creative reuse of space is something historic preservation can bring to a project to maintain community character and shared spaces while allowing for change and growth.*

## *The Back Page*

The following list of Dos and Don'ts is reprinted from *Communicating with Elected Officials*, produced by the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Center for State and Local Policy. You may wish to keep it near at all times or make it a part of your commission's workbook.

### **Dos and Don'ts for Communicating with Elected Officials**

#### **DO**

Conduct your research ahead of time  
Mention you are a constituent  
Make clear, concise arguments  
Provide relevant examples  
Be polite, address officials properly  
Make a specific request  
Be aware of the official's interests and priorities  
Include your contact information  
Leave room for follow-up  
Say thank you

#### **DON'T**

Give false or misconstrued information  
Focus on too many priorities  
Be overly wordy or go into too much detail  
Be intimidated  
Threaten or be demanding  
Expect an immediate response  
Be disappointed to be referred to legislative staff  
Use technical jargon  
Forget to recognize them for their support