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Local Organizations Up In Arms Over Proposed State Program Cut

by Michael Torelli
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A decision made by Governor Dannel P. Malloy is likely to have adverse effects on local projects regarding affordable housing, agriculture, historic preservation, and open space sites.

The Community Investment Act (CIA), which was enacted in 2005, accumulates funds for affordable housing and agriculture developments, as well as historic preservation and open space properties. Funds are raised by implementing a \$40 recording fee to be charged with each real estate transaction in the state.

Since 2005, the CIA has been able to fund over 1,100 projects

in Connecticut and has redistributed roughly \$133 million back to local communities.

According to the CIA website, Malloy's budget proposes to cut all funds from the CIA beginning Jan. 1, 2016, and running through June 30, 2017 by depositing what would be used by the CIA into the state's general fund.

"This unprecedented diversion would effectively end the Community Investment Act as we know it, directly impacting the character of our state," the CIA website reads.

Organizations in Cheshire have been cumulatively awarded approximately \$230,090 since the CIA's inception, which has been spread among a number of quali-

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fied organizations, such as St. Peter's Episcopal Church and the Cheshire Land Trust, Inc.

The Cheshire Historic District Commission has used CIA funds for a variety of programs, as well as preservation of some of the town's historic properties. HDC Chairman Elizabeth Fox wrote a letter in March to Cheshire's local delegation explaining the reasons why she believes the state government should support maintaining funding for the CIA.

"As the Chair ... I have seen how these funds have preserved

the historic character of our town," Fox wrote.

According to Fox, the CIA funds paid for half the cost for booklets distributed to over 600 people who took part in last year's trolley ride through historic Cheshire streets. Fox added that the funds were also used to paint the steeple of the First Congregational Church, offset costs for the development and production of a play on the Civil War, and pay for half of the development costs for a walking tour app to be used on smart phones.

"Raiding these funds to balance the budget means the loss of funds for restoration grants, technical assistance, condition assessments and feasibility studies, field service programs, and so much more," Fox wrote. "Connecticut's historic culture will be at risk."

Economic Development Coordinator Jerry Sitko added that

CIA funds have been used "productively" by the town.

"It certainly has made a difference here, especially in the area of historic preservation," Sitko said.

Sitko would not comment directly on how projects would be completed without the use of CIA funds, but added that the financial appropriations for programs and other work would have to be approved by the Town Council and Town Manager Michael Milone.

"It certainly would come out of the local budget," Sitko said.

State Senator Joe Markley (R-16) stated that the decision on whether CIA funds remain untouched or are cut by Governor Malloy will depend on state budget negotiations. According to Markley, the Connecticut Republican Party has presented an alternative budget that would restore 100 percent of the funds back to the CIA, without an increase in taxes.

Where negotiations will lead, however, is something that Markley is unable to answer.

"The state government is just taking and taking from the communities," Markley said. "This is one of the relatively small things that the state does for the communities, and to take it away would be a terrible thing."