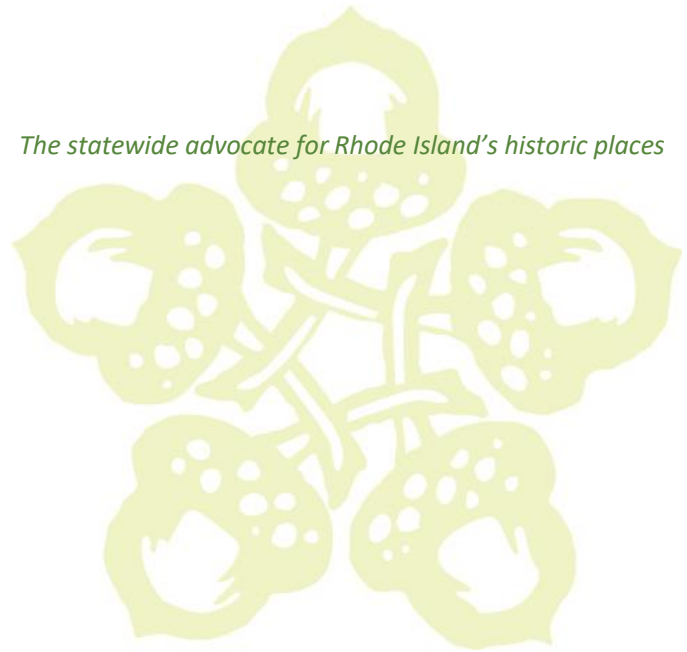


The statewide advocate for Rhode Island's historic places



April 13, 2026

House Finance Committee
Rhode Island General Assembly
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Written Testimony in Support of House Resolution H8316 (MAKING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$150,000 TO THE MAIN STREET RHODE ISLAND PROGRAM)

FROM: Sheryl Hack Preserve Rhode Island

Dear Chairman Abney and Members of the Rhode Island House Finance Committee:

As executive director at Preserve Rhode Island, committed to protecting and activating historic places for the benefit of all Rhode Islanders, I write in strong support of continued state funding for Main Street Rhode Island, managed by Grow Smart RI in alignment with Main Street America. I urge the Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation in H8316 for FY 2027. This is a high-return economic development investment, and the time to act is now.

Rhode Island's walkable, historic commercial districts are among the state's most underutilized economic assets. Main Street Rhode Island exists to change that, through a coordinated statewide network backed by Main Street America's 46-year track record. What makes this program work is who it brings together. The network currently spans across 28 of our 39 municipalities, connecting local government, neighborhood associations, community development leaders, and small business owners at the same table, to brainstorm and build strategies no individual community can generate on its own. Through free monthly roundtables, network convenings, technical assistance trainings, and the inaugural Main Street Together Conference, Main Street Rhode Island serves as the catalyst for strengthening our Main Street districts as places where small businesses can succeed and community connections can grow. We need to capitalize on this momentum.

State investment in this program is not a subsidy or grant, it is leverage. The Main Street America model carries a documented average return on investment of 24 to 1, generating much

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needed state and municipal revenue. Intentional local efforts produced through participation in this program attract private spending, business reinvestment, and property development that would not otherwise occur. A well-resourced state coordinating program creates the conditions for that investment: trained local leadership, documented strategies, and a credible, connected network of communities ready to act. Every dollar of state funding directed toward this infrastructure is a multiplier for local economic activity.

Both missions of Grow Smart RI and Preserve RI are strongly aligned around historic preservation. Preserve Rhode Island serves as the statewide advocate for historic preservation and Grow Smart engages in the revitalization and economic development to the main streets of our towns and cities, centered around sense of place. Sense of place and historic preservation are one in the same, our organizations both seek to advocate and revitalize the structures that give Rhode Island its essence and sense of place, and our main streets play the most important role. They are not only vital to the economic and cultural health of our state, but they also connect us to our past.

As we near the end of Year 1 of the three-year pilot established by the 2025 legislation, the state's early investment is beginning to compound. Communities participating in the inaugural "learning cohort" are moving from learning to action, developing projects with real economic potential through Main Street America's Four Point Approach. That technical assistance pipeline exists only because Rhode Island currently has an active state-level membership in Main Street America. Without continued funding, that partnership cannot be sustained, the momentum communities have built would stall, and the returns the state has already begun to seed would be left unrealized.

I respectfully urge the House Finance Committee to approve the \$150,000 appropriation for Main Street Rhode Island in FY 2027.

Thank you for your consideration. I invite you to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Hack

Executive Director, Preserve Rhode Island

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