

How Architect Robert Verrier Saved More than 150 Places with Historic Tax Credits

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Written by Robert Verrier, FAIA, NCARB

For more than 30 years, historic preservation tax incentives have been helping architects, builders, and private citizens transform historic buildings for new uses, preserving architectural heritage, and benefiting communities all over the country. I should know, because using tax credit incentives has been key to my business for just as many years, allowing me and one of my partners Mike Binette to save clients money while restoring more than 150 historic commercial, industrial, and educational structures -- many of which can be found on the National Register of Historic Places.

We are proud of what we've achieved in and around Boston -- an American city rich in history and beautiful old buildings -- but we're also excited about how these incentives have helped Boston and cities like it all over the country.



Bourne Mill, one of America's oldest cotton gins, in Tiverton, Rhode Island.

The recent debate over historic preservation tax incentives is long on political orthodoxy but short on common sense. The benefits of these tax credits are indisputable. By redeveloping historic buildings, tax credits save our architectural heritage and spur new private investment, create construction jobs, and set the stage for new economic activities, such as tourism.

There's nothing like a broken window to scare off businesses. **Any savvy investor will agree that commercial activity gets a bump when abandoned buildings are brought back to life, or derelict properties are restored to their former grandeur.**

But there's much more. Many historic buildings serve as the visual gateway to entire towns and neighborhoods. They anchor their communities, and often had a central role in making them happen. Examples are everywhere -- churches, town halls, first settler homesteads, factories, schools, mills, lighthouses, and office and institutional buildings. Our architecture firm has spent four decades restoring and adapting old mills and other historic structures throughout New England and along the East Coast -- each of which has precipitated in some way the rebirth and growth of the community.



St. Aidan's Catholic Church in Brookline, Massachusetts, where John F. Kennedy was baptized.

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Why does this matter? First, **these landmarks are part of the fabric and collective memory of their communities.** Generations of families made their living inside those factories, connecting the old stone walls with their family history. They root us to the place.

More so, **these old buildings have great bones and can reinvigorate their neighborhoods once again.** Many adapted mills have taken on new lives, such as commercial, hospitality, community centers and a wide array of residential type uses. In this way, these historic structures have brought their towns and neighborhoods back to life.

Preservation is also the greenest thing we can do. For example, in Dorchester, Mass., the 1765 Baker Chocolate Factory grew to employ hundreds. After shuttering in 1969, it sat mute and untended until its conversion to a community of apartments, assisted living, and more. The work took decades to complete and recycled tons of brick, granite block and many hundreds of massive wood beams and deck.

Today, Dorchester Lower Mills not only has hundreds of new residents, it has become a vibrant downtown with cafés, boutiques, and a bustling grocery store. People visit for fun, ambiance -- and history. **In this way, historic tax credits create a valuable commodity: hope.**



Baker Chocolate Factory (side view) in Dorchester, Massachusetts.

Proof of old and historic buildings' attraction and economic value is everywhere. And many of our friends and clients -- mayors, real estate developers, bankers, and residents -- will vouch that the same results never would have been accomplished without historic federal and state tax credits.

Our country's history deserves better than a wrecking ball. If you believe in America's past -- and our chances for a better collective future -- historic tax credits are something you can and must believe in, too.

Robert Verrier, FAIA, NCARB and Michael Binette, AIA, NCARB, are partners at The Architectural Team, Inc., a Boston-based architecture firm specializing in master planning, hospitality, mixed-use, multi-family housing, and historic preservation and adaptive reuse.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is committed to raising awareness of the importance of the historic tax credit and advocating for a few strategic improvements that would expand its already impressive track record of saving places, creating jobs and revitalizing communities. You can help! Visit SaveHistoricCredit.org.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation works to save America's historic places. Join us today to help protect the places that matter to you.
