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Preserving Georgia's heritage demands stronger historic rehab tax credit

W. Wright Mitchell, President and CEO of Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation Special to the Savannah Morning News

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Key Points AI-assisted summary

The Georgia State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC) program encourages private investment in restoring historic buildings.

In the last five years, the program has generated nearly \$900 million in private investment, creating over 10,000 jobs and 1,800 housing units.

The program's tax credits are fully claimed through its 2029 sunset date, effectively halting new projects without legislative action.

In 2026, the United States will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, a milestone that invites every state to reflect on its own history and the legacy it hopes to carry into the next century. Georgia, one of the original thirteen colonies, stands at the heart of that story. From Savannah's colonial squares to the mill villages of the Piedmont and the main streets that grew up around the railroads, Georgia's history is rich. Georgia's historic buildings and districts are a tangible connection to that history, but the connection is fragile. Too often, the buildings that tell our story fall victim to deferred maintenance, economic pressures, or the increasing expense of updating older structures for modern use. When they disappear, we lose more than bricks and mortar; we lose identity, opportunity, and the rooted sense of place that makes our communities stronger. This is why the Georgia State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC) program matters. And it is why the General Assembly should act decisively in 2025 to strengthen the program ahead of the nation's semiquincentennial.

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The HRTC is one of Georgia's most effective economic development tools. Unlike grants or appropriations, tax credits do not require upfront state spending. Instead, they encourage private citizens and developers to invest their own dollars into rehabilitating historic buildings — projects that spur construction jobs, generate long-term local tax revenue, and reactivate properties that would otherwise remain liabilities. In just the past five years, the Georgia HRTC has spurred nearly \$900 million in private investment across the state. The HRTC program has helped breathe new life into mill complexes, commercial blocks, and community landmarks in cities of every size and in all corners of Georgia. These are not abstract benefits. Revitalized structures become apartments in housing-strapped communities, storefronts for small businesses and tourism draws for visitors to our state. Again, in just the past five years, Georgia's HRTC program has helped create 1,800 new housing units and over 10,000 jobs. Unfortunately, Georgia's HRTC program is now effectively dead with limited credits fully claimed through the program's sunset date of 2029. Without action from the legislature, no new projects will be able to utilize this critical program, and good projects will not move forward. These lost opportunities will harm rural economic development and urban revitalization across the state. Fixing the HRTC program will send a clear signal that Georgia views its past as an asset for its future. A functional state credit will unlock private capital at a moment when communities statewide are seeking new strategies for growth. It will help small-town main streets compete with sprawling development, give rural counties a tool to fight blight, and support urban districts where housing demand far outstrips supply.

Most importantly, a strengthened program will honor the principle at the heart of the 250th anniversary: that the story of America is the story of its people and its places. Preserving that story requires meaningful investment in the places that reflect our shared history. Strengthening the HRTC is not merely a policy choice; it is an act of stewardship. By enhancing the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, lawmakers can help ensure that future generations inherit a Georgia that remembers where it came

from, values the communities that built it, and embraces preservation as a pathway to economic resilience and civic pride.

W. Wright Mitchell is the president and CEO of the Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, which works for the preservation and revitalization of Georgia's diverse historic resources and advocates their appreciation, protection and use.

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