I’m standing here today in front of the Atlas Theater on H Street, about a mile and a half northeast of the Capitol. This theater was built in 1938 and really fell into disrepair in the 1970s as a result of neglect and also the race riots here in Washington, DC. But today it is a vital, new theater here in this vibrant community in a big part because of the National Park Service Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program, which helped this place get reestablished and is revitalizing this entire neighborhood. Let’s go inside and check it out.

The National Park Service’s Historic Preservation Tax Incentive Program is the largest community reinvestment program in the country, leveraging over $55 billion of reinvestment in communities since its inception in 1976.

The goals of the program are to preserve historic buildings, stimulate private investment, create jobs, and to revitalize communities. We do this in partnership with the IRS and with the State Historic Preservation Offices. Sustainability is an absolute high priority of mine, and the preservation of historic buildings is a key to sustainability.

I’m here inside the theatre with Scott Kennison, who’s been involved with this project from its beginning and today operates the theater, so, Scott, maybe you could tell me how the tax incentive program really helped.

Scott Kennison: “Well, it really made it possible for us to be in this building today. We use it for all sorts of performances and educational programs that we have here. We have performances on the stage—music, dance, theatre. We also have another theater space down the hall. In total, there are five performing spaces in the building.

The Atlas has been sort of the lynchpin of the whole—this neighborhood. This neighborhood is now called the Atlas District, and it is, I think, because of the Atlas that all these restaurants and these bars are thriving.”

The Atlas Theatre is just one of 35,000 projects that have received tax credits. They’re found in communities all across this country and in all kinds of historic buildings. For example, an old Catholic school dormitory in Duluth, Minnesota, now serves the community as a women’s shelter. The Ford Motor Company assembly plant in Richmond, California, is now space for manufacturers of environmentally sustainable products, as well as pavilion space for meetings and entertainment. The Cadillac Hotel in Seattle, damaged in the Nisqually Earthquake, is now home for Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. And the old Waco High School in Waco, Texas, was updated to create more than 100 affordable housing apartments.

The fact that the National Park Service is influencing the revitalization of communities through investment in historic properties around this country is a little-known fact, and so I encourage you to learn more about the opportunities for this tax incentive historic preservation program.