

There are many remarkable people on the front lines of preservation advocacy. Each quarter, we want to recognize a preservation advocate who has made an impact and is an inspiration. **They are our Preservation Action Heroes.**

Preservation Action Hero

Meghan Elliott Minnesota

Meghan Elliott has dedicated her career to historic building redevelopment. “Use is the best form of preservation,” has become her motto after years of helping put unused and under-utilized buildings back into service. Meghan started her career in the field of earthquake engineering for historic buildings in high seismic zones after obtaining graduate degrees in both engineering and architecture as a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow. She quickly realized that life safety and engineering are only one small – but very important – part of the many challenges of building reuse.

A move to Minnesota (and its lack of seismic activity) incentivized Meghan to create a consulting practice dedicated to making historic sites and buildings socially, physically, and financially relevant and viable. Meghan founded [New History](#) in 2011 and, nearly 300 projects later, has become a resource and leading advocate for building reuse across the state.

2020 was a chaotic year for Minnesota. With all that was happening in the state and the world, the state legislature was focused on high visibility issues. This left the expiring state historic tax credit in danger of falling through the cracks. Meghan saw the need for action and co-founded [RevitalizeMN](#) to advocate for the tax credit’s extension, and to bring awareness to the important role of building reuse for economic development, sustainability, housing, and heritage.



First enacted in 2011, the Minnesota state historic tax credit was put into place as part of a jobs act in response to the Great Recession, which hit Minnesota construction jobs particularly hard. Initially a five-year program, the credit had been extended to 2021. With the clock running out, Meghan and RevitalizeMN advocated and lobbied for an eight-year extension; in the end, the program was only extended by one year to 2022.

The **Minnesota credit** has been a critical tool for historic building redevelopment across the state. Since 2011, the credit created over 28,000 jobs and generated more than \$5 billion for the state’s economy while saving more than 170 historic properties. **The return on investment for this program speaks for itself: for every \$1 invested in the credit by the state, nearly \$10 was returned in economic development, making Minnesota one of the most admired and effective tax credit programs in the country with no annual or per-project caps.**

Bracing for another round, Meghan and her [RevitalizeMN](#) colleagues reached far and wide when advocating for the tax credit’s retention. It was looking good: the extension had bi-partisan support in both the Minnesota House of Representatives and Senate earlier this year. Then, unexpectedly, the Senate adjourned their regular session without passing either the proposed \$4 billion tax bill - which included a permanent extension of the credit - nor a \$4 billion spending bill. With only one omnibus tax bill that included many tax provisions, the state historic tax credit became yet another victim of divided politics. **At the time of this writing, and despite tremendous community support, bi-partisan bill sponsors, and advocacy efforts, Minnesota’s state historic tax credit program has expired. While RevitalizeMN continues to advocate and reach out to senators to return for a special session to approve the 2022 tax bill, no announcements have been made.**

Meghan acts as CEO of [New History](#). Based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, New History works with clients throughout the Upper Midwest region, including regional and national real estate developers, cities, counties, architecture firms, and educational institutions, among others. The integrated team includes historians, licensed design professionals, and project planners for historic building redevelopment – all with a depth of experience in the regulatory, financial, and physical framework of historic preservation. In 2021, she added real estate development to her career, and is completing the conversion of the historic St. Louis County Jail in Duluth, MN into Leijona, 33 units of mixed-income housing on the shore of Lake Superior.

Thank you, Meghan, for embodying what it means to be a Preservation Action Hero!