

12-15-02

State's Historic Trust reviews its own grants to free up \$11M

Associated Press

TRENTON — Hoping to free up \$11 million in grants, the New Jersey Historic Trust has decided to have its own volunteers review grant applications rather than bringing in state employees to do the job.

The McGreevey administration has said the state does not have enough money right now for the Historic Trust to hire the staff needed to visit historic sites and decide which deserve money.

The trust has decided it would prefer to have its volunteers handle reviews rather than accept help from the Department of Community Affairs.

The trust, which has four employees, said it needs twice

Upgrades may get a 2nd chance

SCHOOL From B1

that to complete the process. For now, it plans to have some of its 11 volunteer trustees complete necessary visits and paperwork for grant reviews.

The trustees, who must have five years of historic preservation experience to be appointed, are qualified to complete the reviews.

Carol Greene of Mahwah, the trust's new chairwoman, likened the situation to "a bleeding wound."

"People have been waiting for their grants since Feb. 1," Greene told The Star-Ledger of Newark. "Projects are going stale, projects are losing matching funding, buildings are continuing to deteriorate and they are losing financing backing. It's a huge problem that has to be solved."

Projects for which funding is being sought include county courthouses in Sussex, Hunterdon and Hudson counties; firehouses in South Orange and Raritan; and the Barron Arts Center in Woodbridge.

Trustees recommend which sites to fund. Final approval is left to the Legislature.

This year, Gov. James E. McGreevey moved the Historic Trust from the New Jersey Department of State to the Department of Community Affairs.

Trust members have resisted what they view as efforts by Community Affairs Commissioner Susan Bass Levin, former mayor of Cherry Hill, to wield greater influence over the quasi-independent agency.

"The trust is very passionate about its independence," Greene said.

Levin said she wants to loan out DCA personnel only on a temporary basis, and the trust should be able to hire more staff when the state's budget problems ease.

"The trust will continue to be the quasi-independent agency it always has been," Levin said. "Governor McGreevey and I are committed to preserving historic buildings. The DCA is the perfect home for the trust. We have architects, engineers, planners and historians on staff that we can loan to the trust so we can get these grant applications finished."