



AIA
Michigan

8 February 2016

Local Government Committee of the Michigan Senate
c/o Senator Dale Zorn, Committee Chair
Farnum Building
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909-7536

RE: AIAMI opposes Michigan SB 720

Dear Ma'am / Sir,

The American Institute of Architects of Michigan (AIAMI) is writing today to express our opposition to SB 720.

The American Institute of Architects of Michigan has represented the architects of this state for over 100 years. And by 'representing the architects of the state' we mean that we are staunch advocates for our architects to be highly knowledgeable about the building of excellent buildings that will be valuable to the people of Michigan, and that we have and maintain an educational process where aspiring architects learn the demands of our profession and how they can develop the skills needed to be exceptional architects themselves. To you, our legislators, that means that we are a well organized and informed group that serve the architectural needs of your constituents. But more than that, we are also expert at speaking to the needs and requirements of the built environment; and that, very much, includes our older historic structures.

With this letter we want to convey one simple sentiment; the effort to preserve the historic buildings in our great state needs to be made easier, not harder, as SB 720 attempts to do. We are fully aware of the arguments put forth by the Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) and others opposing this bill and we support those arguments 100 percent. And as such we do not feel like we need to make those arguments to you again. Instead we would like to ask that you consider what is at stake.

Historic preservation in America is still fairly young. Many preservation organizations and educational programs only date back to the 1980's, and some are even younger. Many historic districts are also fairly young and therefore historic district commissions are still learning. And while these efforts are relatively new much has been accomplished. Iconic buildings across our state have been protected and restored. And older neighborhoods in many of our cities are being cared for and maintained so that future generations will be able to enjoy a wide range of architectural styles and understand how our culture has grown and changed. But most importantly, gone are the days where whole neighborhoods were decimated in the name of 'urban renewal' regardless of the architectural fabric that neighborhood might have contained.



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As the voice of the architects in the state of Michigan, we at AIAMI want to say in the strongest and loudest way possible that we oppose SB 720 for many reasons. We believe that all communities should be following the same Department of the Interior Standards and Guidelines as those guidelines are well researched and grounded, and anything else would result in chaos in the design and preservation community. We believe that requiring 2/3 of property owners to support a petition before a study committee can be appointed is a terribly high bar that will squash the preservation of our buildings and neighborhoods. One has to go all the way back to the year 1900 to find more than 2/3 of our electorate getting out of their chairs to vote for the very important office of President of the United States of America; since then we are content with about half of our electorate making that critical decision, and much less on an 'off' year.

We are also opposed to the idea that the historic nature of a district would need to be reaffirmed every ten years. While there are pragmatic reasons to oppose this (cost, complication and confusion within the community), the idea that once a district is determined to have enough examples of significant architecture worth protecting and restoring, by knowledgeable and respected architectural historians and preservationists that a future group of legislators, who may know little or nothing about architecture can simply overturn that. And further, to give the ability to scrap every historic district to every legislative group every ten years is no way to protect our history. We do not vote to reaffirm our National Parks, or our National Battlefields, or our National Cemeteries every ten years.

As we said, there are other reasons for our opposition to SB 720 and we are in complete agreement with all of the MHPN's arguments against this bill. We also know that our historic districts can be improved and there are a great many people who are working on that all across our state, and our nation. Every year there are conferences, seminars, workshops and retreats where preservationists, architects, engineers, historians, and yes, legislators and historic district commissioners meet to discuss the not so clear cut world of preservation. Doing away with historic districts will not save more buildings. Making it harder to form historic districts will not save more buildings. Making the standards and guidelines for historic preservation subjective per each municipality's whims will not save more buildings.

Our history is precious; and it should be. And much of that history is embodied by our architecture. But unlike our historical books, and papers, and paintings, and other artifacts, our buildings cannot be moved to museums. Our architecture is in, and of, its environment; its landscape. That part of our history needs to be preserved as well, and we do not see SB 720 improving our preservation efforts.

If there is any additional information AIAMI can provide to the committee we would be happy to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Neville
President, AIA Michigan