



Kansas Preservation Alliance, Inc.

preserving the past to enrich the future since 1979

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RE: HB 2118

March 12, 2013

The Kansas Preservation Alliance stands in opposition to House Bill 2118 that would repeal the Kansas state “environs” review process. The existing law enables the community and the state to jointly review changes to buildings within five hundred feet of registered historic properties. The intent was and is to protect the historic character of the historic building in the same way that other development regulations protect the commercial character of retail businesses or salvage operations. Each is vital to the community, but may not make good neighbors. Thus, the reality is that the current law also protects the investment of the historic property owner.

The environs review provisions are similar to zoning laws, but are much more flexible. They apply a scalpel rather than a cleaver and permit parties to negotiate and reach compromise. Of the 269 projects involving listed properties or their environs reviewed by the State of Kansas in the 2012 fiscal year, twenty, or less than 8 percent, of the total were viewed as having an adverse influence on a historic property. And we in KPA know that local city councils can already vote those determinations down under the existing laws.

When you invest scads of money into repairing a building you want to protect that investment, and it isn’t like investing in gold or stocks. If you and your neighbor each had a pound of gold the value of the gold depends on the marketplace, and what either of you does with your pound of gold won’t change the world market price.

On the other hand, if you sell your gold and spend it fixing up your house, and your neighbor decides to sell his gold and spend the money breeding pot-bellied pigs, your investment has just been erased. That is why we have zoning laws to begin with.

Thoughtful development of historic properties can lead to real economic benefits. We have seen the results of making the best use of historic resources in Downtown Lawrence, Old Town in Wichita, and on dozens of Main Streets across the state. Here in Downtown Topeka, those development efforts brought in \$7 in private investment for every \$1 the City provided as redevelopment grants, based on preserving the character of this historic city. And most of those dollars were spent paying skilled laborers here in the community, not buying manufactured materials shipped in from another state.

The Kansas environs law is critical to generating that kind of economic development at a local level. It is also critical to save our state from the thoughtless demolition of our collective heritage. Please encourage the responsible stewardship of our heritage by defeating House Bill 2118.

Robert L. Beardsley, President