



Michigan Historic Preservation Network
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MHPN supports the proposed changes to the Downtown Development Authority Act, Senate Bill 21 & Senate Bill 22

These comments are regarding Senate Bill 21 and 22 and the proposed changes to the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Act that will affect how historic sites are reviewed. The highlights of the bills are:

- The DDA is required to submit proposed changes to the exterior of a DDA owned or financed property, located in a national register district to the State Historic Preservation Office for review. Private property rights are preserved.
- The DDA is required to submit proposed demolition of a DDA owned or financed property within a national register district to the SHPO for review and approval.
- The SHPO is mandated to review and approve or deny proposed demolition within 30 days to expedite the redevelopment of the DDA property.
- This allows for coordinated and efficient efforts to facilitate historic preservation and economic development.

In order to preserve our main street heritage and foster economic development, significant resources in Michigan rely on careful review of changes that affect their integrity and future viability. The DDA legislation in conjunction with the State Historic Preservation Office's (SHPO) ability to exercise authority in such reviews is a key component to protection of contributing historic resources within National Register districts across the state. Those resources add economic value (think historic Mackinac Island). A recent incident in Ionia, MI highlights the relevancy of this legislation and review process.

Last June, the Ionia DDA approved plans for demolition of a contributing structure in Ionia's Downtown Commercial Historic District, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In accordance with Section 29(2) of the Downtown Development Authority Act (MCL 125.1679; PA 197 of 1975), an authority is required to refer proposed changes to the exterior of sites listed in the National Register to the SHPO for comment. SHPO alerted the Ionia DDA of this; it also informed the city of available resources to assist them and encouraged the city to evaluate alternatives to demolition such as placing it on the market for redevelopment.

The obligation of SHPO to collaborate in the redevelopment of the property is an opportunity to address not only the potential loss of an important historic resource, but also to be a partner that contributes to the economic vitality of a community. Regrettably, SHPO's recommendation was not acknowledged and the resource was demolished despite the resources and alternatives available to the city.

It is critical that we allow for the redevelopment of outmoded properties and preservation of our heritage. This bill is important for community preservation and economic revitalization and strikes the appropriate balance.

Thank you for your consideration and I urge your support of these bills.

Sincerely,

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Past Issues

Mt. Pleasant City Hall Now in Historic Borden Building

Cover Story, by Julie Swidwinski

*Location: Mt. Pleasant, Mid-Michigan
Population: 25,946*

After sitting vacant for the better part of 40 years, the Borden building was a fading vestige of Mt. Pleasant's once flourishing agricultural industry. The structure—with its blighted exterior, frequent vandalism, and environmental contamination—was an eyesore to those entering the city's Central Business District. It was even tagged as a "symbol for all that is not right with the downtown" in a 2003 Hyett Palma study. After fifteen failed attempts to restore the building, its future was bleak. However, the new millennium brought new ambitions for the building. Once its true potential was uncovered, the community quickly stepped up to save the historic Michigan treasure.

"Preserving our community's past has always been a priority for our city," said Mt. Pleasant Mayor Jim Holton. "This is never more evident than in our downtown, which is committed to maintaining historic architecture and finding modern reuses for prized structures."

Constructed more than 100 years ago by the Borden Condensed Milk Company, the two-story commercial Italianate structure was built on the banks of the Chippewa River. The Michigan Condensed Milk Factory, also known as the Borden Creamery, was one of the few milk factories that produced both condensed milk and butter. In its glory days, the factory processed more than 200,000 pounds of milk per year from 500 local dairy farmers. After the factory was closed in the 1960s, however, the structure saw little use.

Redevelopment of the factory proved difficult as the property was often overlooked as too small for developers with historic rehabilitation experience or too big for dreamers with minimal resources. Proposals to transform the Borden building into a community center, urban mall, university classrooms, post office, and more, came and went with little fruit.

"The stream of ideas to reuse the Borden building seemed endless," said City Manager Kathie Grinzinger. "Over the decades, many proposals for adapting the landmark were



Mt. Pleasant Mayor Jim Holton.



The finished building, photo by Tim Fitzgerald.

The final piece of the funding puzzle lay in the hands of Mt. Pleasant residents. In 2005, residents approved the sale of the former city hall building, helping raise part of the \$3.5 million needed to purchase a condominium in the Borden building. This 28,000-square-foot space would house the municipal offices. Residents knew the decision would ultimately raise their taxes .6 mills. In the end, the community enthusiastically supported the rehabilitation of the historic landmark by nearly a two-to-one margin.

"It was simply a momentous time for Mt. Pleasant," Mayor Holton said. "The city was buzzing with pride because we knew that when all was said and done, the community was reinvesting in both our past and future."

Since the Borden building is listed on the National Register of Historical Places, its rehabilitation had to be precise. The building's exterior, along with key interior features, needed to match its original construction as closely as possible. The entire process was overseen by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and the local Historic District Commission.

Once cleanup and construction began in April 2007, crews faced a number of obstacles that could have halted the project. More than 20 artesian wells were discovered underground on the site that was to become a public parking lot. Tanks filled with contaminated molasses and unknown materials needed to be disposed. The brick smokestack and water tower, which served as historical landmarks to the residents, were too badly damaged for repair. Asbestos and lead paint removal delayed construction for weeks.

"At times it seemed like such a mess," Grinzinger said. "But we knew that this cleanup was necessary to create a safer, more vibrant community for our residents."

Using a photograph taken around 1910 as a guide, rehabilitation began brick-by-brick. Crews sifted through the building's original 400,000 bricks, reusing those they could and incorporating matching replacements where needed. Old shingles and decking on the roof were removed. Specially milled, historically accurate tongue-and-groove decking was installed and covered with new green shingles that mat

examined, but nothing ever materialized. Finally, after 40 years had passed, it became evident: if the building was going to be saved, it needed to be done quickly."

In early 2002, the city solicited proposals from developers willing to tackle the redevelopment of the aging industrial site. The J.E. Johnson Group of Midland presented a plan to purchase and rehabilitate the structure while maintaining its historic appeal. The assistance of numerous federal and state organizations followed, with offers of various tax credits, environmental cleanup funds and adaptations to historic regulations.



The Creamery restoration was a monumental undertaking of 40 years of trying and 17 attempts to pull it out. Using a photograph taken around 1910 as a guide, rehabilitation began brick-by-brick. The entire process was overseen by the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office and the local Historic District Commission. The project created a rallying point for the community and increased civic pride during tough times. Photos courtesy of the city of Mt. Pleasant.

the original. Hundreds of windows were constructed to match the initial design, and eight magnificent cupolas, complete with handcrafted finials, were built on-site to sit atop the building.



Rehabilitated interior as a state-of-the-art office space. City Hall was moved to the new building, with commission chambers located in the factory's former boiler room.

Although the exterior of the building is straight from a history book, the interior was rehabilitated into state-of-the-art office space. Mt. Pleasant municipal offices account for roughly 75 percent of the building. The city's commission chambers are located in what was the factory's boiler room that provided heat for the milk condensing process. The remainder of the structure is occupied by other tenants, resulting in an increased tax base for the city.

At the project's completion stood a structure that enhanced the Mt. Pleasant community in more ways than one. In addition to developing the first historic district, the project created a signature entrance to Mt. Pleasant's west side and downtown community. The rehabilitation spurred the expansion of the city's Greg K. Baderschneider River Walk Trail; added public parking and completed the streetscape in the downtown area; and created a unique water feature that captures the flow from the discovered artesian wells. Mt. Pleasant's overall investment in the project exceeded \$7 million.

Since the building's grand opening in December 2008, the efforts of the community have not gone unnoticed. Last year, the Borden building received the Governor's Award for Historic Preservation. The project was also honored with a finalist nomination for the Michigan Municipal

League's Community Excellence Award and a presidential plaque from Keep Michigan Beautiful.

The Borden building continues to make the Mt. Pleasant community proud. Not only is it a reminder of the city's rich history as the heart of central Michigan's agricultural beginning but the forgotten factory turned state-of-the-art structure also serves as an example of how historic preservation can meet the needs of the 21st century.

"We can save our past and build our future, without sprawl, strengthening our city center," said an editorial written in the Morning Sun, a daily newspaper that serves central Michigan. "We can do it when the right dreams meet the right incentives—and in the Borden building project, they did."

A Timeline of the Historic Borden Building

- Construction of the condensed milk factory began in January 1907, and was completed in less than six months.
- Approximately 40,000 cubic feet of concrete was laid in the foundation and floors.
- The foundation of the 125-foot smokestack contained more than 4,500 cubic feet of concrete and extended down to the "hard pan" (bed rock).
- Roughly 75 tons of roofing steel was used, with roof shingles made of asbestos. The material, when first used, was heralded for its fire retardant properties.



- The building contains four layers of brick; more than 400,000 in all.
- A large whistle was used to notify factory workers of specific times during the day am, 7:15 am, noon, 1 pm and 6 pm.
- Monday, May 15, 1908 was the first day milk was processed. At the end of the first day, 10,000 pounds of milk were processed, just a third of the overall capacity of factory.
- A grand opening was held with an eight-piece orchestra playing. Men were charged 25 cents each to help defray the costs of the party. More than 2,500 people attended the open house. 

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City of Adrian – Municipal Complex Rehabilitation

In the Spring of 2008, it was becoming very evident to the City Manager, Mayor, And City Commission members for the City of Adrian that something drastic was going to have to happen if they were to successfully address the very dire economic issues confronting the city and its dying downtown. Urban blight, economic decay, dysfunctional traffic routes, and a downtown full of older structures containing asbestos and lead paint contamination were all contributing to the steady and continual demise of the downtown district. Something had to be done to revitalize the downtown district, and done soon.

Ultimately the decision was made to join forces with the J.E. Johnson Development Group (located in Midland) to devise a plan that would address issues with the existing city hall by relocating it into a newly rehabilitated historic structure; renovate the 1950's vintage city library next door; demolish a contaminated and decaying building next to the library and construct a new police administration building (with historic architectural features similar to the other adjacent historic structures); and lastly, completely and accurately rehabilitate the 1905 vintage federal post office next to the new police station to its original architectural splendor for use as the new community room and town meeting hall. All this to be done with the goal in mind of saving the city money and, in the long run, revitalizing the downtown district and attracting further economic development and new businesses to the downtown area.

Now complete, the city's vision for the successful rehabilitation of their downtown has truly been a success. Over the past year, and despite the bad economy, Adrian has seen significant positive activities and accomplishments. In May of 2010, the city cut the final ribbon on the new municipal complex downtown that features the new city hall, new police station, new city chambers building and significantly refurbished city library. They believe these new structures are quality built buildings that will now serve the city well for many years to come. In fact, they now have the figures for the new city hall, that indicate utilities are reduced by more than \$50,000 per year, and the new city hall is even a much larger building. In addition, the management and improvements of the city library have resulted in it being named the state of Michigan's "Library of the Year" for 2010. And, the new police headquarters and facilities have become the envy of other cities around the state. In addition, Mayor McDowell states that he has received more positive comments about the new city chambers building than any other construction since he has been in

office. It is truly beautiful inside and the restoration project has been a huge success.

In conclusion, as a direct result of their commitment to revitalizing the downtown area, the city of Adrian has seen other significant changes as well. To date, eleven new businesses have opened and been sustained, all available vacant apartments in the downtown are filled with a variety of young professionals, six more buildings are in the process of rehabilitation for the construction of new apartments, major store-front renovations to several properties will be taking place, and twelve buildings have been sold in the last 12 months to local investors and business owners who, by virtue of their purchase, are making a commitment to stay. Overall, the city's vision for economic development, rehabilitation, and historic preservation through the creation of their new municipal complex is truly a resounding success for the entire community and a model for others to follow.



