

Submitter: Bert Sperling

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Housing and Homelessness

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB2138

I'd like to speak about how my neighborhood's experience with becoming listed on the National Register of Historic Places became a nightmare.

Our neighborhood association (in the Eastmoreland neighborhood of Portland, Oregon) decided that being listed in the National Register would protect the neighborhood against changes to existing homes and control over the type of new housing.

Neighbors disagreed and asked the board to stop their efforts. The board took a comprehensive poll to determine the opinions of all neighbors on the issue, and a majority indicated that they indeed did not want a historic district.

Undeterred, the board pressed onward, since by the twisted rules of the National Historic District, all they needed was a majority of homeowners not to object to the district. A further impediment to indicating opposition is that an objection has to be in writing and duly notarized.

With that high bar to clear, all that the board needed to do was sow enough confusion, doubt, and ill-will that enough neighbors would do nothing and the criteria would be met to registered as a federal historic district.

Still the opponents sought to educate the homeowners and actually succeeded in filing enough letters of opposition to stop the historic district. But with the opposition letters on file and available as public documents, the names and addresses of opposing homeowners made them the targets of intimidation, attacks and pressure tactics intended to withdraw their letters of objection. In the course of this sad campaign to form an Eastmoreland historic district, there were threats of bodily harm (setting a home on fire, throat-cutting), and doxxing (a group of supporters urged followers to contact employers of those opposed to the district). Pelting homes with dog waste became commonplace.

Finally enough homeowners were convinced to rescind their objection and after seven years of bitter contention, Eastmoreland was designated a national historic district.

I urge the committee to support this bill and remove the ability to impose National Register of Historic Districts over the will of the majority of the homeowners. This happened in Eastmoreland and it shouldn't be allowed to happen again.