As permitted by current law, local governments around the state of Indiana can set design requirements on new residential construction to address local concerns on high performance standards, neighborhood appropriateness, etc. Urban Design Commissions and architecture review boards often reinforce the will of citizens and communities in setting the tone and character of their towns and neighborhoods and play an important role in long term economic development strategies.

House Bill (HB) 1114 strips local governments of their ability to influence architecture in their communities. The bill prohibits a town, city or county from regulating design elements of Class 2 buildings and R-occupancy Class 1 buildings with a plethora of exceptions (Class 2 buildings not in a historic district or designated as a historic landmark, not governed by an HOA, not in a flood zone, not owned or leased by a municipality, not containing more than five rental units with unrelated tenants on contiguous property; along with Class 1, R-occupancy buildings with less than 5 rental units).

The Indiana Chapter of the American Institute of Architects opposes HB 1114 because it is detrimental for good design in Indiana, and is bad for communities, homeowners and consumers.

Sometimes these local standards can be frustrating, of course, when the preference of the owner/developer conflict with that of these entities. However, by negotiating with local authorities over these issues, architects and other designers deliver homes our clients can thrive in.

ARCHITECTS’ KEY OBJECTIONS TO HB 1114:

- Many of the “building design elements” in HB 1114 are not architecture/design at all, but instead are building materials decisions. This bill would allow developers to choose lower quality materials that do not meet the needs of local communities.

- Indiana’s “minimum building codes” set a baseline for residential design and construction, but they are not intended to serve as both a floor and a ceiling for design quality in every community in the state.

- Few single-family homes are “little cabins in the woods” and most instead exist in communities of homes. Architects understand the impact of design choices do not stop at the property line of a home, but influence the character, functionality, and home values of an entire community.

- This bill fails to address the complexity of overlay districts of various kinds, and deprives citizens and local business of the ability to influence their communities. Restrictions of the kind in this bill would have had a negative influence on small cities and towns that have successfully rehabilitated struggling economies. HB 1114 could also negatively affect other special districts such as historic overlays, high performance home zoning, tax allocation districts, community improvement districts, landmark districts, and more.
• HB 1114 could also seriously compromise the years of work that innumerable communities across the state have done using form-based codes. This urban/suburban growth approach addresses the relationship between building facades and the public realm, using physical form to direct development, rather than land use or separation of functions.

Although Hoosier AIA members believe our clients should be able to build the home of their dreams, the pursuit of such a home should not inhibit local communities and its citizens from influencing the look, feel, design, and functionality of their towns and cities. Good design does not exist merely in the vacuum of a single lot or family dwelling, but at the broader community level.

WHAT PROPONENTS WILL SAY ABOUT HB 1114

This bill would allow clients to build their dream homes. Most homes in Indiana are not built with the final resident involved in its design – in fact only a very small amount are, usually with an architect involved. This bill would allow developers to construct spec-homes built to only the minimum building codes that are then standardized across every community in the state. Conversely, architect designed homes are almost universally built in partnership with local institutions, not in opposition to them.

This bill eliminates local rules on design that add no improvements to the safety or integrity of a home. Much of HB 1114 focuses on materials choices – exterior cladding, materials on roofs, foundations structures, as well as the layout of rooms and location/number of exterior doors and windows. Many of these elements contribute significantly to safety, energy efficiency, and durability that exceed the minimum requirement of the state’s building codes.

Local design requirements have a dramatic impact on affordable housing by increasing costs. Affordable housing is more complex than the original cost of a new spec-home. It includes operating costs, resale opportunities, durability, and community design considerations. Pushing the quality level of design elements down to a state minimum can also have a negative effect on the value of nearby homes and communities.

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AIA Indiana represents more than 779 design professionals across the state, whose members are committed to high standards for the health, safety and welfare of the communities our members serve. Architects concerns go well beyond the aesthetics of a building, but also inherently encompass its functionality, durability, economic contributions, long-term operational costs, and client considerations. Our members are active contributors to Indiana’s building code process, fire codes, local urban design organizations, and dozens of community organizations working to improve the living conditions of Hoosiers.

For more information on this issue, contact Jason Shelley, Hon. AIA, Executive Director of the Indiana Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, at 317.634.6993 or jshelley@aiaindiana.org.