

June 20, 2013

The Honorable Wesley Chesbro  
Committee on Natural Resources  
1020 N Street, Room 164  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 731 (Steinberg) CEQA Reform - OPPOSE

Dear Chairperson Chesbro and Committee Members:

I am writing to express my concern with SB 731 (Steinberg). The bill modifies CEQA review by precluding the Aesthetic impacts of a residential, mixed-use residential, or employment center project within a "transit priority area" from being considered as a significant impact on the environment. The Aesthetics section of the CEQA checklist is often used to analyze neighborhood character of historic areas – those issues of style, size, materials and landscaping that make neighborhoods unique and complement historic resources.

My objections to SB 731 are:

1. There is no clear exception for projects that impact historic resources;
2. The exemption does not support the policy it is intended to implement because it is overly broad and applies to all projects within a geographic area, regardless of whether they further a Sustainable Communities Strategy;
3. Aesthetics review frequently incorporates consideration of historic resources;
4. CEQA is frequently the only tool that communities have to evaluate aesthetic impacts, especially in smaller communities that may be located on major transit lines;
5. People cherish beautiful communities.

**SB 731 should be amended to clarify that this exemption does not apply to projects that may adversely affect Historic Resources, consistent with the limits on categorical exemptions under CEQA. This would allow impacts on Historic Resources to be avoided or mitigated, as necessary to protect them from damage. Alternatively, exempted projects should be limited to those that are consistent with an adopted Sustainable Community Strategy and are located in communities with a local design review ordinance.**

I urge you to consider amendments to the Bill to address our concerns. If this is not possible, I urge your **No vote**.

Sincerely,