

2026 Theme Statement

“Enduring Distinction” (A working title)

The last time we were in Detroit for the MHPN’s statewide preservation conference was in May of 2016. It was on the heels of Detroit being named as UNESCO’s first “City of Design” from the United States. It joined the ranks of UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network – 116 strong at the time - with Budapest and Singapore joining Detroit in the year’s cohort. In 2016, we were celebrating additional landmark events including the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service, and the 35th anniversary of the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. It made for quite a year!

A decade has sped by! We’ve rejoiced in many victories, mourned losses, and now are confronting challenges to fundamental practices and protections in the field of historic preservation that could place us back to “square one” in terms of progress. It’s good we’ll be together to be inspired by each other’s energy and determination in continuing to expand the preservation movement, stronger in spite of these current trials.

As we kick-off the MHPN’s 45th anniversary year, we’ll celebrate what the City of Detroit offers but also look outward from there. How can we not? Although everyone recognizes that Metro Detroit is Michigan’s most significant metropolitan area, not everyone realizes that, in addition to Detroit proper, over 200 municipalities are included in its 1,285 square miles covering much of Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties.

We’ll definitely be studying Detroit’s preservation activities in our sessions and tours. Over the past months, however, we’ve also discussed our desire to explore the stunning architecture of those communities located outside the heart of the city – the Grosse Pointes, Southfield, Dearborn – as well as the many historic neighborhoods that are gems on the landscape – Indian Village, Russell Woods-Sullivan, Northland Gardens. They feel the gravitational pull of Detroit’s design prominence but have developed their own aesthetic and sense of place. As we explore Metro Detroit – its dizzying array of commercial and civic buildings, churches, schools, parks, and residences large and small – we are reminded there is much worth stewarding.

This placemaking conversation extends far, far beyond the Detroit area. It can be shared throughout the state because it applies to traditional downtowns and neighborhoods, archaeological resources, vernacular and high-style buildings, and architectural treasures of the recent past. Large Legacy Cities as well as small towns can benefit, as can our fragile shoreline enclaves, agricultural communities, and more. The point of this coming year’s conversation is to recognize that in preserving our historic places, we safeguard something distinctive that can indeed endure.

We’ll end here with the same upbeat welcome we used back in 2016: “Meet you in the D!”