



THE SENATE
STATE OF MICHIGAN

SUE SHINK

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COMMITTEES:

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AGRICULTURE (C)

CIVIL RIGHTS, JUDICIARY, &

PUBLIC SAFETY (VC) ENERGY &

ENVIRONMENT

HOUSING & HUMAN SERVICES LOCAL

GOVERNMENT

APPROPRIATIONS

RE: Thurston Nature Center Preservation – Letter of Support, Public Commentary

Dec. 17, 2024

Ann Arbor Board of Education

Dear Board Members,

I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed Thurston Elementary School Expansion into the Thurston Nature Center. Please consider my full support for the preservation of the Thurston Nature Center. I also ask you to pursue historic landmark status for this space and I offer to be helpful in that endeavor.

The nature area, developed by Bill Stapp, who is the global founder of environmental education, is the birthplace of environmental education. It is an historic community and global treasure. Stapp's special interest was international environmental education, and he was the first chief of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Environmental Education Section. His environmental education program was the first to be unanimously accepted by all 135 UNESCO member nations. During and after his two-year tenure in Paris, France, Stapp and his wife, Gloria, visited and consulted with representatives of more than 120 countries on environmental education issues.

The current project raises concerns, including student safety and loss of vital green spaces that contribute to our entire community's mental well-being. This nature area has been cared for by the community and while the School Board may own it, it belongs to the people. The values of this nature center cannot be replaced by mitigation or a new wetland. Please listen to the community and preserve and protect the Thurston Nature Center in its entirety.

Access to preserved nature spaces is more important now than ever, given our changing climate and pressures on our mental health, especially children's mental health. I support the preservation of this green land, as well as the pursuit of historic landmark status for this space. I implore you to listen to the community to prioritize the long-term value of this land over the short-term logistics of reevaluating the current plan.

Please listen to your residents. Our love and concern are based on an understanding and appreciation of what we stand to lose. Many have reached out to me to ask for assistance. Please listen to your residents as we ask you to preserve the Thurston Nature Center.

I appreciate your consideration as we work together to make the best choice for our community.

Sincerely,

Sue Shink
State Senator, 14th District