



National Trust *for*
Historic Preservation®

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Packard Proving Grounds Historic Site

A community-submitted Section 106 Success Story in Shelby Township, Michigan.

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By:

Community Submission



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Packard Proving Grounds Historic Site in Michigan.

Around 26 years ago, Section 106 saved the [Packard Proving Grounds Historic Site](https://packardprovinggrounds.org/) [Link: <https://packardprovinggrounds.org/>] in Shelby Township, Michigan. Today the site is a community hub. There are historic tours, museums, buildings for wedding receptions and other events, and a farmers market that draws hundreds of people every Saturday. People from around the world have visited and toured the site. It is the biggest draw in the township and brings business to its local economy.

The Packard Motor Car Company of Detroit developed its proving grounds in Shelby Township beginning in 1927. It encompassed over 500 acres and included miles of test roads, an oval high-speed test track, support buildings, and a lodge residence for the manager and his family. The famous architect Albert Kahn designed many of the buildings in the Tudor Revival style. Packard went out of business in 1956 and the property was sold to Ford Motor Company in 1961.

Ford ceased operations there in the late 1990s. Sections of the property went up for sale and demolition permits were taken out for the buildings. In early 2000, the Packard Motor Car Foundation stepped in and rescued the site.

What We Would Have Lost

If enacted, the July 2026 proposed changes to the Section 106 regulations by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation would not involve stakeholder input until much later in the process, if at all. This likely would have resulted in a different outcome for this project. It is possible

that the entire historic Packard Proving Grounds would have been sold to developers, the rare Albert Kahn-designed buildings would have been demolished, and a strip mall would likely have taken their place. There are already houses and condos sitting on the parts of the proving grounds that couldn't be saved, and an Amazon fulfillment center sits on one corner of the former Packard site.

The land division of Ford Motor Company sold a section of former Packard property to the U.S. Postal Service for a distribution center. The property contained a rare 1928 metal airplane hangar used by Packard to test airplane engines from 1928 to 1930. A local historian alerted the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office of the situation which in turn invoked Section 106. The USPS hired a consultant to conduct the review. After the consultant determined that the entire Packard property was eligible for National Register listing, the USPS took their distribution center elsewhere and the hangar was saved from demolition. The process to save the rest of the Packard Proving Grounds began.

The process went very smoothly thanks to the State Historic Preservation Office, which saw the historic value of the entire site, not just the hangar. The SHPO worked long and hard with the Packard Motor Car Foundation, Ford Motor Company and the Shelby Township government to save as much of the site as possible. Section 106 and the airplane hangar started the ball rolling. Fourteen acres of the original site and all the buildings are now owned by the Packard Motor Car Foundation. The site and its restoration have been a huge success for all parties involved. Ford got good PR for saving a historic automotive site, the township got a very popular venue, and the Packard Foundation and the SHPO got kudos for making it all happen.

Although much of the original Packard Proving Grounds is gone, the buildings and the small section of test track that were preserved are still there to tell the story of the Packard Motor Company.

Visit [Section 106 Under Threat](#) [Link: /section106] for more success stories, information, and to take action.

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