

MINUTES

City of Ypsilanti
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Regular Meeting held in person

Tuesday, May 23, 2023 (approved 7/11/2023)
7:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chairperson Pettit Welcomed attendees.
Meeting called to order at 7:04pm

Commissioners Present: Alex Pettit – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
James Chesnut – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
James Ratzlaff – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
Stefan Szumko – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
Delrhea Byrge – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Ellen Thackery, Preservation Planner

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Szumko (second: Ratzlaff) moved to approve the agenda as proposed.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Szumko, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS, other than their agenda item—none

PUBLIC HEARING—none

OLD BUSINESS—none

NEW BUSINESS

210 S Washington

**new garage door*

Applicant Bob Doyle, present

Staff report: This house contributes to the district. The garage was built later and is tucked behind the house. Proposed work is a new garage door in charcoal by Clopay. Sample of material was passed around. Staff did not find that this proposal will have an impact on historic materials or historic character of the building and that the proposal meets Standard 9.

Discussion:

Applicant: Had nothing to add.

Commissioners: Clarified which side of the sample is the side that will be visible on the door.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Byrge) moved to approve application PHDC 23-0038 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the replacement of the existing garage door at 210 S Washington with a Clopay steel door in smooth Charcoal gray as proposed because the proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

218 N Washington

**concrete bollards*

Applicant: Carol Cramer, chair and representing the Ladies' Literary House Foundation, present

Staff report: House contributes to both the National Register and local district. Proposed work is a series of 4" steel pipes filled with concrete that will serve as bollards between the parking lot and the house. Proposal is that they will be black, but staff wondered if commission would like to give staff administrative approval of a color change if building code will require a color other than black. Staff recommends approval because the bollards will be pretty unobtrusive, meeting Standard 9, and will preserve the house over the long term.

Discussion:

Applicant: Applicant confirmed the bollards can be painted whatever color is required—they just want to protect the house.

Motion: Szumko (second: Ratzlaff) moved to approve Application PHDC 23-0039 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the proposed steel bollards painted black, or whatever color is required by building code, to be installed between the parking spots and the house at 218 N Washington because the proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation 9.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

100 W Michigan Ave, Suite A

**install a hanging sign near door to suite*

Staff report: This sign will hang on the secondary façade, not on W Michigan but on the N Huron side. Staff outlined the installation requirements in the staff report and in the motion itself, and staff notes that the building inspector is requiring architect's sealed plans for this sign, probably because it will hang over a public

right of way. Staff will remind contractor of that requirement in the letter following this meeting. Staff reminds commission to add Standards 9 and 10 to this motion.

Discussion:

Applicant: Not present.

Commissioners: Clarified what "sealed" means in this context. Staff explained that an architect will need to provide drawings with his or her seal on them so that the building department can be sure that the installation will be safe. Commissioners clarified location of sign.

Motion: Szumko (second: Byrge) moved to approve application PHDC-23-0040 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the installation of a sign hung at 100 W Michigan Ave Suite A (on the Huron Street side), subject to the following conditions: all installation devices (screws, nails, bolts, anchors, etc.) shall be corrosion resistant, of a material that will be compatible with adjacent materials, and shall be inserted into mortar joints; any holes will be caulked with exterior-grade high-performance sealant; and all necessary building permits and zoning approvals will be obtained before installation. The proposed work meets Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, Standards 9 and 10.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

118 W Michigan Ave

**exterior trim added at the storefront level, accent lighting along the signband, removal of interior-grade bricks and replacement with exterior-grade bricks, scattered repointing, painting storefront gray.*

Staff report: The proposed work is for both 118 and 116 W Michigan. 118 is the taller of the two and was not considered contributing when the National Register nomination was written because it had had a slipcover on it, but the building would be considered contributing today. [Summarized proposed work.] Staff noted that it seemed confusing to only show 118 W Michigan on the application, but staff explained that when the building department was consulted, 118 tends to be the address used for work on both buildings and a note is made in BSA in the descriptions of proposed work that the work is on both buildings and those notes almost serve as a cross reference. Staff also clarified with architect that a mortar analysis will be done but hasn't been done yet and that the method for removing bricks has not been determined yet. Staff and architect also clarified that the intention is that the downlighting will provide some lighting to the signs so the signboard signs will not need to be internally lit.

Applicant: Adam Smith, architect, present. Clarified that this agenda item had been approved a few years ago, but the pandemic came and now the owner would like to pick the work back up again, but the six-month window on the HDC application had passed.

Commissioners: no questions or concerns because they had seen this application before.

Motion: Szumko (second: Ratzlaff) moved to approve application PHDC-23-0043 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the proposed work at 116 and 118 W Michigan Avenue with conditions. The proposed work and necessary conditions are as follows: installing exterior trim to storefront level and painting storefront level gray; removing interior-grade bricks and replacing them with

exterior-grade bricks as close to the historic bricks as possible, with the conditions that power tools will be used by skilled contractors on the horizontal joints only (hand tools on the vertical joints) and that appropriate soft mortar will be used on all repointing (see *Preservation Brief 2* and Ypsilanti's *Historic District Fact Sheet: Masonry Repair and Cleaning* for details); and installing 4 proposed small downlights and 1 sconce between 116 and 118 at the storefront level, with the conditions that the proposed lighting must meet the city's ordinance and that it is understood by the applicant that internally illuminated signs in the historic district are discouraged. Relevant Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation include Standard 9.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

212-214 Ferris

**replacing porch decking boards and skirting; correcting previously unpermitted work*

Staff report: House contributes to the National Register and local historic districts. House is a duplex, so both porches should be the same. At some point, the porch at 212 was completed within the guidelines, but when 214 got its porch redone late last year, they went ahead with the work without approval or permits and the work does not meet the Standards or Guidelines. Currently, 214 has plywood boards on the porch and T111 siding below the porch. After work is completed, both porches will be the same and both will be up to the Standards and Guidelines, with tongue-and-groove decking and lattice skirting.

Applicant: Not present

Commissioners: The lattice could really use a picture frame around it.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Byrge) moved to approve application PHDC-23-0044 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the replacement of plywood boards with wood tongue-and-groove porch flooring and the replacement of T111 porch skirting with wood lattice at 214 Ferris, with the condition that all materials will be painted. The proposed work meets the design guidelines as specified in the district's Fact Sheet about porches and the Secretary of the Interior's Standard for Rehabilitation 9.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

311 E Forest Ave

**building a detached deck*

Staff report: This house is in the district but is not considered contributing. The Commission has seen this project a couple times, first as a study item and the commission recently approved the door onto the deck. The deck is now the item before the commission. It is detached. Since there are no historic materials to preserve, Azek is what is being proposed. The only question staff had was whether the house will be able to properly shed water where the deck and the house are close.

Applicant: Nikki Nabozny, applicant, present. Shared samples.

Commissioners: If deck is graded appropriately and considering that the Azek is planks that will drain water and snow between them, the detached deck should perform fine. The privacy screen is also likely Azek. The Azek has a slight texture to keep it safe but it's not plastic looking and deeply textured as some other composite and synthetic materials are. No railing is necessary at this height.

Motion: Byrge (second: Szumko) moved to approve application PHDC-0042 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the detached deck, steps, and privacy screen of Azek material at 311 E Forest Avenue, with the condition that the Azek material is smooth in texture without an exaggerated faux wood grain. The proposed work meets Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation 9 and 10.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None
Motion carried.

31 N Washington

**covering damaged bricks in the theater's alcove below the marquee and restoring the marquee.*

Staff report: Commission has seen this building before—it is the Martha Washington Theatre which contributes to the local and National Register districts. The work being proposed here is covering the damaged bricks below the marquee with architectural panels and also restoring the marquee. Staff's written report in the meeting packet summarizes the question about the proposed architectural panels as follows, "Considering the absence of [photographic] documentation, are the architectural panels being proposed compatible with the overall character of the building and compatible with the building's size, scale, material, and color?"

Applicant: Joel Stoin, applicant, represents owners. Present. Points out that these bricks below the marquee were previously covered with panels that were like a stucco with stone or gravel embedded, like a gravel veneer. They had hoped to be able to restore the bricks that had been under this gravel veneer, but the bricks turned out to be heavily damaged. The material they propose is a fiber cement material that installs similar to a shiplap and is supposed to look similar to concrete.

Commissioners:

First question about the proposed replacement material: color. [Staff note: The Standards require that exterior alterations will be compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale, proportion, and massing to protect this property and its environment.] The previous stone was brownish and blended in and the existing bricks would blend in, whereas this proposed material does not blend in with the rest of this building and the neighboring spaces. Is there a different color that would appear more compatible? Applicant explains that this material is what the owners chose, but note that it's not as light as it appears in the rendering. Commissioner states that considering the windows and the neighboring buildings, the proposed color and material does not seem compatible. Commissioner notes that making the panels so light in color contrasts with the rest of the building but matches the marquee in lightness and so it detracts from the restoration work on the marquee because it diminishes the contrast between the marquee and the rest of the building. Commissioner notes that it is not just the color, but it is the scale of the pattern—it is affecting the sense of the building's proportion, and it does diminish the work being proposed for the marquee. The building was brick and it wants to be brick so that the marquee can be the focal point. Commissioner notes that we look at materials but also texture and the rhythm of window openings on this building and neighboring buildings.

Commission generally seeks to preserve materials, but in this case, the original materials are heavily damaged so looking at what would an appropriate replacement material be? Commissioner notes that we are looking at scale and proportion as well. Applicant seeks a solution the commission can approve because of the court-imposed deadlines. Commissioner states that brick would be the best starting point; it is what was there, and it would be an easily approvable material. Applicant states that he does not think the owners will want to go with brick. Could they propose this material in a different color? Commissioner asks whether commissioners could get on board with something closer to the brown gravel veneer in color that was there, would that be constructive to this discussion? Commissioner states that before we consider that, let's understand the nature of the rest of the proposal: black storefronts, red entry doors. Looking at the rendering on page 80 of the packet, black windows, black storefront to right, teal storefront on left painted black would make sense tying this composition together as one piece of architecture, bring the marquee back to life--now we need to figure out what is appropriate for the area in the center below the marquee.

Applicant asks if the owner selected the proposed material in black, so the whole storefront level was in black and you would not see the horizontal lines, would that be more acceptable to the commission? One commissioner indicated that it would, but one commissioner indicated that that treatment's success is very reliant on paint color, whereas brick, which the commission would not allow to be painted in the future, would always work. Commissioner is not sure that a solid band of black at the storefront level would actually work from a compatibility and composition perspective. Black would hide the seams it's true, but it would introduce a different proportional problem—the black storefront level from side to side would create a plinth and would feel very heavy. Commissioner offered that if the "columns" from top to bottom could be brick and then the remaining material could be black, that would at least read more like the traditional building with storefronts. Retaining the brick columns on the streetface only would be less brickwork, commissioner agreed. Columns should read from parapet to street. When you look at past pictures, keeping that line created by the columns is important. The material (fiber cement) has not been used in the central downtown in commissioner's memory, and the way it is being proposed to be used is not the way a traditional storefront would be used—the material is not broken up, even by a ticket window anymore. Applicant reminded commission that this Washington Street side of the building will be leased out and not used by Déjà vu. Commissioner expressed that the fiber cement should not be right at the sidewalk level where snow could pile up against it or rain could splash back on it.

[Discussion about the building's changing features over time.]

[Discussion about materials Nichiha makes—would any be more appropriate? Are there other options that might work better? Nichiha makes several different products—one looks like shiplap, one looks like traditional lap siding. Commissioner states that traditional lap siding on this building downtown would not be appropriate either.]

Historic material was brick and later covered by the brown gravel veneer. One commissioner states that the commission's charge is to apply the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The building and its materials are valued—those are our charge.

The columns (and some of the alcove) appear to have always included glass cases that housed movie posters.

Commissioner agrees that the way the building has historically read is that from the street from left to right, there was a column, glazing on the storefront, a column (even with a display case), the alcove, a column with a display case, another storefront, and another column. Those columns and storefronts made breaks in the composition. The application of one material on the storefront level covering the fronts of those columns changes the building and its proportions, and using one continuous black band of color along the sidewalk would take the breaks in the composition and the framing of the entry doors and marquee away. One continuous band of color along the bottom cannot do the architectural work of framing the entry and marquee the way it was intended.

Tenants in this part of the space can seek approval for signage but Déjà vu cannot seek any more signage on the Washington side of the building, per the court order.

Commissioner states that the continuous band of light-colored material at the center of the building as proposed is not compatible with the building's design; if the columns were defined, even if it's the columns only on the streetface with this proposed material proposed in the alcove only, that might be a more compatible design for this building. This continuous band of material across the front is not compatible or harmonious with the other buildings in the neighborhood. These columns may not be structural, but visually, they are like columns and when you look at page 80 of the packet, you can see the columns that run from the top of the parapet and should run down to the sidewalk or almost the sidewalk. Covering up the streetfacing sides of those columns (like with this fiber cement material) doesn't work. One commissioner notes that one of the "columns" (the one to the right of the entry doors when looking at the building) has been altered and so it will appear wider than the column to the left and that poses a design challenge (see page 68 of the packet) but the commissioner thinks it is still worth figuring out—the column does still need to read as a column from the front of the building. This design challenge is worth resolving because this is the work that these important buildings require and deserve. Commissioner states that even if this column to the right were all brick and so wider than the column on the left, he still thinks that would look appropriate and then a different material inside the alcove meets that column. He believes that would still be appropriate.

[Commission discusses that bricks on the fronts of the columns only wouldn't be as difficult or expensive as bricks filling in the entire alcove. There are some design challenges in here with the different surfaces and making them work together, but commissioner believes it could be done and a sense of proportion could be preserved.]

Commissioner wonders if a veneer brick on the visual columns would solve many of the perceived issues with brick—material, time, expense.

It is understood that because these columns originally had cases built into them, they were not complete brick all the way up, but now that a replacement is being considered, the Standards require a compatible design—looking at compatibility with this building and the other neighboring buildings. The proposed paneling is not compatible on the fronts of the columns. Other neighboring buildings have the brick columns between the storefronts and that rhythm of columns and storefronts is what helps make a design compatible and approvable.

Applicant seeks a list of materials that will be approved. Commissioners state that it is not just a list of materials—it is how the materials are applied that make a proposal approvable. Commissioner stated that the columns on the streetfront cannot be this material installed in the way that this rendering shows. The continuous read of this material across the front of the columns does not work for this street. Commissioner was thinking that if the column faces were something that is more harmonious with the rest of the street, then, when the column turns inward (into the alcove), it could potentially be a different material.

Applicant expressed frustration that every rendering and proposal costs money and he doesn't know if it will be approved. Chair explained that the commission offers the option to bring a design in for free as a study item and discuss it with the commission before submitting an application as an agenda item.

[Discussed idea of another material that would allow the column to read as a column from the parapet to the base, with the storefronts and entries as punchouts. Brick would be best, but if you showed a different design that had that sensibility, that could possibly get approved. If an applicant brought a sketch instead of a rendering as a study item, that would be less costly for the owners, and it makes for a more efficient process.] Applicant stated that owners are investing a lot into making this corner look better and are investing in security and the restoration of the marquee. Staff states for the record that for historic district commissions, it is not about what looks better—it is instead about what meets the Standards and Guidelines. It is really important that the commission always refers back to the Standards and Guidelines.

Commissioner states that there is brick and brick veneer—brick veneer might be a more cost effective option and might be a viable option in this case. Commission believes that for the design to be harmonious and compatible with the building and with the street, the columns need to read as columns—the commission has identified that the columns from top to bottom are an important character-defining feature of the building and so seek to bring the verticality of the columns from the parapet to the street, and to retain the rhythm of the streetscape which is structural column, storefront, structural column, storefront. It is about color in part but also materiality. Commissioner suggests bringing product specs for the next product proposed and also please consider a study item before the next application.

[Discussed process delays and product delays and pressure from the court-imposed deadline. Commission discussed that for a study item, participating by Zoom could be an option, since feedback is the product instead of a commission decision.]

[Discussed that some buildings downtown don't follow this rhythm of column, storefront, column storefront. Commission stated that there are a few reasons for that—each building is its own resource and we consider it individually and in concert with the others. What works for one building might not work for another building and what works for one street might not work for another street. Also, some work in the district was done before the district was established in 1978, so some work that was done before then would not be in line with the Standards and Guidelines today. Experience of professionals who work with historic buildings regularly and who work in historic districts regularly is invaluable.]

Staff stated that the projects that the commission reviewed on the street do indeed follow that established rhythm of column, storefront, column storefront and referred to the Google streetview to show examples. Restated that a study item could be handled by Zoom, and commissioner added that a team of professionals would be welcome and that could be productive since the study item discussion could be had over Zoom.

Staff clarified that the Standards and Guidelines say that your first line of action is restoring a feature, and if that feature cannot be restored then we'd be looking to reproduce it in its original material. In this case, we'd be trying to reproduce the feature in brick. If that is not possible, then you are looking at designing a new feature that is compatible and differentiated. Chair states that in this case, the original material was brick. It is within the Standards and Guidelines to require that the replacement be brick. But the Commission is interested in trying to find a solution that will be as much like brick as possible and resemble what was there to carry out the function of that and the read of the façade.

[Procedural discussion regarding application amendment.]

Applicant amended application PHDC 23-0045 to exclude the fiber cement architectural panels and to only include the restoration of the marquee.

Motion: Chesnut (Szumko seconded) moved to accept amended application PHDC 23-0045.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge

Nays: None

Motion carried.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Byrge) moved to approve amended application PHDC-23-0045 and issue a certificate of appropriateness for the work proposed at 31 N Washington as amended, only including the restoration of the marquee using 1-watt light bulbs. This meets Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation #5 and #9.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge

Nays: None

Motion carried.

STUDY ITEMS—none

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS—

None reported.

OTHER BUSINESS

Property Monitoring:

Letters to places commissioners have reported have gone out and staff is following up.

Staff has sent a letter to the owner of the depot and staff is following up, trying to get a meeting on the calendar.

Staff met with the new owner of 302 E Cross and her contractor so that project is beginning to take shape.

Staff encouraged commissioners to use See Click Fix (<https://cityofypsilanti.com/506/Report-an-Issue>) to send staff property concerns. If it's indicated that the issue is in the "Historic District," it will come right to staff.

Updates from Staff: none

Commissioner Comments:

There is a new window company in town called Hinge and Sill. Staff will send the list of window professionals that she knows of to all commissioners. City does not recommend any contactors, but staff will provide a list of known contractors as a courtesy and that is made clear when the list is sent.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS—none

HOUSEKEEPING BUSINESS

1. Approval of the minutes of April 25, 2023

Motion: Szumko (second: Chesnut) moved to approve the minutes of April 25, 2023, as submitted.

Voice Vote - Ayes: Commissioners Pettit, Chesnut, Ratzlaff, Szumko, Byrge
Nays: None.
Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Pettit adjourned the meeting, citing the end of the agenda with no further items to discuss.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 9:38 p.m.

Full Minutes Prepared By: Ellen Thackery