



MINUTES

**City of Ypsilanti
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
Meeting held in person at Ypsilanti Freighthouse**

**Tuesday, September 27, 2022 (approved 10/11/22)
7:00 P.M.**

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair called meeting to order at 7:03 pm.

ROLL CALL

Commissioners Present:

Alex Pettit – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
James Chesnut – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
Stefan Szumko - Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti
James Ratzlaff – 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: Ratzlaff (second: Chesnut) moved to approve the agenda.

Approval: Voice vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS--none

PUBLIC HEARING—none

OLD BUSINESS

408 N Huron--clarification

**Rebuilding a foundation wall and installing a window*

Applicant: Thomas McKee, applicant, present.

Staff Report: Staff clarified that this item is not meant to be a new discussion or a new decision. Applicant wanted to clarify what his approval was for. He had thought the approval from August would

have allowed him to install either a sliding window or glass block, but the minutes seemed to reflect just glass block, so applicant just wanted to clarify.

Discussion: Commissioners who were present at the meeting explained that they sought to deny the vinyl slider because it was vinyl, and so instead, approved the glass block. Another commissioner suggested that if glass block were installed so it was recessed from the face of the building, it would not be as noticeable. Applicant agreed that he would follow that recommendation.

No motion, no vote, clarification achieved.

513 N River

**New shed and patio.*

Applicant: Commissioner Szumko recused himself from the discussion and vote. Property owner was also present.

Staff Report: Staff had noted that this agenda item has been postponed a couple times due to quorum, the decision must be made tonight, and that treated lumber would be stained or painted and staff had no other concerns.

Discussion: Commissioners did not have any comments, perhaps because this item has been in the packet several times and there has been ample time to review the proposal.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Byrge) moved to issue a certificate of appropriateness for application PHDC 22 0071 dated August 2, 2022 for a new shed and covered patio behind the garage because the proposed work meets Secretary of the Interior's Standard 9, as long as any treated lumber will be painted or opaquely stained once it cures and as long as the proposed work successfully passes zoning and building department review.

Approval: Roll call vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

216 S Washington

**4" vent cap installed on side of house for bathroom exterior venting*

Applicant: Not present.

Staff Report: Staff had noted that they didn't have concerns with the application.

Discussion: Commissioners noted that this would be a very small impact and that it would not be possible to vent through the roof because this is a second-floor bathroom and there is a third floor on the house.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Chesnut) moved to issue a certificate of appropriateness for application PHDC-22-0078 for the installation of a 4-inch white vent cap for a bathroom fan to be painted to match

the stucco proposed at 216 S Washington because the proposed work meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, specifically Standard 9.

Approval: Roll call vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

111 N Huron

** Updated sign*

Applicant: Applicant present.

Staff Report: This application is for a sign that is very similar to the sign already installed. It is a monument sign that is lighted, as the existing sign is, and you can see by the nighttime simulation picture (page 48 of the packet) that the top part of the sign that appears white during the day is not actually all a lighted white wash of light at night. Instead, it appears dark and only the letters appear in that upper part of the sign at night. Because it's very close to the sign that already exists, staff did not have concerns.

Discussion: Commissioners discussed that historically, the commission has wanted to avoid that bright wash of light, so if a sign will be internally illuminated, the background should be dark to avoid that bright wash behind the letters or logo. Applicant explained that in this case, the white at the top of the sign is painted aluminum and the clear letters are pushed through, so the light only lights the letters.

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Byrge) moved to issue a certificate of appropriateness for Application PHDC 22-0083 dated September 20, 2022 for a replacement monument sign measuring 7'6" by 7' at 111 N Huron because the sign: is similar to the existing, does not destroy historic materials or spatial relationships, is compatible in scale and proportion to the nearby historic resources, and is removable without impact to historic resources, meeting Standards 9 and 10. Further, the background of the proposed sign is dark and only the words are illuminated, which aligns with the exception listed in the City's fact sheet for signs. This sign will still need to be reviewed by the Planning and Building Departments, and will need to meet their requirements. Any amendments to the sign's design will need to be reviewed by the historic district commission.

Approval: Roll call vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

319 N Huron

**New internally lit signs over garage and office area*

Applicant: Laith Issa, applicant, present.

Staff Report: This application is for two internally lit signs, and the building has not had lighted signs in the past. The building is considered non-contributing to the district. Staff suggests that perhaps we should clarify some items on our sign guidelines as a future project.

Discussion: Commission discussed that, again, it's that wash of light from a backlit sign that the commission has tried to avoid in the past. Here, over the garage, there are individual letters that will be backlit internally with no connecting backlit background. That's one type of sign. There is also another type of sign that you have over the office that includes an illuminated background behind the words. It is that lit, light-in-color background that creates that wash of light behind the words that the commission has traditionally tried to avoid. Commissioner would want to have the white on this sign behind the letters masked. Other commissioners said maybe a solution would be separate letters for over the office, like over the garage. Proportionally, the signs look like they'd meet the Standards. Applicant agreed to ask his signmaker what would be possible, and asked if it would be possible for the commission to give a conditional approval so that he wouldn't have to come back before the commission with an amended application. Commission agreed that they could achieve that outcome in a motion.

Motion: Chesnut (second: Szumko) moved to issue a certificate of appropriateness for the two new internally-lit signs proposed at 319 N Huron (application PHDC 22-0080 dated September 12, 2022) because the building is noncontributing, only the letters on the signs will emit light, and the proposed signs will not have a significant negative impact on the district. Additionally, the commission requests that the applicant submits to staff additional information showing that the white part of the sign over the office area will not be illuminated and information that clearly shows that the white part of the sign will be masked so just the letters are lit. As a result, the proposed work meets Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation 9 and 10.

Approval: Roll call vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

STUDY ITEMS

311 Washtenaw

Contractor: Contractor Ron Rupert present.

Discussion: Currently, here at 311 Washtenaw, there is asphalt or Insulbrick siding on this rear enclosed porch that is failing, as shown on page 67 of the packet. The next-door property at 313 Washtenaw is a twin to this one and Ron's client likes what that next-door neighbor has done to side their rear enclosed porch—they installed vertical OSB siding to cover that enclosed porch where the old siding was failing. Ron had asked staff if that work had been approved. It had not. So, Ron wanted to come talk with the commission about what would be an acceptable siding to recover the enclosed porch at 311. Ron notes that the rear enclosed porch does not have a moisture barrier or clapboards underneath—just planks. Commission discussed that, normally, you'd install the same material as is on the house, but, as Ron states, Insulbrick is not made anymore. So what is acceptable now?

Commission notes that the example with vertical siding has no cornerboards or window trim, which would be needed in the historic district. Ron agrees—cornerboards, window trim, and a rain table at the bottom are all needed. Ron thinks that wood board-and-batten siding would be

more appropriate for the building than the vertical OSB. A commissioner requested a sample of the material to understand the proposal better. Ron also notes that the house itself has clapboard siding under the insulbrick siding, so if the insulbrick were to be removed in the future on the house itself, the board-and-batten on the rear portion would be compatible but also differentiated. Discussed possible use of Azek instead of wood since this is the rear of the house, a non-historic enclosure, and very damp. Commission seemed open to that idea, and one commissioner suggested that as long as all of the trim and boards were all of a material consistently, that would be preferable so that all of the materials would move together. Discussed idea of adding gutters to this space and addressing how the flashing appears visibly where the rear enclosed porch meets the house.

115 Maple

Homeowners: Both present.

Discussion: Updating commission. Has been looking at structural integrity of foundation, costs, and ways to offset that. What we have today is a report from a structural engineer and more photos. Structural engineer's report states that house needs a more substantial foundation. Now that we have seen these pictures of the property, we can all see repairs are needed. The wall in question is brick on cobble on clay, trying not to disturb, had Omega Construction in and they described that this would be a hand-dig project. Excavation would cost about \$30,000. Thinking about restoration vs removal of back half of the building (non-historic part) and rebuilding. Would a cinderblock foundation be allowed? New roof now on. Clarifying that we are talking about the back half of the property—where the additions are—and leaving the historic portion at front of the property on the brick foundation in place. Confirmed. A couple different ways to give this house more foundation. There is the hand dig of course, but then one idea that has been mentioned by the structural engineer is to build interior foundation walls of wood. Confirmed again that we are talking about the rear 400 feet of the house. The historic part of the house is in good condition and is level and he wants to save that.

As for the study questions, a commissioner states that having cinderblock on part of the foundation would likely not be a problem but perhaps there are some different ways to treat it--block could be parged for example to soften it. Other thing is the idea of demolishing the later additions and then building a new addition behind the historic house. That is definitely on the table as a possibility but it all depends on what you propose to build. You don't need to have finished, expensive drawings, but some informative drawings and representations of the volume you'd be proposing, and what you propose to do with the original structure are both really important to the conversation. If you work with a designer who has done work with historic buildings before, they can provide options. The commission can't design the project for you, but also can't give you a blanket approval. The commission will have to get a sense of what you are proposing before they can give you the approval to demolish part of the property. Homeowner's second question is regarding building an addition on the house that would be larger than the square footage of the original house—is it allowed and would the rest of the house need to be brought up to modern code? Commission deferred to the Building and Planning and Zoning departments on those questions and the question of setback on the lot. Homeowner asked whether the commission would consider a two-story addition since the house has been one story. Commissioner stated that this isn't a blanket yes or no question, but it really depends on what

you're proposing. This is an interesting design challenge—something that respects the original historic structure but that gives you what you're hoping for. It is likely doable but finding someone who can do this for you and who has experience with historic buildings might be a big challenge. Commissioner stated that the original historic structure should remain as is from the exterior. Best to leave that historic structure alone so that the new addition can be differentiated and you can have a bit more design freedom on the addition, while still being compatible. If you're talking about involving the primary footprint of the original house as part of the work, the commission and applicant will have more to discuss. Commission is open to ideas. Commissioner requested that the homeowner provide a drawing or lines drawn on the floorplan he has that show what he plans to demolish and what he plans to keep; that will be critical to any future decisions. Also helpful would be to have a drawing that shows the various additions so commission could understand this portion of the house is on a slab, this is on the crawlspace, and where the boundaries of those various areas are. Staff confirmed that the homeowners have Kurt Weiland's contact information so they could ask the building questions they have. They do.

ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

320 N Washington Street--asphalt roof to asphalt roof

115 Maple--asphalt roof to asphalt roof plus gutters and downspouts

19 N Hamilton--asphalt roof to asphalt roof; the panel covering their window must be removed.

Commission had no additional questions about those.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Property Monitoring

- a. Commissioners/Staff discussed property concerns and property issues under review.

2. Updates from Staff – two commissioners resigned and we are seeking new commissioners to fill those vacancies

3. Commissioner Comments—

- a. a concern about an outbuilding behind 305 S Washington Street. It appears to be suffering from demolition by neglect and may be unsafe. Also has a utility pole very close to it and it appears that DTE can't maintain that pole because this structure is too close. Staff will look into this and see what is happening with citations etc.
- b. Staff will also look into the history of depot enforcement and staff will document areas where the building is losing structural integrity or in danger of losing historic features.
- c. Commission would still like a clarifying meeting regarding infrastructure like sidewalks in the district, and staff will work on this.
- d. Commission comment that we need more clarification around noncontributing vs contributing. It is good to draw that distinction, but if that distinction is being based on old survey data, that could be a problem. How do we update that survey data so we're working with good data? Staff describes how we are overdue for a new survey and it is a project she is looking into, possibly partnering with the State Historic Preservation Office and possibly with Eastern Michigan University. Still looking into this and exploring this.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS-none

HOUSEKEEPING BUSINESS

Approval of the Minutes of August 23, 2022

Motion: Chesnut (second: Szumko) moved to approve the minutes of August 23, 2022, as submitted.

Approval: Voice vote. Unanimous.
Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

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

MEETING ADJOURNED at 9:00 p.m.