



**2019 Annual Report
Historic District Commission
Ypsilanti, Michigan**

INTRODUCTION

The Historic District Commission of the City of Ypsilanti is governed by the Michigan Local Historic Districts Act, State of Michigan Public Act 169 of 1970, and by Chapter 54 of the City of Ypsilanti Code of Ordinances.

MEMBERSHIP

Anne Stevenson, Vice Chair (November – December)
Hank Prebys
Amy Swift

Alex Pettit Vice-Chair (January – September), Interim Chair (September – December)
Erika Lindsay
Ronald Rupert

COMMISSION AND STAFF

According to Sec. 54-32, Historic preservation is declared to be a public purpose with numerous community benefits. The Historic District Commission (HDC) has several responsibilities, but chiefly, it serves as the quasi-judicial body that ensures exterior alterations of historic properties meet the Secretary of the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation; thereby protecting the historic integrity of the district for future generations.

Throughout 2019, the Historic District Commission (HDC) continued meeting on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m. The HDC was staffed by a Preservation Planner during this time. Cynthia Kochanek held the position in January and was succeeded by Scott Slagor on February 25. Staff performed various administrative tasks and technical assistance to enable the HDC to fulfill its responsibilities under the Historical Preservation Ordinance. Staff responsibilities included reviewing Historic District Work Permit Applications prior to meetings; corresponding with applicants; providing technical assistance to property-owners; preparing meeting agendas, commission packets, minutes and various reports; property monitoring; webpage maintenance; Facebook updates; and other support, as needed.

The HDC continued to provide prompt review of applications. Applications are collected from the Building Department and reviewed by staff for completeness. Incomplete applications are addressed through email or phone correspondence with the applicant. Staff works with the applicants to get their application to a point of compliance that is likely to be approved by the commission. Staff reviews are completed for each application. The reviews include a brief history of the property, a breakdown of application items, recommended motions from staff, and the appropriate Secretary of

the Interior Standards for Rehabilitation to cite with each decision. Staff reviews are included in the meeting packets that are posted on the City's website and emailed to the Commission prior to each meeting.

On August 26, the HDC had a special meeting with the staff of the Community and Economic Development Department, including the Preservation Planner, Scott Slagor; Community Development Manager, Christopher Jacobs; and Director of Economic Development, Joe Meyers. The meeting gave an opportunity for the commissioners to discuss what they think is working well, what additional information they need to do their jobs effectively, additional sites in the city that could be designated historic, and an expansion of the work staff could approve administratively. The expanded administrative approvals were approved and have since helped to shorten meeting time and streamlined the process for applicants.

The Preservation Planner attends each HDC meeting to provide staffing support. The HDC is also supported by a recording secretary, Nancy Hare-Dickerson. The recording secretary is responsible for drafting full minutes for each meeting.

The turnaround time for applications averages about two weeks. Potential applicants are encouraged to bring projects to the Commission as study items before formal submission of an application. This allows the Commission to provide feedback to property owners at a conceptual stage, clarifying expectations and allowing for a more predictable final review.

Changes in HDC Membership

In 2019 the HDC lost two members and gained one new member. First, Mike Davis, Jr., former chair, resigned on September 4 to take a position on the Planning Commission.

Jane Schmiedke, co-author of the original 1972 Historic District Study Committee Report and long-time chair, resigned from the HDC on November 12 after 40 years of service. City Council and Staff thanked her for her years of service with flowers.

The commission gained a new member, Amy Swift, in October. Swift is a building tradesperson, specializing in historic window restoration. She owns the Detroit-based restoration company, Building Hugger, and is active in the Michigan Young Preservationists organization.

The HDC anticipates the addition of another new member in early 2020.

INITIATIVES

HDC Demolition by Neglect

In 2018, the HDC reviewed and made the determination that three properties in the historic district were in danger of demolition by neglect; 302 E Cross, 206-210 N Washington and 401 E Forest. Work to resolve the condition issues of those properties continued in 2019. The HDC and staff are working with the owner of 302 E Cross to have the building repaired and secured. The property at 206-210 N Washington was acquired by the City through foreclosure. The City is working on a Request for Proposal for its redevelopment, which will ultimately resolve the case of demolition by neglect.

The property owners at 401 E Forest have been non-responsive and further enforcement is being undertaken. Once the issues are resolved, the demolition by neglect status will be removed for each property.

Additionally, the HDC reviewed the condition of a carriage barn at 422 N Hamilton. The owner made necessary repairs and the HDC determined it was no longer in danger of demolition by neglect.

Rules and Regulations Update

In 2018, staff worked on a Baseline Certified Local Government (CLG) Evaluation for the Michigan State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to address how the City is meeting its obligations as a CLG. The SHPO asked that the HDC update its rules and regulations, specifically its conflict of interest policy. This was completed and approved by City Council in April 16, 2019.

CLG Grant

The City obtained a CLG grant from SHPO at the end of 2018 in order to host a National Alliance of Preservation Commissions training in March 2019. The training was attended by all staff in the Community and Economic Development Department and three HDC members. In total there were 90 participants from HDCs around Michigan and SHPO staff. The training focused on interpreting the historic district ordinances, infill construction, and alternative materials.

New Owner Outreach

“New Owner” mailings occurred quarterly in March, June, September, and December. Post cards were sent regularly to realtors who list properties in the Historic District.

Facebook updates

Staff continued utilizing the commission’s Facebook page to do weekly “Throwback Thursday” posts utilizing old photos from City files and surveys as well as photos from the archives at the Ypsilanti Historical Society. Staff has also been utilizing the page more regularly for meeting updates, relevant preservation related topics as well as posts in May to celebrate Preservation Month.

Historic Walking Tours

HDC Staff, Scott Slagor, led walking tours of Downtown and Depot Town in October. The tours done in partnership with the DDA to highlight historic resources in Ypsilanti and the community’s story. Staff intend on conducting the tours regularly April through October of 2020.

APPLICATIONS

The number of applications received in 2019 was about the same as the number received in 2018. The number of study items was slightly less than the amount for the previous four years. Administrative approvals have nearly doubled from 2018, partly due to the HDC expanding the type of work that can be approved administratively. Staff also attributes the increase to the rainy spring that necessitated a large number of roof replacements; which are generally administratively approved. The ambitious scope of many of the approved projects reflects the commitment of residents and businesses to

the improvement of the community. The number of applications and actions taken is depicted in the table below.

Historic District Commission Actions, 2015-2019

| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-----------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Approved as submitted | 79 | 69 | 73 | 68 | 60 |
| Approved with modifications | 15 | 14 | 22 | 11 | 13 |
| Approved administratively | 11 | 13 | 36 | 27 | 44 |
| Amended approvals | 1 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| Denied: lack of information | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Denied: inappropriate | 0 | 5 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Pending at year end | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Notice to Proceed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 7 |
| Total Applications | 109 | 106 | 144 | 124 | 125 |
| Study Items | 40 | 42 | 43 | 41 | 35 |

MAJOR PROJECTS

The Historic District continued to benefit from investment over the past year. Some of the significant projects are summarized here:

- **New Construction**

No new buildings were approved in 2019, however 217 N River was approved for a major rear addition as the new owner substantially invests in the property.

- **Solar Panels**

Solar energy continues to be prominent in Ypsilanti. The HDC approved five solar installations in 2019.

- **100 W Michigan**

One of the most notable changes to the district was the removal of metal cladding from 100 W Michigan (formerly Dalat Restaurant). The HDC approved its removal, revealing original brick, storefront elements, windows, and hand-painted signs. The HDC also approved infilling non-historic windows on the north

elevation; some window infill on the east elevation, and masonry repairs. The project is ongoing with more applications expected in early 2020.

- **101 W Michigan**

Work has continued on the façade rehabilitation of 101 W Michigan. The original historic windows have been fully rehabilitated and work is currently underway on the storefront and new rear stairwell. Substantial progress is expected in 2020.

- **116-118 W Michigan**

Work has continued on the façade rehabilitation of 116-118 W Michigan. Several study items were discussed with the building. Additional applications are expected in early 2020.

- **400 N River**

Work has continued on the rehabilitation of the Thompson Block at 400 N River. Applications were approved in 2018 and the HDC and staff has watched as the historic features of the building are restored. Continued work and potentially some modifications to applications are expected in 2020.

Demolitions

No demolitions were completed in 2019.

Appeals

No appeals were filed with the State Historic Preservation Review Board in 2019.

Looking Forward

2020 should be an exciting and eventful year for the historic district and the commission. Visible changes should continue to take place at the major building projects as work moves to completion. The Michigan Historic Preservation tax credit bill is expected to be introduced and staff plans to keep tabs on the tax credit and introduce new resolutions in support of the credit to the HDC and City Council, if changes are made.

In the upcoming year, staff will continue to process updates and revisions to the commission forms, fact sheets. Staff will continue the Facebook updates for community outreach and will look to streamline and perfect the commissions' processes. Staff will further develop historic walking tours, with individual tours for the Downtown, Depot Town, and West Cross historic business districts. Staff and the commission will continue to work toward the goals established by SHPO in their 2018 CLG evaluation; including new design guidelines as applicable, continued survey of undesignated historic resources, and education opportunities. Staff will also investigate the creation of a historic district study committee to update the current district, addressing: boundaries that do not conform to parcel lines, an updated period of significance, and updated contributing/non-contributing resources list.

SUMMARY

Although of varied scope and scale, the projects completed throughout 2019 are excellent examples of the continued preservation efforts of property owners within the Ypsilanti Historic District. Commendation by the City is due to these owners for their substantial contribution to the community as they continue to support the efforts of the Historic District to beautify the district and preserve the heritage of Ypsilanti's built environment. Preservation is one of the means that makes Ypsilanti an authentic, vibrant, and diverse community.

This report was adopted at the January 14, 2019 regular meeting of the Historic District Commission and respectfully submitted to Ypsilanti City Council.