



**2021 Annual Report
Historic District Commission and
Historic Preservation Program
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. The Commission works to safeguard locally designated historic resources through review of exterior changes. City staff works on a broader historic preservation program that aims to recognize significant historic resources across the city.

MEMBERSHIP

Alex Pettit, Chair

Anne Stevenson, Vice Chair (February-
July 2021; resigned July 2021)

Erika Lindsay, Vice Chair (August-)

Amy Swift

Ronald Rupert (Resigned, end of
January 2021)

James Chesnut

James Ratzlaff

Stefan Szumko

Jeff Muir

COMMISSION AND STAFF

According to Sec. 54-32 of the City's Historical Preservation Ordinance, 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 and local Design Criteria to protect the historic integrity of the district for future generations.

The HDC is comprised of seven members, including at least one architect or building/conservation expert, and two residents of the historic district. The in 2021 the HDC was staffed by the Preservation Planner, Scott Slagor and is also supported by a recording secretary, Nancy Hare-Dickerson. Both Scott and Nancy resigned their positions by the end of the year.

Despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic, the HDC continued meeting regularly on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month at 7:00 p.m, via Zoom. Business was completed with relatively few technical difficulties.

The turnaround time for most applications was about two weeks from submission to approval. Potential applicants are encouraged to bring projects to the HDC as study

items before formal submission of an application. The study item allows the HDC 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 January 2020, long-time HDC member and district resident, Ron Rupert retired from service at the end of his term. In July 2021, Vice Chair and long-time HDC member, Anne Stevenson also resigned. Both seats were filled, first by Stefan Szumko, a district resident, historian, and contractor; and Jeff Muir, a district resident and real estate professional.

INITIATIVES

Commissioner Training

The 2021 Michigan Historic Preservation Network Conference was held virtually and offered a special training day for local commissioners. The city offered to pay the registration fee for commissioner training. Three commissioners and the Preservation Planner participated in the one-day training, which was well received.

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 has made some progress. The HDC authorized the city to take legal action with the owner of 302 E Cross to have the building repaired and secured. Such action has not yet been taken as the owner has resumed work on the property. The property at 206-210 N Washington was acquired by the City through foreclosure. The City is working on its redevelopment, which will ultimately resolve the case of demolition by neglect. owners of 401 E Forest appear to have been working to resolve the Demolition by Neglect Issues, albeit without a permit. City staff is working to resolve this issue.

New Owner Outreach

New property owners in the historic district receive letters to welcome them to the historic district and provide a general overview of how exterior work is regulated. These new owner mailings occurred in quarterly. Additionally, post cards were sent regularly to realtors who list properties in the Historic District.

Throwback Thursdays in City Newsletter

Staff worked to include "Throwback Thursday" features in the monthly City Newsletter utilizing old photos from City files and surveys as well as photos from the archives at the Ypsilanti Historical Society.

APPLICATIONS

The number of applications received in 2021 was significantly lower than those submitted in pre-pandemic years, roughly seventy percent of the total in 2018 and 2019. The number of applications and actions taken is depicted in the table below.

Historic District Commission Actions, 2017-2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Approved as submitted	73	68	60	43	42
Approved with modifications	22	11	13	4	4
Approved administratively	36	27	44	32	31
Amended applications	4	5	3	1	0
Denied: lack of information	1	1	0	0	0
Denied: inappropriate	6	3	3	3	6
Pending at year end	2	1	0	0	0
Notice to Proceed	0	5	7	7	3
Total Applications	144	124	125	90	86
Study Items	43	41	35	12	16

MAJOR PROJECTS in the HISTORIC DISTRICT

The Historic District continued to benefit from investment over the past year.

New Construction

No major new construction was reviewed in 2021. Work was generally replacement of existing features. The most common projects were roofs (22 of the total applications), many of which were approved administratively. The second most common item was windows (12 of the total).

Demolitions

No demolitions were completed in 2021.

Appeals

One appeal was filed with the State Historic Preservation Office for a roof that was completed without HDC review at 211 Ferris. However, the applicant and HDC were able to work out a solution and the appeal was dropped.

LOOKING FORWARD

There are a number of goals to look forward to in 2022.

The Michigan Historic Preservation Tax Credit bill was signed into at the end of 2020. The public rule-making process occurred over 2021 and the program will likely be ready for applications sometime in 2022. The new tax credit is expanded, allowing for both National Register and locally designated properties, which includes a much larger area of Ypsilanti. Staff aims to hold a public meeting once the process is figured out. Commissioners, staff, and many Ypsilanti residents advocated to legislators in favor of the tax credit. Both Representative Peterson and Senator Irwin voted in favor of the bill.

Goals

Staff and the HDC will continue to work toward the goals established by the State Historic Preservation Office in their 2018 Certified Local Government 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 to address boundaries that do not conform to parcel lines, an updated period of significance, and updated contributing/non-contributing resources list. The size of Ypsilanti's historic district and the timelines laid out in Michigan law make the update a challenge. Staff hopes a phased approach can be reached, coordinating the project with SHPO.

SUMMARY

Despite the challenges of virtual meetings, the HDC and property owners continued to work together. Ongoing work in the historic district despite supply-chain and labor shortages speaks to the vibrancy of Ypsilanti and the value its residents place in the city's historic resources. The HDC and staff will build on the achievements of 2021 in fulfilling goals for the historic preservation program in 2022.