



**2022 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 as amended, 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  
James Chesnut, Vice Chair  
James Ratzlaff  
Stefan Szumko

Delrhea Byrge  
Jimmy Huffman (served April to  
September 2022)  
Jeff Muir (resigned in September 2022)

**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. Preservation Planner Scott Slagor resigned his position in December 2021, and Preservation Planner Ellen Thackery began with the City in February 2022.

By February 2022, the historic district commission was meeting in person but Zoom was still an available option early in the year.

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.

## **INITIATIVES**

### **State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit**

In 2022, the state reinstated the historic rehab tax credit that allows up to 25% of eligible expenditures to be returned to the property owner in the form of a state income tax credit that can be carried forward up to 10 years. Staff had originally planned an infoshop about the new program at the Freighthouse for mid-June 2022 to be presented by the state preservation architect. About 20 registrants had reserved their spots, but, unfortunately, the architect had to cancel our program. Instead, staff promoted and held office hours in City Council Chambers and helped people submit their credit applications in a one-on-one format.

Ypsilanti was able to get several applications for the state rehab tax credit program submitted in 2022. The program has a cap, and the commercial credits available reached their cap very quickly statewide. The residential side of the program experienced less of a rush statewide, and the program is again available in 2023 for owner-occupied residential properties that contribute to the local historic district or the National Register historic district. The preservation planner is happy to help homeowners determine if their home is eligible, and more information about the tax credit is available at <https://www.miplace.org/historic-preservation/programs-and-services/historic-preservation-tax-credits/state-historic-tax-credit-program/> . Staff plans another educational event about the program in 2023, along with a mailer.

### **Commissioner Training**

Two new residents joined the commission in 2022, and both were given an orientation to the commission and a training on preservation law and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. The whole commission expressed interest in trainings pertaining to new materials and also new construction in the district. Staff was able to arrange for a training on reviewing new construction in the historic district by preservation architect Mike Kirk at the June 14 commission meeting. The training was held during the regular meeting and Mike presented by Zoom. The training was well received.

### **Resurveying the Historic District**

In the 2021 update to the City's Master Plan, resurveying the historic district was established as a goal, because the guiding documents for the local historic district from the 1970s and 1980s are no longer sufficient. Updated documents would help property owners and the city make the best decisions for the preservation of Ypsilanti's most historic resources. In October 2022, staff began drafting a grant application for a Certified Local Government grant for the resurvey. That application was completed and submitted February 1, 2023.

### **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.

302 E Cross: In 2021, the HDC authorized the city to take legal action with the owner of 302 E Cross to have the building repaired and secured. In 2022, the property owner has been issued citations and has entered into the administrative hearings process with monthly fines, and the owner has put the property on the market. Staff has heard from a couple interested potential buyers since fall 2022, and staff will work with the property owner to resolve open issues.

206-210 N Washington: 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.

401 E Forest: In 2021, owners of 401 E Forest appeared to have been working to resolve the Demolition by Neglect Issues, albeit without permits. City staff continues to work to resolve this issue.

**Throwback Thursdays**

In 2021, 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. In 2022, staff was posting weekly Throwback Thursday features on the historic district commission’s facebook page instead. Staff is working with the City’s communications manager to reinstitute Throwbacks in City newsletters in addition to the weekly facebook posts.

**APPLICATIONS**

If 2018 and 2019 are considered typical years for application submissions, 2021’s application submissions were about 30% lower than typical. The City received more HDC applications in 2022 than it did in 2021—2022’s total submissions were only 14% lower than typical totals. The number of applications and actions taken in 2022 is depicted in the table below.

**Historic District Commission Actions, 2017-2021**

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Approved as submitted	73	68	60	43	42	65
Approved with modifications	22	11	13	4	4	2
Approved administratively	36	27	44	32	31	29
Amended applications	4	5	3	1	0	3
Denied: lack of information	1	1	0	0	0	0
Denied: inappropriate	6	3	3	3	6	2

Pending at year end	2	1	0	0	0	2
Notice to Proceed	0	5	7	7	3	2
<b>Total Applications</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>108</b>
Study Items	43	41	35	12	16	26

The most common proposed projects were roofs (22 of the total applications), many of which were approved administratively. The second most common item was paint (12 paint jobs were proposed and all were approved administratively, but some of the proposed paint jobs were also part of other applications).

**MAJOR PROJECTS in the HISTORIC DISTRICT**

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

**New Construction**

The proposed new construction project at 220 N Park was approved as presented.

**Demolitions**

No major demolitions were completed in 2022. Demolitions of a nonhistoric metal shed and a nonhistoric addition on a historic house were both approved.

**Appeals**

One appeal was filed with the State Historic Preservation Office for vinyl windows that had been installed without HDC review or approval at 18 N Washington. The administrative law judge in the case ruled in the City of Ypsilanti’s favor. The applicant may appeal that decision to circuit court in 2023.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

There are a number of goals to look forward to in 2023.

**Goals**

Staff intends to continue to promote the state historic rehab tax credit and plans to facilitate an educational event on the topic in 2023.

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. In 2022, staff began planning an Old House Expo/ Preservation-palooza event for 2023 and staff is hoping that educational event will be successfully implemented. Staff also sees a need to better track enforcement issues

in the district. Checking on issues, confirming that completed work matches approved work, and tracking the status of active cases are all enforcement-related tasks that staff sees a need to systematize going forward. Staff also intends to reinstitute the practice of new owner outreach in the district. On a quarterly basis, staff will run a report from the assessment database showing new owners that quarter, and those new owners will receive a welcome to the historic district information packet and letter. That practice was completed by the former preservation planner but was stopped in 2022, and staff intends to reinstitute that practice for 2023.

In 2021, the then-preservation planner mentioned that he hoped to “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.” Current staff agrees that the historic district study committee report from 1972 needs to be updated and believes that access to an updated survey that complies with modern standards would greatly improve the efficiency of that report-updating effort. Staff has sought a grant for a resurvey, and if that grant is awarded, once that survey is complete, this study committee report work could move forward. If the grant is not awarded, a phased approach to the study committee work may indeed become necessary in the coming years.

## **SUMMARY**

Coming out of the pandemic, there has been a lot of pent-up demand to get work in the historic district done. Supply chain issues and labor shortages continue to challenge, but work continues to get proposed and completed, and the HDC and property owners continue to work together. The new preservation planner has heard from many property owners and residents who love their old houses and commercial buildings and love being part of the historic community that Ypsilanti is. The HDC and staff will build on the achievements of 2021 and 2022 in fulfilling goals for the historic preservation program in 2023.