



**2015 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, Chair  
Hank Prebys, Vice-Chair  
Ronald Rupert  
Michael Condon

Alex Pettit  
Erika Lindsay  
Jane Schmiedeke

**COMMISSION AND STAFF**

Throughout 2015, the Historic District Commission (HDC) continued meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers.

The HDC was staffed by interns Abigail Jaske, through July, and Haley McAlpine, beginning in November, and by Assistant Planner Cynthia Kochanek, during the gap. In the HDC Assistant role, they worked 15-20 hours per week performing various administrative tasks to enable the Commission to fulfill its responsibilities under the historic district ordinance. Staff responsibilities included reviewing Historic District Work Permit Applications prior to meetings; corresponding with applicants; preparing meeting agendas, Commission packets, and minutes; property monitoring; and preparing reports as needed.

The Commission continued to provide prompt review of applications. In November, the application deadline was changed to 4pm on the Tuesday of the week prior to the meeting, from noon on the Wednesday before the meeting, to allow for more time for staff review. The applications are then collected from the Building Department and reviewed by staff for completeness. Incomplete applications are addressed through written or phone correspondence to the applicant, requesting that additional information be provided prior to the meeting; if that information is not provided, the application is returned to the applicant. In the fall of 2015, the HDC Assistant began writing "Staff Reviews" after reading each application. These reviews were designed to offer suggested questions for Commissioners and to provide the Commission with information not included in the packet, such as staff correspondence with the applicant. These staff reviews were included in the meeting packets. Packets are then posted on the City of Ypsilanti's website and emailed to the Commission by the Friday before each meeting.

The HDC Assistant attends each Commission meeting. After the meeting, the HDC Assistant writes all decision letters and a draft of the official minutes. The draft is then forwarded to the HDC Chair for review. The turnaround time for this process, from application submittal to mailing of decision letters, generally takes about ten days; however, the approvals are provided to the building department the next day to expedite the work.

Potential applicants are encouraged to bring projects to the Commission as study items before formal submission of a Work Permit 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.

## **Initiatives**

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### **Educational Material Updates**

Fact sheets underwent a style update to match the City's current branding and content was edited for length and to reflect current policy. These factsheets will be on the City's new website when it launches in the first quarter of 2016.

### **New Owner Outreach**

"New Owner" mailings had been occurring once or twice a year through 2014. In 2015, that was changed to quarterly: March, June, September, and December.

### **Grants**

The HDC submitted a letter of support for the City to apply to the State Historic Preservation Office for grant funding for educational workshops and materials.

### **Redevelopment Ready Certification**

The City was certified as a "Redevelopment Ready Community" in 2015 by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. This certification reflects the City's efforts to ensure that its development processes, including zoning, planning, building and historic district approvals, are transparent, consistent, and fair.

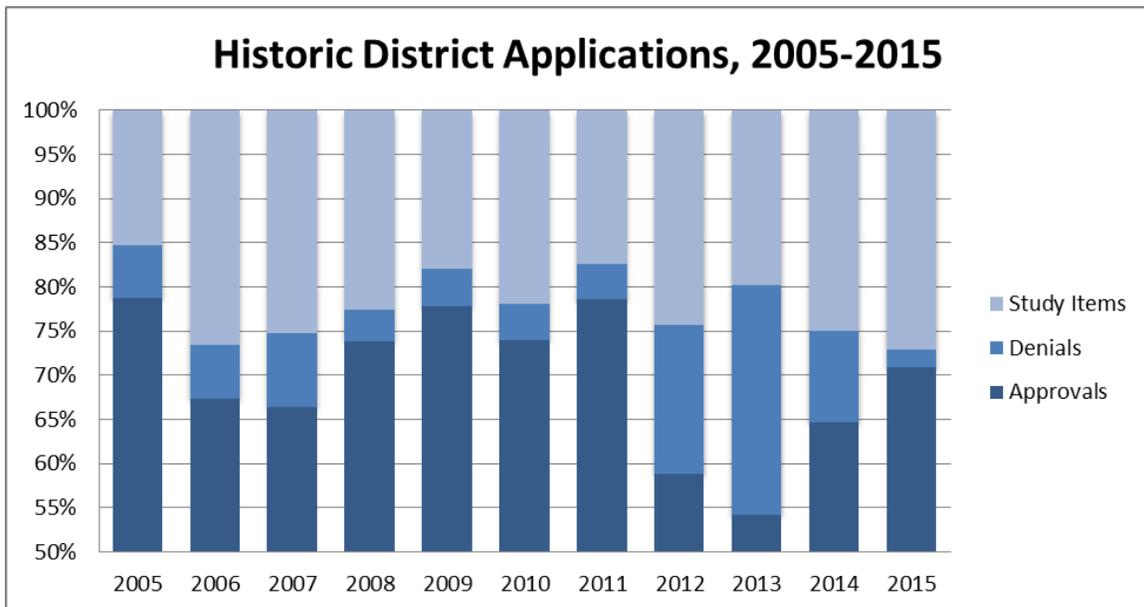
## APPLICATIONS

The number of applications received this year was the highest since 2007. The number of Study Items is also the highest it has been since 2007. The lower amounts of applications in recent years reflect the impact of economic issues. The ambitious scope of many of the approved projects reflects the commitment of residents and businesses to the improvement of the local community. The number of applications and actions taken is shown in the table below.

**Historic District Commission Actions, 2010-2015**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Approved as submitted	71	51	44	62	54	79
Approved with modifications	7	15	10	6	25	15
Approved administratively	13	11	9	9	9	11
Amended approvals	2	5	2	2	3	1
Denied: lack of information	2	1	2	0	0	3
Denied: inappropriate	2	3	3	5	5	0
<b>Total Action Items</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>111</b>
Study Items	27	17	26	28	34	40

To illustrate the number of projects within the Historic District this year as compared to the past ten years, the chart on the following page depicts HDC Work Permit application activity from 2005 through 2015.



### Major Projects

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

- 47 N. Huron – The HDC approved the installation of solar panels at the Corner Health building in January.
- Thompson Block- In spring of 2015, work finally began on the Thompson Block that was approved by the HDC in 2014. The approved work included painting, window installation, parking lot installation, store fronts, lighting, and an addition for stairs and elevator, as well as rooftop decks. A workplace tragedy happened in May, and the project has made slow progress since that time.
- Starkweather Homestead- All of the double hung windows on the first floor have been replaced with metal clad wood sash packs and the first floor apartment has been completely restored and leased.
- 229 W. Michigan- The HDC approved the installation of solar panels at the Ypsilanti District Library building.
- Towner House (303 N Huron)- After being reviewed as a Study Item and returning as an Action Item, a new sign was approved for installation at the Towner House by the HDC.
- Ypsilanti Farmers Market (9 S Adams/16 S Washington)- Growing Hope attended HDC meetings throughout the year to discuss work plans for the property. They plan to relocate the Ypsilanti Farmers Market to this address, and they needed new doors and entrance ramps to accommodate vendors.

### Demolitions

In January of 2015, the HDC approved the demolition of an accessory structure (a shed) at 418 Maple St. The HDC agreed that the shed was of no historical significance, and the shed was deemed a safety hazard by the City of Ypsilanti. The shed was ultimately demolished in the spring of 2015.

Demolition of the structures at 220 N Park (formerly the Boys and Girls Club) was approved in 2015. This approval called for the demolition of all structures on the lot, including the administrative offices, the main gym, and two dugouts. Demolition is expected to be completed in spring of 2016.

### Appeals

There were no appeals filed in 2015.

### Looking Forward—Things to Expect in the Year to Come

The HDC has many plans for the upcoming year. This includes a training session staffed by the Michigan Historic Preservation Network on January 19th at the Ypsilanti Historical Society Archives. The HDC is also planning to host 3-4 seasonally timed workshops designed to educate citizens on a variety of topics concerned with owning and maintaining historic properties.

Plans for 2016 also include a joint initiative with Washtenaw County to create an outreach program designed to further educate Realtors in the surrounding area about the benefits and responsibilities that come with owning a property in a historic district.

Staff is also preparing an inclusive informational binder for Commissioners, similar to those provided to the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, that would include previous historic district studies, current state and local legislation, rules and regulations, by-laws, and other documents important to the HDC.

In 2016, Staff will be making necessary updates and revisions to current HDC Fact Sheets, as well as producing new Fact Sheets to better inform the public of the HDC's design guidelines.

### SUMMARY

Although of varied scope and scale, the projects completed throughout 2015 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 HDC to beautify the district and preserve the heritage of Ypsilanti's built environment.

This report adopted at the January 26, 2016 regular meeting of the Historic District Commission and respectfully submitted to the Ypsilanti City Council.

/s/

1/26/2016

\_\_\_\_\_  
Anne Stevenson, Chair  
Historic District Commission

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Date

/s/

1/26/2016

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Haley McAlpine, Historic District Assistant  
Community & Economic Development Department

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Date