

Historic District Commission 2009 Annual Report

Membership

Jane Schmiedeke, Chair
Hank Prebys, Vice-Chair
Edward Penet
Christian Overland
Brenda Rigdon
Ronald Rupert
Michael Condon
Jennifer Henriksen
Alex Pettit
Joseph Schultz

Commission and Staff

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. Christian Overland and Edward Penet left at the end of January. Brenda Rigdon left the Commission in May. Jennifer Henriksen joined the board in February. Alex Pettit joined the Commission in July. Commissioner Joseph Schultz returned to the Commission in October.

In 2009, the Commission was staffed by the Planner II Richard Murphy, Preservation Planner Courtney Miller and Historic Preservation interns Aimee D'Agostini and Anne Stevenson. Preservation Planner Courtney Miller served from January until July. The HDC Intern from January to August was Aimee D'Agostini, a graduate student from Eastern Michigan University in the Historic Preservation program. From August through December, Anne Stevenson, also a graduate student in EMU's Historic Preservation program, filled the position of HDC Intern. The HDC Intern served 15-20 hours per week, performing various administrative duties, enabling the Commission to fulfill the requirements of the 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. Additionally, staff administratively approved routine roof work under conditions defined by the Commission.

The Commission continued to provide prompt review of applications. The current application procedure begins with the filing of a Historic District Work Permit Application by noon on the Wednesday before the HDC meeting. The applications are then collected from the Building Department and reviewed by staff for both completeness and

zoning compliance. Incomplete applications are addressed through written or phone correspondence to the applicant, requesting that additional information be provided prior to the meeting. Properties under consideration are photographed by staff for reference. Staff assembles completed applications into meeting packets and delivers them to Commissioners on the Friday before the meeting. An additional application was created this year entitled Demolition Permit Application (guidelines attached), which requires specific documentation. The application seeks to create a greater understanding and guide applicants through the process of applying for approval of demolition of structures in the Historic District.

The HDC Intern attends each Commission meeting. After the meeting, the HDC Intern 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 the mailing of decision letters, generally takes about ten days. When building, sign, fence, or other permit applications are made at the same time as the Historic District Work Permit Application, staff performs zoning reviews in parallel to the HDC process both to minimize conflicts between Commission approvals and zoning requirements and also to minimize response time.

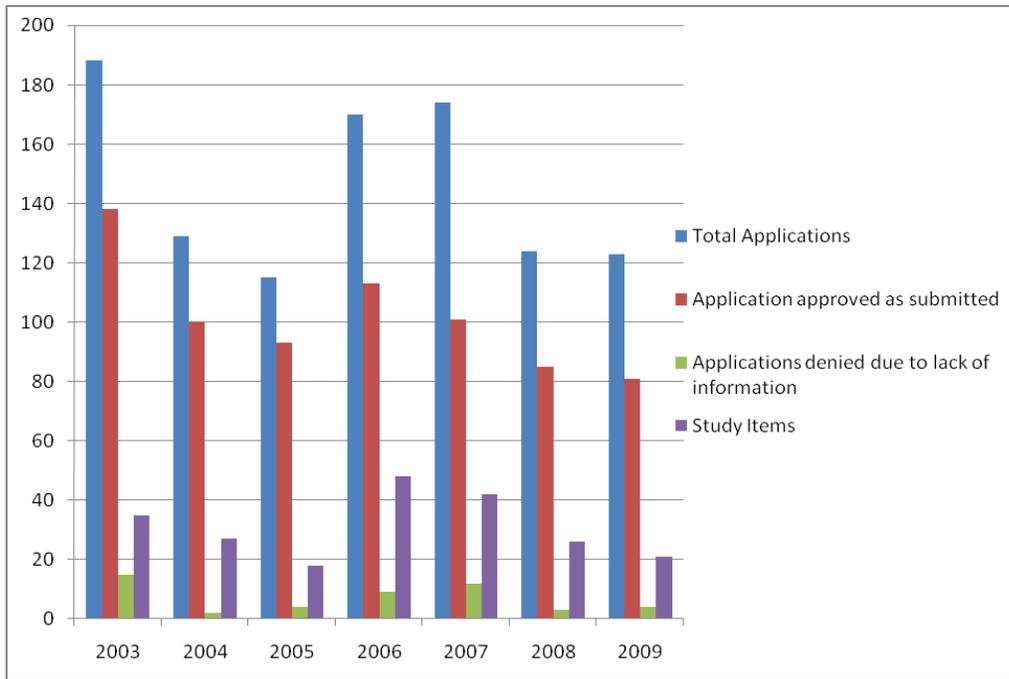
Potential applicants are encouraged to bring projects to the Commission as Study Items before formal submission. This allows the Commission to provide feedback to property owners at a conceptual stage, clarifying expectations and allowing for a more predictable final review.

Statistics and Trends

Residents and businesses continued to invest in Historic District properties although there has been an overall decrease in building activity in the last few years. Considering the overall economic downturn, the current number of applications is encouraging. The number of applications and actions taken is shown in the table, below.

Historic District Commission Actions, 2006-2009

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Applications approved as submitted	88	84	72	76
Applications approved with modifications	10	8	2	3
Administrative approvals	24	19	11	12
Applications denied due to lack of information	6	3	1	3
Applications denied due to inappropriateness	3	9	2	1
Applications pending at end of year	2	2	1	1
Study Items	48	42	26	21
Amendments to previous approvals	5	7	9	6
Total Applications	186	174	124	123



Source: Planning & Development Department Records

To further illustrate activity levels in the historic district, the chart above shows HDC Work Permit activity from 2003 through 2009.

Historic District Fact Sheets

In August 2009, the Historic District Commission published a new fact sheet, entitled Signs and Awnings, in which the HDC expressed the view that signs are non-permanent fixtures which maintain the distinctive feature of the district, and discussed appropriate materials and installation of awnings.

Edison Power Plant Historic District

A Historic District Study Committee was formed on July 15, 2008 to study and report on the feasibility of providing legal protection to the Edison Power Plant, Dam, and Peninsular Paper Company Sign by creating a three-resource historic district to be subject to the provisions of the existing Chapter 54 of the City of Ypsilanti Codes, entitled Historical Preservation. The Preliminary Report was submitted in September 2008 to the State Historic Preservation Office. The Final Report was submitted to City Council in December 2009.

Property Monitoring

One of the issues facing the Historic District Commission during 2009 was the monitoring and enforcement of inappropriate changes to properties located within the Historic District. Commission and staff maintain records of all unauthorized alterations

to properties, and staff sends notices to property owners regarding what proper steps they need to take to seek decisions from the HDC. Secondary and third letters are sent to property owners before these issues are turned over to enforcement. Even with these steps, however, there has been little turn around by property owners to make the appropriate corrections. There has been discussion about more effective ways to deal with property monitoring and enforcement and hopefully this issue can be focused on in the upcoming year.

Demolitions

115 S. Washington – HDC approved the demolition of a freestanding sign at the behest of the Ypsilanti Fire Inspector, due to its hazardous condition.

107 E. Cross – HDC approved the demolition of the property in July. (see Appeals)

505 N. Hamilton – The Commission approved the demolition of the front west porch roof and also the removal of the remains of a garage which had been previously torn down.

631 N. River, house – The Commission found the house had no architectural or historic significance in its present condition. It was also found that the structure constituted a hazard to the safety of the public or occupants. Demolition was approved.

Appeals

107 E. Cross - On July 14, 2009, HDC approved the demolition of 107 E Cross, due to the structure being a hazard to public safety. Petitioner David Kircher, appealed this decision to the State Historic Preservation Review Board which upheld the decision of the Commission.

The property owner has other appeals active and the demolition has been delayed until a final decision can be reached by the courts.

Significant Projects

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

- Ypsilanti Freight House:
More work continued this year on the Freight House, including the installation of a rain garden at the northern end of the structure. As well approval was given to include repair and addition of roof masonry, railing and decking systems.
- 109-113 W. Michigan: Puffer Red's
Commission approved repair and refurbishing of the front façade, with installation of new awnings and an electrical sign.

57 N. Huron (Corner Health Center):

The Corner Health Center (47 N. Huron) purchased the adjacent building at 57 N. Huron and reconstructed the store front.

Riverside Arts Center Off Center:

The original garage doors, long missing, were replicated.

Conclusion

The above projects are all excellent examples of restoration and reflect Ypsilanti's sense of pride and commitment to historic preservation. Commendation by the City is due to these owners for their substantial contribution to the community as they help support our efforts to beautify the district and preserve our historic heritage.

This report respectfully submitted to the Ypsilanti City Council by the Historic District Commission.

Jane Schmiedeke, Chair
Historic District Commission

Date

Anne Stevenson, HDC Assistant
Planning and Development Department

Date