



**2017 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
Mike Davis
Erika Lindsay

Alex Pettit
Ronald Rupert
Jane Schmiedeke

COMMISSION AND STAFF

Throughout 2017, the Historic District Commission (HDC) continued meeting on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. The location of the meetings were subject to change from the City Council Chambers, as necessary.

The HDC was staffed by intern Yasmin Ruiz, through March and by Associate/Preservation Planner Cynthia Kochanek beginning in April. In July, the Preservation Planner position was created, which provides a more stable and consistent staffing for the HDC. This freed the intern role to be more of a learning position that would not require the intern to attend HDC meetings on Tuesdays which conflict with a required course in the HP program. In the HDC Assistant/Preservation Planner role, staff worked 15-20 hours per week performing various administrative tasks to enable the Historic District 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; webpage maintenance; and preparing reports, as needed.

The Commission 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, requesting additional information be provided prior to the meeting. If that information is not provided, the application is returned to the applicant. Staff reviews are written for each application and are designed to address issues and to fill in gaps in the applications. These staff reviews are included in the meeting packets. Meeting packets are then posted on the City of Ypsilanti's website and emailed to the Commission by the Friday prior to each meeting.

The HDC Assistant/Preservation Planner attends each HDC meeting in order to take minutes. After the meeting, the HDC Assistant writes decision letters and drafts the official minutes. The draft is then forwarded to the HDC Chair for review. Starting at the second meeting in October, a recording secretary, Seth Regan, started attending the HDC meetings in order to take minutes thus freeing staff to fulfill a more advisory role.

The turnaround time for the application process, from submittal to the mailing of decision letters, generally takes about two weeks; however, the approvals are provided to the building department the day after the meeting to expedite the work.

Potential applicants are encouraged to bring projects to the Commission as study items before the 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

HDC Application Revisions

A new application format and application checklist was implemented in early 2016, that application was tweaked throughout 2017 as issues were identified.

Fact Sheets

A new lighting fact sheet was adopted by the HDC in September and modifications were made to the Masonry and Mortar fact sheet.

New Owner Outreach

"New Owner" mailings occurred quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

Facebook updates

Staff began 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 and other interesting preservation related topics.

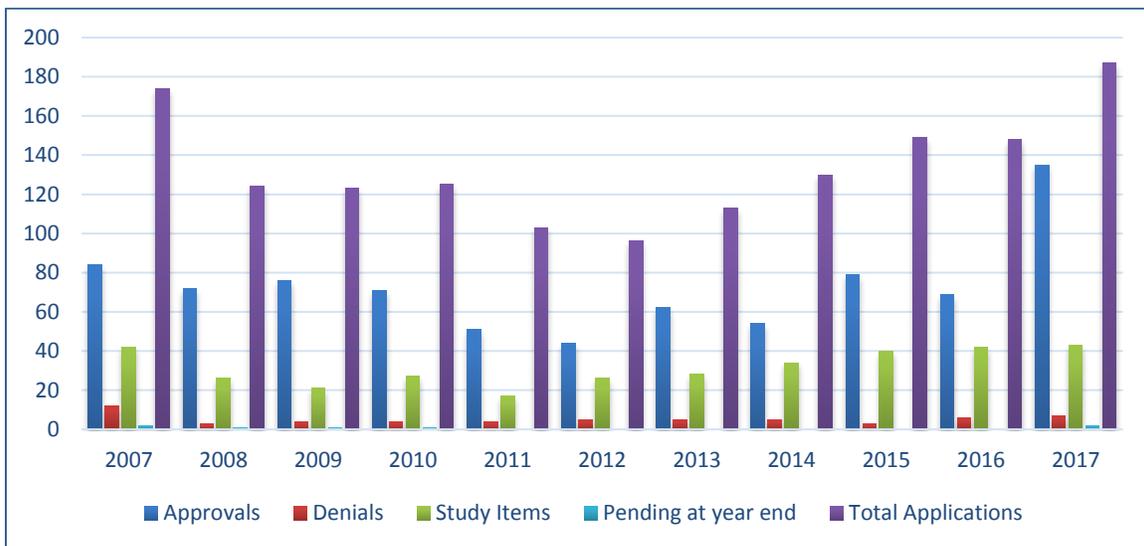
APPLICATIONS

The number of applications received in 2017 was the highest amount received in the last ten years. The number of study items is similar to the amount for the previous 2 years and seems to be averaging out around 40 per year. Administrative approvals are at the highest level they've been in the last decade, the figure for this past year is triple that of the previous year. This can be attributed to not only the amount of applications taken in for the year but also to the staff's knowledge and comfort level with administrative approvals. 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 depicted in the table below.

Historic District Commission Actions, 2012-2017

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Approved as submitted	44	62	54	79	69	73
Approved with modifications	10	6	25	15	14	22
Approved administratively	9	9	9	11	13	36
Amended approvals	2	2	3	1	4	4
Denied: lack of information	2	0	0	3	1	1
Denied: inappropriate	3	5	5	0	5	6
Pending at year end	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total Action Items	70	84	96	109	106	144
Study Items	26	28	34	40	42	43

To illustrate the number of projects within the Historic District this year as compared to the past ten years, the chart below depicts HDC Work Permit application activity from 2007 through 2017.



MAJOR PROJECTS

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

- **Ypsilanti Freighthouse**

The Ypsilanti Freighthouse was issued a temporary Certificate of Occupancy in January and a permanent Certificate of Occupancy in October and was able to open to the public and host public meetings and events after more than a decade of being closed to the public.

- **203 S Huron**

The Gilbert Residence was approved for renovation of the main entry, window and gutter replacement and a modification of the roofline. Work has commenced and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2018.

- **39 E Cross**

A storefront renovation was approved for this location with new signage as part of a larger renovation project that included interior work on the restaurant. Exterior work appears to have been completed at this time.

- **15 S Washington**

The old Smith Furniture Building was approved for work in July. The plans for work included window additions, storefront window replacement, door replacement and the addition of a knee wall on the S. Washington frontage. Work commenced at the end of 2017.

- **400 N River**

Building restoration work was approved for the Thompson Block in February of 2017. Work on stabilizing the building has commenced and visible changes to the structure should start in the coming year.

Demolitions

In June of 2017, the HDC approved the demolition of an accessory structure (a garage) at 333 Oak St. The HDC agreed that the garage was of minimal historical significance and the current owners were looking to modify the structure and add a garage in order to make the building more accessible. At that same meeting, the house addition and new garage were approved.

Appeals

No appeals were filed with the State Historic Preservation Review Board in 2017.

Looking Forward

2018 should be an exciting and eventful year for the historic district and the commission. Visible changes should start to take place at the Thompson Block and work on 15 S Washington should be completed in the coming year.

Staff will process updates and revisions to the current HDC Fact Sheets, the HDC Work Permit Application and any other commission forms and webpages, as needed. Staff will continue the Facebook updates for community outreach and will look to streamline and perfect the commissions' processes.

SUMMARY

Although of varied scope and scale, the projects completed throughout 2017 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.

This report adopted at the January 23, 2018 regular meeting of the Historic District Commission and respectfully submitted to the Ypsilanti City Council.