

**Washtenaw County Historic District Commission
Meeting Minutes**

DATE:	Thursday, January 4, 2024
TIME:	5:30 pm-7:00 pm
PLACE	Eastern County Government Center Office of Community & Economic Development- 2 nd floor 415 W. Michigan Ave, Ypsilanti, MI

Call to Order

- Chair Ralph called the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission meeting to order at 5:35 pm.

Roll Call

- Secretary Clarke conducted roll call:
 - o **Commissioners present:** Alice Ralph, Kim Clarke, Anne Stevenson, Angela Oehrli, James Mann, Dena Rapley
 - o **Commissioners absent:** Alec Jerome, Katie Remensnyder, Peter Kelley
 - o **Staff present:** Kat Slocum, Sarah Ponders, Toni Kayumi

Approval of the Agenda of the Current Meeting:

Chair Ralph asked if there were any corrections to the agenda. There were none. Chair Ralph moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Oehrli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes of Previous Meeting: September 7, 2023:

Chair Ralph asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. Commissioner Oehrli moved to edit the minutes of September to correct the spelling of her last name. Commissioner Clarke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Citizen Participation: none

Items for Consideration

- Gordon Hall Grant Application: Staff presented the Gordon Hall Grant Application draft, attached to the meeting packet. Commissioner Oehrli asked for guidance on the role of a commissioner when reviewing grants. Chair Ralph noted that the role of the HDC is narrow, as it is a CLG that facilitates the applications. Commissioners can be confident that the grant is factual and worthy of support. Staff asked that commissioners apply their expertise to help edit grants to make it a stronger application when appropriate and confirm if the grant effectively fits into the master plan. Commissioner Rapley suggested that quieter historic voices should be amplified within the outcomes of this project and future projects.
 - o Following discussion, staff presented a drafted resolution of support, attached to the meeting packet. No edits were requested. Chair Ralph motioned to accept and Commissioner Oehrli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
 - o Following the resolution, staff presented a drafted letter of support, attached to the meeting packet. Commissioner Oehrli asked for clarification on when the grant is due and when monies are awarded. Commissioner Stevenson asked for clarification on amounts of money awarded by SHPO. Chair Ralph asked for the word “successful” to be added to the draft letter.

- 2024 HDC Meeting Calendar: Staff presented a draft calendar for 2024, attached to the meeting packet. Chair Ralph moved to adopt the calendar as proposed.

HDC Elections

- Chair Ralph expressed interest in continuing her role as chair. Staff noted that in email correspondence Vice-Chair Jerome expressed interest in serving in any capacity needed. Commissioner Clarke stated continued interest in serving as secretary/treasurer.
- Commissioner Mann noted that a single vote could be made for the slate due to no change in roles. Commissioner Clarke made a motion to vote on the election. Chair Ralph called a vote. Motion passed unanimously.

Staff Reports:

Staff updated the Commission on the following items:

- **Groves Farm application for Local Historic District:**
Staff presented the preliminary application for the local historic district and discussed next steps for the process. Commissioners Mann and Stevenson both suggested partnering with EMU Historic Preservation faculty and graduate students to assist with research. Commissioner Oehrli suggested commissioners be present to show support of the process at the Northfield Township Board of Trustees meeting in March 2024 and the Northfield Township Historical Society (NTHS) membership meeting in January.
- **Local Historic Districts**
 - **Wild-Frey Farm:** The Board of Commissioners approved the Wild-Frey Farm Local Historic District Ordinance on September 20, 2023. Staff is currently working to complete an affidavit for the property to attach to the deed in anticipation of sale.
 - **Thornoaks:** Siding has been installed at 4071 Thornoaks Drive. The siding is not in compliance with the COA issued in February 2022. The appeal of the decision is in circuit court, no hearing date has been set. A Motion for Expedited Review was submitted on October 31, 2023. At this time, Corporation Counsel has recommended no other action until the case is heard.
 - **Audit Report:** Staff presented the Historic District site visits that were completed in Fall 2023. Staff noted a theme that homeowners were frustrated with the historic tax credits application process. Commissioner Rapley asked: do we have capacity to help facilitate an easier experience for the homeowner to apply for the tax incentive? Staff answered that the mechanics of the process are arduous. Staff can facilitate email connections to webinars, online training, and personnel at SHPO who can assist, but limited staff time hampers our ability to help further. Commissioner Rapley suggested hosting a historic tax credit training workshop for homeowners in partnership with neighboring communities. Commissioner Clarke shared that the Ypsilanti Historical Society has training and information sessions and would be a helpful resource on this topic. Staff suggested that the Washtenaw County Historical Societies Consortium be contacted to discuss holding a county-wide training seminar to assist homeowners and other stakeholders with their tax incentives applications.
 - o Staff noted the creation of a contractors list for Local Historic District owners. The list consists of companies and workers whom owners recommend based on their quality of work on historic district properties.
- **2024 HDC Goals:** Establishing yearly goals is a requirement of CLG communities. Staff provided several HDC goal suggestions. Commissioners expressed the overall desire that funding be re-established for the HDC and full-time historic preservation staff at the county. Commissioner Rapley asked: "When we have limited funding, who is feeling that impact? Do we lose already underrepresented voices when there is less money? Who feels the burden the most?" Chair Ralph suggested the HDC provide support of, and re-establish connections to, existing historic properties across the county. The bicentennial celebrations are important to support. Commissioner Oehrli suggested a sub-committee be formed to work on ways to amplify the HDC's voice within the county.

Staff encouraged the HDC to use a subcommittee to expand its presence into more areas of the county and raise voices to decision makers. Staff suggested that an enhanced HDC presence at Board of Commissioners meetings would be appropriate, using public comment periods to amplify the work of the HDC and to present any financial data that illustrates outcomes of BOC support of HDC work. Staff commented that the March 2024 HDC meeting can be used to form a subcommittee, draft its suggested outcomes, deliverables, and project plan.

o Adopted 2024 Goals:

1. Continue and update oversight of local historic districts in Washtenaw County
 - increased communication with local historic districts*
 - tax credit support*
 2. Promote survey and designation of historic sites
 - *support Northfield Township CLG Grant*
 - *promote Groves Farm to Northfield Township*
 - *acquire funding for study committee*
 3. Promote heritage tourism and placemaking
 - *apply for grants/funding for historic plaques*
 - *support local historic sites and organizations*
 - *improve visibility of historic preservation in Washtenaw County through online engagement, awards, and public meetings*
 - *form a HDC subcommittee to promote historic preservation initiatives within Washtenaw County*
- **Northfield Township MPDF CLG Grant:** Staff updated the commissioners on the status of the NTHS grant survey project. Firefly Preservation Consulting, LLC was selected in consultation with the NTHS. A project kickoff meeting with the consultant, subgrantee (Washtenaw County) and grantee (Michigan State Historic Preservation Office) was held November 16. The consultant is now in the initial research phase. A public grant “kickoff” meeting is scheduled on Jan 11, 2024, at 6:30 pm in the Northfield Township Community Center. Michigan SHPO, Washtenaw County Staff, NTHS, and Cheri Szcondronski of Firefly Consulting will be in attendance.
 - **Washtenaw County Updates:** Staff introduced Sarah Pounders, the new Historic Preservation Intern, as well as Toni Kayumi, the new director of the Office of Community and Economic Development. Also, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) membership has been renewed.

Treasurer Report: No report.

Items for Discussion: Nothing further discussed.

Adjournment: Chair Ralph motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:14 pm.

The next HDC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 5:30 p.m. at Eastern County Government Center Office of Community & Economic Development 2nd floor 415 W. Michigan Ave, Ypsilanti, MI