

**Washtenaw County Historic District Commission
Meeting Minutes**

DATE:	Thursday, January 9, 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 5:37 pm.

Roll Call

- Secretary Clarke conducted roll call:
 - **Commissioners present:** Alice Ralph, Anne E. Stevenson, Kim Clarke, Jo Angela Oehrli, Katie Remensnyder, Alec Jerome, Debby Covington, Dena Rapley.
 - **Commissioners absent:**
 - **Staff present:** Kat Slocum, Britt Teliin.

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 Stevenson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Approval of the Minutes of Previous Meeting: August 8, 2024:

Chair Ralph asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. There were none. Commissioner Clarke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Citizen Participation: None

Welcome New Commissioner – Debby Covington

Items for Consideration

- **2025 HDC Meeting Calendar:** Staff gave information on the dates that were chosen. Motion to approve calendar by Vice Chair Jerome. Commissioner Stevenson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- **Commissioner Updates:** Staff gave information about needing one more seat to be filled by an attorney.
- **HDC Elections: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer**
Chair Ralph expressed interest in continuing as Chair. Vice Chair Jerome expressed interest in continuing as Vice Chair. Secretary Clarke stated interest in continuing as Secretary. Commissioner Rapley expressed interest in serving as Treasurer.

Vice Chair Jerome motioned to approve positions. Commissioner Remensnyder seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

- **2024 Review – Discussion**

- **CLG Annual Report:** Staff discussed the inventory and designation. The only items needed in 2024 were administrative approvals. Groves Farm historic resource survey will be submitted to SHPO. The Native American Resource Layers of geo-rectified Native American Trails was a success. Staff updated the online Storymaps in Washtenaw County.
- **LHD Annual Audit Report:** Staff presented the Historic District site visits completed in Fall 2024. There are 16 Historic Districts as of last year. Staff mentioned that most of the sites were doing well, and some owners received approval last year for small changes like paint and generators. However, Conant Farm is not in good shape. Commissioner Remensnyder and Commissioner Stevenson mentioned that it would be good to have full documentation, such as a Historic American Buildings Survey, of the farmstead buildings that are in decline.

- **2025 HDC Goals**

- 2025 draft provided by staff. Staff provided several HDC goal suggestions. Chair Ralph stated that newer commissioners (within two years) should engage in the processes of grants and or the HABS report. Staff mentioned only about 50 historic markers remain and that Highland Cemetery reached out to have its taken down and possibly replaced. Commissioner Covington noted that the David Byrd Center marker is hard to read now. Vice Chair Jerome suggested figuring out ways to reenforce and give the HDC more authority on properties. Vice Chair Jerome also talked about supporting historic preservation as a whole and wanting to investigate some legal notifications for the next meeting in March.

- **Adopted 2025 Goals:**

1. Support designated historic resources in Washtenaw County.
 - a. Increase communication with historic districts/sites (national, state and local) through quarterly emails to residents/property owners. Include information on COAs, press releases, tax credit announcements, and other relevant items.
 - b. Tax credit support - host a meeting/workshop in Washtenaw County with staff from the SHPO office. Seek to increase community understanding of tax credits, connect residents with SHPO staff that can assist with tax credit applications, and facilitate opportunities for residents to connect with each other.
 - c. Complete administration for Gordon Hall Rehabilitation Grant. Act as liaison between SHPO, DAHS, Phoenix, Hopkins Burns, and Washtenaw County.
 - d. Apply for 2026 CLG grant.
2. Promote survey and designation of historic sites.
 - a. Continue to support Northfield Township MPDF Grant. Introduce LHD designation to selected property owners to increase protection of sites.
 - b. Complete LHD designation of Groves Farm in Northfield Township - our first LHD in that

township.

- c. Evaluate other resources for LHD nomination in underrepresented townships and/or of underrepresented groups to increase DEI and access to economic incentives.
- d. Form a study committee, complete a report, and designate a new LHD.

3. Promote heritage tourism and placemaking.

- a. Evaluate existing County Historic Markers and determine prioritization of maintenance. Update Historic Markers on webpage GIS with all sign locations and pictures of each marker.
- b. Research sites of historic significance throughout the county for installation of new signs. Specifically examine underrepresented areas and/or underrepresented populations.
- c. Research grants to support funding maintenance to existing historic markers and/or installation of new markers.
- d. Complete updates to all Storymaps. Explore possibility of creating a Storymap for Northfield Township using 2019 survey. Exploring adding the Underground Railroad tour as a Storymap.
- e. Improve visibility of historic preservation in Washtenaw County through online engagement, 2025 Preservation Awards, and public meetings.

Staff Reports:

Staff updated the Commission on the following items:

- **2025 Historic Preservation Budget Changes**

Budget was approved of \$15,000 for 2025 and \$15,000 for 2026. Staff is meeting next week to learn where funding will go. It has been noted that this is the first budget since 2011. Staff is currently drafting a 5-year plan with key performance indicators for historic preservation. Commissioner Covington asked to consider internal and external marketing for the commission as a budget expense.

- **HDC Historic Markers:** Staff have noticed that many of the markers are in stages of deteriorating and need to be looked at. Staff will make site visits.

- **Historic District Ordinance updates:** Staff stated it will be complete in March, and they will schedule a meeting in February.

- **Local Historic Districts**

- **Thornoaks:** The 4071 legal case has no updates at this time. The presiding judge has resigned and staff is awaiting appointment of a new judge.
- **Merriman:** Property was recently sold and will be used as an active farm. Owners want to adapt the property to suit their farm needs and had a few items administratively approved. They also noted that two trees on the property are diseased and will be inspected.
- **Conant:** Property was recently resold by private sale and the new owner was not told it was a historic site. Interior of structure is in very bad condition as it was used in the past as a rescue facility for cats; one building is currently a hazardous. Staff is working with the homeowner as much as possible. Staff will have an update by next meeting and pursuing a HABS report. Barn on property is in decent shape.

- **Popkins:** The site has had issues with break-ins, window damage and people trying to reside inside. Three windows were shattered when staff visited in August. Staff have asked police for more surveillance of area and will visit again soon.
- **Groves Farm Study Committee update:** The report was submitted and a public meeting will be the next step.
- **Northfield Township MPDF CLG Grant:** This grant is moving along well. Staff mentioned it is on time and on budget.
- **Gordon Hall Rehabilitation Grant:** This grant is also moving along but has had some delays during the holidays.
- **2024 Preservation Awards:** Staff mentioned the awards were a success.
- **Washtenaw County Updates:** Staff introduced Britt Teliin, the new Historic Preservation Intern. Also, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) membership has been renewed.

Treasurer Report: No report.

Items for Discussion: Nothing further discussed.

Adjournment: Vice Chair Jerome motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:07 pm.

The next HDC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, March 6, 2025 at 5:30 p.m. at Eastern County Government Center Office of Community & Economic Development 2nd floor 415 W. Michigan Ave, Ypsilanti, MI