

Washtenaw County Historic District Commission Meeting Minutes

DATE:	Thursday, March 6 th , 2025
TIME:	5:30 pm – 7:00pm
PLACE:	Eastern County Government Center Office of Community & Economic Development – 2 nd Floor 415 W. Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti, MI

1. **Call to Order**– Secretary Clarke called the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission meeting to order at 5:39pm.
2. **Roll Call** – Secretary Clarke conducted roll call:
 - **Commissioners present:** Alice Ralph, Kim Clarke, Jo Angela Oehrli, Katie Remensnyder, and Debby Covington.
 - **Commissioners absent:** Anne E Stevenson, Alec Jerome, and Dena Rapley.
 - **Staff present:** Kat Slocum, Britt Teliin.
3. **Approval of Agenda** – Commissioner Covington asked if there were any corrections to the agenda. There were none. Commissioner Covington moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Oehrli seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
4. **Approval of Minutes: January 9, 2025**– Commissioner Remensnyder asked if there were any corrections to the minutes. There were none. Secretary Clarke seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
5. **Public Comment**- James Johns from North Coast Solar Company attended on behalf of homeowners at 4151 Thornoaks to help give information for the decision. Mr. Johns presented the work to be completed at the property and responded to questions from Commissioners.

6. Business

a. COA 4151 Thornoaks- Action

The property owner is seeking to install 33 solar panels on the south-facing roof. Staff presented the COA application. Some key points were presented including that the proposed solar panels are similar in color to the existing dark gray/black shingles. Comparison of installation on the north versus the south roof indicated that the installation preference was the south roof due to price and efficiency. The Commission utilized Google Street view to determine visibility of the south roof from the right of way. Dense foliage obstructed the view of the proposed location for the solar panels. The Commissioners further reviewed the mid-century modern design of the property which features square angles, glass, and modern design. Lastly, Commissioners reviewed the longevity of the panels and discussed with Mr. Johns that the panels are removable and non-permanent due to their approximately 30-year life span. Commissioner Remensnyder noted experience reviewing solar panel installation projects and provided perspective to the Commissioners on other projects.

In reviewing the application alongside guidelines from the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Properties, the HDC noted the mid-century modern design of the home, the installation cost/efficiency comparison, the similar color of the roof shingle with the panels, the obstruction of view from the road due to foliage, and the non-permanent nature of the panels. Due to these many factors, the HDC determined that the south elevation was the preferred location and that proposed installation was compatible with the mid-century modern design of the home.

The Secretary of Interior does not presently have robust recommendations for solar panels. Thus, installation of panels is considered on a case-by-case basis by the WCHDC. The Secretary of Interior

Standards 9 and 10 were presented in relation to the COA application and were determined to be compatible with the project.

Roll call favor or against: Secretary Clarke moved to approve, Commissioner Covington seconded. All were in favor and the COA application was approved.

b. 2025 HDC Yearly Goals, edits – Discussion

The Commissioners reviewed the edits, including additional information from Commissioner Jerome from the draft in January to “Ensure Protection of Historic Resources.” The goals were briefly discussed by the Commissioners and were approved.

c. Highland Cemetery Sign Funding Request - Action

Historic Preservation Staff visited Highland Cemetery to inspect the existing HDC historic marker. Staff found that the sign needs to be cleaned but overall remains in good condition. The Highland Cemetery Board is seeking to install an interpretive sign to include more information on the cemetery’s history. Their request the Highland Cemetery Board included a quote for \$4,325 to complete design and fabrication of a durable metal sign. The sign is to be designed by the Highland Cemetery Board, to include a historic map of the cemetery, a brief history, and the HDC logo. The final design is to be presented to the HDC board for approval. This sign would increase public visibility and public interest. The Highland Cemetery Board is highly active and engaged. They are writing, drafting, and producing the plans. Highland Cemetery is asking for some financial support as a partnering group.

There was discussion of funding, how much to give, the HDC’s annual budget and projected future expenditures, and criteria for funding applications. The HDC decided to fund the project by providing \$1,000.

Secretary Clarke’s husband is on the cemetery board and abstained from voting due to a possible conflict of interest.

Call for vote: Commissioner Covington motions, Commissioner Oehrli seconds the motion. All in favor.

d. HDC Subcommittees - Action

- i. Heritage Tourism - This group would oversee the historic marker project and storymaps (advertising). Commissioner Covington, Commissioner Rapley and Secretary Clarke volunteered to serve on the subcommittee.
- ii. Historic Resource Support and Designation - This group would oversee helping with the historic tax credit to contact owners and assisting property owners in designation. Commissioner Oehrli and Commissioner Remensnyder volunteered to be on the subcommittee.

e. Woodlawn Cemetery - Discussion

Historic Preservation Staff provided Commissioners a packet including drafted restoration plans for Woodlawn Cemetery. The cemetery is an abandoned African American cemetery that was established in the 1930s and has been abandoned since 1965.

Staff met with Ypsilanti Township Community Engagement staff Laurie Lutomski to discuss the site and determine permission to restore the site. Ypsilanti Township does not own the property and

MCL does not stipulate that the cemetery falls under the jurisdiction of the township since the cemetery was privately owned. The township has been mowing the lawn at the property twice a year. In the meeting, staff presented a similar project in Scio Township which restored Popkins Cemetery. In that case, Scio Township passed a resolution of maintenance in perpetuity. HDC staff suggested Ypsilanti Township adopt a similar resolution and Ms. Lutomski noted support. Files, including information about Woodlawn Cemetery, a drafted restoration plan, and the Scio Township resolution were emailed to her to present to the Ypsilanti Township Board of Trustees.

Staff visited the site to take photos. Multiple areas with very deep concave collapses of burials were present. There are few remaining headstones visible at the cemetery. Research into the property revealed that 14 veteran burials are present. Veteran markers can be repaired or replaced through the Veterans Administration via the Washtenaw County Veterans Association. Staff reached out to organizations and the township to see if they will help restore the cemetery. There are three historic trees at the cemetery. All other foliage appears to be overgrowth based on historic aerial survey. There are an estimated 150 burials, but there are only records of 57.

If landscaping cannot be covered, the HDC commits to provide funding to complete overgrowth removal. Commissioner Oehrli moved to support solicitation, Commissioner Remensnyder seconded. All in favor.

f. Historic Markers - Discussion

- i. Cheney School - is interested in installing a marker.
- ii. Groves Farm - will likely be added as a Local Historic District by the end of the year and does not currently have any historic markers. The property owner is interested in installing one.

7. Staff Report

- WCHDC budget - It is updated; \$15,000 cannot be used for staff time, only HDC items.
- MHPN 2025 Preservation Awards - Staff nominated the Washtenaw County historic preservation program as we are the only county-wide CLG in the state and with a programmatic agreement.
- Historic District Ordinance updates - went through board of commissioners with two public meetings. The ordinances were approved.
- Groves Farm Study Local Historic District status update – report was well received by the State Review Board and the State Historic Preservation Office. One minor edit will be completed by staff. A public meeting is scheduled for April 9 in Northfield Township to present the completed Groves Farm Report for public comment.
- [Northfield Township MPDF CLG Grant](#) - all final drafts are now complete and will be presented at the April 9 Northfield Township Historical Society meeting.
- [Gordon Hall Rehabilitation Grant](#) - Four bids were received. Staff is working with Phoenix Contractors to tabulate bids.

Adjournment

Commissioner Oehrli moved to adjourn, Chair Ralph seconded at 7:34pm.

The Next Meeting is scheduled for April 3.