

City of Northville
Local Historic District Survey Committee Meeting Minutes
July 19, 2018

Northville City Hall – Council Chambers
215 W. Main Street
Northville, Michigan 48167

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Allen called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. in the City of Northville Municipal Building, City Council Chambers, 215 W. Main Street, Northville, Michigan, 48167.

Present: James Allen
Leanie Bayly
Mark Chester
David Field
Robert Miller
Jeff Russell

Absent: Suzanne Cozart (excused)

Also present: Elaine Robinson of Commonwealth Heritage Group, Planning Consultant Sally Elmiger, City Clerk Dianne Massa, and eight citizens

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion Bayly, supported by Russell, to approve the June 12, 2018 meeting minutes as presented.

Motion carried unanimously.

**DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS ON THE SECOND DRAFT
OF THE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY REPORT**

Elaine Robinson, Senior Architectural Historian, Project Team Leader, Commonwealth Heritage Group, explained the changes between the first and second draft reports.

The first draft was reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), and their comments were incorporated into the second draft. At SHPO's request, there are now two reports for review and comments. To comply with the State Historic Preservation Act, Volume I is a stand-alone local historic district report that includes a fewer number of ~~fewer number~~ (*amended 9/25/18*) of properties than the first draft, but does include all of the other materials originally provided. Although Volume I describes 411 resources, it is but a sampling and is not all inclusive. Volume I will be sent to the State Historic Preservation Review Board.

In order for the Historic District Commission (HDC) to have complete information, Volume II includes the entire inventory. In both volumes, there are photos for the included resources, a full list of all recommendations for contributing/non-contributing resources in the Historic District, and updated boundary maps based on the revisions made by the Local Historic District Study Committee.

The Study Committee members did not submit many comments. However, comments that were submitted were incorporated into the second draft. The purpose of tonight's meeting was to receive additional comments before the report is submitted to SHPO and the State Historic Preservation Review Board for official review and approval.

Robinson reviewed the boundary maps, which show a reduced historic district boundary. All properties voted on by the Study Committee at its June 12, 2018 meeting were removed. The National Registry boundary submission will be the same boundary as the local historic district.

Study Committee Discussion:

The Study Committee questioned what happens if a resource overlaps the Historic District boundary, (part of the resource is in the Historic District and part is not) such as the Foundry Flask property. There is a developer interested in the Foundry Flask property and the HDC would like to review the entire development, not just the portion in the District. Robinson will need to review this with SHPO to determine how best to handle these situations so that the resource is not half-in/half-out of the District.

In response to a question from the Study Committee, Robinson clarified that the September public hearing will be for both Volumes so that the HDC has all of the information on the Historic District resources. There are 411 resources located within the Northville Historic District. With the changes, the Historic District has 258 (63%) contributing resources. As a general practice, at least 60% of the resources in a historic district should be considered "contributing." With the removal of the vacant and clearly non-contributing resources at the edge of the District boundary, the contributing percentage has been brought up to an acceptable level.

Discussion ensued pertaining to properties on West Street (212, 216, 223 West). A comment from the Study Committee noted that all of the houses have had extensive changes made in the last 20 years. In the draft report, 216 and 223 West Street are recommended as contributing, while 212 West is recommended as non-contributing. While 212 West looks identical to 216 West, 223 West has aluminum siding and a wrap-around deck. It was believed that 212 West should be recommended as contributing, and 223 West should be changed to non-contributing. A separate comment voiced concern regarding the subjective nature of the evaluation standards and criteria used to make the contributing/non-contributing recommendations.

Robinson explained that 95% of the houses in the Historic District have been altered. Contributing and non-contributing recommendations were based on which structures could best be taken back historically, which resources best convey what they looked like historically based on photographs and informational research, and then an argument of "why" the resource contributes or does not contribute. Some garages were singled out and removed from the contributing list due to SHPO's comments that these should be designated as non-contributing. Robinson also explained that any changes the Study Committee would like to see, for any contributing or non-contributing recommendations, must have a rationale that can be justified. Changes cannot be recommended based on feelings or opinions.

A comment from the Study Committee voiced that, a few years ago, the HDC held a public hearing on a brick ranch demolition on W. Cady Street, and the HDC voted to allow the demolition. The report

includes three brick ranches with a contributing recommendation. Removing the brick ranches would help increase the District's contributing percentage. While the ranches are more than 50 years old, the HDC would likely deny a request to build a brick ranch in the Historic District. There was difficulty in supporting the Historic District map with the brick ranches remaining as a contributing resource. A separate comment from the Study Committee countered that the possible perception that a brick ranch home does not fit in a Northville historical atmosphere does not preclude it from being contributing. This is a matter of opinion.

Robinson noted that she would support an HDC decision to deny an application to build a brick ranch. Every building should be a record of its time and a brick ranch is no longer what is being built. Robinson also suggested that houses being built should not be a "fake" Queen Anne, Gothic Revival, or Italianate house. Non-contributing houses that have these characteristics seem to be what the Study Committee is advocating as contributing resources.

Comments from the Study Committee noted that people live in homes in Northville that are modified. People build additions and the houses change. Experience dictates that brick ranches are not why people move to Northville. It would be understandable if the brick ranches were recommended as non-contributing. If the brick ranches were eliminated as contributing, approximately 26 properties would be removed which would move the contributing percentage closer to 70%. Robinson noted this would need to be a decision of the Study Committee; it is not a decision Commonwealth Heritage can make unilaterally.

Discussion ensued pertaining to 300-335 W. Cady, which is vacant parcel. Significant historical activity pertaining to the Underground Railroad occurred on this site. While the land is now vacant, the building still exists at Mill Race Village. It was questioned as to the possibility of the vacant land being recommended as a contributing resource as there was significant historic activity that occurred on this site. It was explained that part of the criteria to make a contributing recommendation is what is on the property presently, not what structure was there at one time, or the historic activity that occurred. There needs to be evidence of that significant activity. The significance of the house moved with the house; it did not stay with the land.

Discussion ensued pertaining to the legitimacy of Underground Railroad stories as being involved with the Railroad was an illegal activity. Comments from the audience reviewed the documented trail of the Underground Railroad from Ypsilanti to Northville. Comments also suggested the site should have a historical marker. Robinson explained that a historical marker is a separate matter and does not have an impact on contributing recommendation for this parcel.

In response to questions from the Study Committee, Robinson explained that Commonwealth is writing the report on behalf of the Study Committee. The report needs to go through the SHPO review process. The Study Committee may accept every recommendation or it may suggest that some resource recommendations should be changed. Commonwealth's role is to guide the Study Committee in making its decisions. If the Study Committee wants to change a contributing/non-contributing recommendation, it needs to provide justification to substantiate the recommendation change. Commonwealth can note in the report that it does not agree with a specific contributing/non-contributing recommendation, but that would not be of use to the HDC. The HDC will be using this report to enforce the Historic District.

Robinson also explained that the contributing/non-contributing recommendations were not done lightly. There were many discussions between Commonwealth staff on how to deal with some of the properties that had many alterations, and for alterations that had gone too far. For the most part, major additions that

alter the building footprint made the resource non-contributing. Additions that go up and do not alter the footprint could make a building contributing. Significant changes that are a recognized form and popular for that period can make a building with alterations remain as a contributing resource.

Robinson went on to explain that the next deliverable is due July 25, 2018. If the Study Committee wants to make changes to any recommendations, it needs to provide those to Commonwealth by noon, July 23, 2018. If additional changes were made, the Study Committee will have those included in the draft report that is distributed to the Study Committee, SHPO, the State Historic Preservation Review Board, Historic District Commission, Planning Commission, City Council, and the Building Department.

It was also explained that there is a required 60-day review period between the submission to the State Historic Preservation Review Board and the September 25, 2018 public hearing. The report is not considered done and could continue to change. At the September 25th public hearing, the Study Committee could make further changes based on comments and information received from SHPO and the State Historic Preservation Review Committee. It was noted that, during its review of the first draft, SHPO wanted more of the buildings to be designated as non-contributing. The Study Committee could also vote to accept the report and send it to City Council. City Council makes the final determination to adopt the report.

The Planning Consultant reminded that the September 25th public hearing date is a firm date that cannot be moved. The grant ends on September 25th as well as Commonwealth's contract with the City.

Additional Study Committee comments asked for discussion pertaining to the houses at 401, 404, 412, and 504 W. Dunlap. These are large homes of which the structures have been altered and doubled in size. 401, 412, and 504 W. Dunlap are designated as contributing, while 404 W. Dunlap is designated as non-contributing. Comments questioned the standards for assigning designations when, from the street view, the front elevation of each house is historically accurate, and the significant alterations are not seen until you look at the side of the house. 401 W. Dunlap did not originally face Dunlap Street. The main entrance was moved, and it has multiple additions.

If the additions to the non-contributing house were removed, the original house would look as it did in the 1800s. In addition, the original owner from the 1800s would be able to look at the house from the front elevation, and recognize it as their house. While comments from the Study Committee were in accord with 401 and 504 W. Dunlap being designated as contributing, it was also stated there are several non-contributing houses that should also be recommended as contributing. The Study Committee is looking for some leeway in the architectural evaluation criteria for these houses, as well as others, which would help the Study Committee justify recommending that certain non-contributing houses be changed to a contributing recommendation.

Comments from Robinson pointed out that the addition on the back of 504 W. Dunlap is appropriate for this house, and this addition is how the house would have look in the 1880s. Historically, the addition on 404 W. Dunlap would not look as it does presently. Commonwealth could make a case for either designation. If the additions were removed, the house would be deemed contributing and the contributing status could be reinstated. If the Study Committee wants certain houses to have the contributing designation, it needs to have that conversation to recommend the changes. Commonwealth struggled with many of the designation recommendations and needs the Study Committee's help with gathering new information to substantiate any changes.

Robinson explained that Commonwealth welcomes Study Committee input on which designations should be changed. The report needs to reflect the Study Committee's beliefs. Commonwealth looked at every building and made its best recommendation. Recommendations may be revisited if there is more information that supports changing the recommendation. However, the report also has Commonwealth's name on it. Commonwealth will not make a change that threatens their credibility. Any eligibility recommendations must include good arguments or discussion points Commonwealth can use to support the change.

A comment from the Study Committee questioned if brick ranches that are 50-60 years old are considered historic. Robinson explained that no structure is "historic" until it is recommended to be designated as "historic." Age does not necessarily determine a structure to be "historic."

The Chair asked the Study Committee to comment on any other structures in the draft report that should have a different recommendation than contributing/non-contributing. A comment from the Study Committee stated that all brick ranches, but especially the brick ranches located at 120 West, 368 N. Rogers, and 531 Linden Ct. should be recommended as non-contributing. Eliminating 368 N. Rogers as contributing would open a gateway on Linden and Dubuar, eliminate 26 houses, and increase the Historic District's contributing percentage.

Robinson explained that removing 368 N. Rogers as contributing would create a "keyhole" or "donut hole" in the District, which is not allowed. The advantages to leaving brick ranches designated as contributing are that all newer structures will be contributing at some point, and the brick ranches require HDC review as they are contributing resources. If the ranches are removed as contributing, the HDC will not have control as to what happens to the property.

Discussion ensued among the Study Committee pertaining to the relevance of brick ranches. A comment from the Study Committee noted that brick ranches, based on past experience, were found by the HDC to not be considered historically significant and the HDC has voted to allow demolition. A separate comment from the Study Committee countered that the HDC is assuming that allowing previous demolitions of brick ranches was the correct decision. Reasons to allow demolition needs to be done based on evidence, not opinion.

It was reminded that any recommendations to change contributing/non-contributing designations need to be submitted directly to Robinson by noon, July 23, 2018.

Being no further discussion, the Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 8:06p.m.

Dianne Massa, CMC
City Clerk

Approved as amended: 9/25/18