

**CITY OF NORTHVILLE**  
**Local Historic District Study Committee Meeting Minutes**  
June 6, 2019  
Northville City Hall - Council Chambers  
215 W. Main Street  
Northville, Michigan 48167

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Chair Allen called the meeting to order at 7:00 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  
Suzanne Cozart  
David Field  
Jeff Russell

Absent: Mark Chester  
Suzanne Cozart

Also present: Elaine Robinson of Commonwealth Heritage Group, Planning Consultant Sally Elmiger and approximately 15 guests.

**APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

**Motion by Field, support by Russell, to approve the agenda as published.**

**Motion carried unanimously.**

**APPROVAL OF 5/2/2019 MEETING MINUTES**

**Motion by Russell, support by Field, to amend the May 2, 2019 meeting minutes as follows:**

- Page 3, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph: In response to a question from Member Miller, Ms. Robinson said a ~~property owner would need to file for a Section 106 exemption for MDOT to protect a historic home's right of way when improving a road~~ when a road project was being planned that would impact an historic home, the historians would note that there was a National Register District and follow the requirements for a historic property. If only the local historic district existed, the MDOT would do some further investigation and would likely treat the resources as if they were listed in the National Register.

**Motion carried unanimously.**

**UPDATE FROM ELAINE ROBINSON, COMMONWEALTH HERITAGE GROUP**

Elaine Robinson, Commonwealth Heritage Group, said the final cut-off date for public comment on the draft report was May 17, and changes were made May 23, 2019. The September 2018 report had eight

people make a total of 46 formal comments by the May 17 cut-off. Of those, 26 comments required no response or changes for the May 23 final report. One person was asked to provide a comment but did not.

Ms. Robinson had reached out to some of the eight people in order to clarify their comments. All requested changes were made and the map was updated accordingly.

**PUBLIC HEARING – NORTHVILLE LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY REPORT AS REVISED MAY 23, 2019.**

Chair Allen opened the public hearing.

Chris Rizik, 208 S. Rogers Street, asked why his property had been added back into the Historic District at the May meeting. Their home was only 7 years old.

Chair Allen said the process of removing/adding back in parcels was not unique to this parcel. Earlier in the process 208 S. Rogers had been removed, but in May the Committee brought the parcel back in to the District in order to complete the District and protect the home on the southeast corner of Cady and Rogers.

Member Bayly explained that 208 S. Rogers had been part of the Historic District for a long time; its inclusion was nothing new. The original house had been demolished, but the parcel was not a new addition. The purpose of the Committee was to study the boundaries and make recommendations; in the end there was no change to the property.

Noel Walker, 531 Linden Court, said that his 3-bedroom ranch was listed as contributing in the Study Report. He wanted to change that designation if it was going to negatively impact the value of his property. His was a house that nobody wanted: it had 3 small bedrooms with tiny closets and one bathroom. He could sell the house as a tear-down, but if it received a designation as contributing it would have to remain as a ranch home.

Chair Allen said that whether the house was contributing or non-contributing, it was still within the Historic District and all the rules of the District had to be followed.

Mr. Walker was concerned that he would not receive a demolition permit if he applied for one. He did not want to be the last ranch house on Linden Court. Everyone else had had the opportunity to tear their homes down and build new.

Chair Allen explained that the Historic District Study updated all homes within the District, and homes 50 years old and older were now within the period of significance.

Mr. Walker said the house was not contributing when he bought it; none of the other homes on the street were contributing either.

Chair Allen explained that this was the first time the Historic District had been the subject of a study which designated structures as contributing or non-contributing.

Mr. Walker reiterated that every other house on his street had been replaced, he felt the ability to sell his home would be affected by whether he could sell it as a tear down or whether any future owner would have to maintain the structure as a ranch home. If the latter were the case, was there anything he could do about it?

Chair Allen explained that Mr. Walker would need to go through the process for demolishing a home in the Historic District. The Study Committee was a recommending body to City Council regarding the Historic District boundaries.

Greg Presley, 735 Randolph, Unit 122, Northville MI said that over the past 30 years he had completed 67 projects west of Center Street, with 35 of those being alterations to historic houses considered contributing, and 16 being alterations to historic homes that were not considered contributing. He had also done 13 new homes in the Historic District, with another 7 or so that were new builds or alterations in process. He objected to the determination that 16 projects that he had done were considered non-contributing on the basis of alterations that had taken place. While there were a few alterations from the 1980's and early 90's that he wished he could do over, generally speaking he was proud of his work, and felt that his projects did contribute aesthetically and functionally to their neighborhoods. The structures met all the things the Historic District Commission considered, such as setback, height, spacing, massing, proportion, scale, rhythm, materials, and details. There were many factors that impacted whether a structure contributed to the neighborhood but he didn't see those factors in the division between contributing and non-contributing. Further, there used to be a category in *2.3 Resource Count and Percentage*: significant historic structures, complementary structures, and non-contributing structures. In the study, complementary structures had been merged into contributing structures, and now there were only the two designations. Having just the two designations was too harsh, and moved the District in the wrong direction.

Mr. Presley said that if there were only going to be the two designations, the result was the HDC was not getting a very good grade for the work it had done for the past 30 years. This seemed unfair. He wondered why the wording was changed to contributing and non-contributing.

Ms. Robinson explained that the previous wording did not follow the standards of the National Park Service requirements. In order to maintain Certified Local Government (CLG) status, the National Park Service language had to be followed.

Mr. Presley asked what CLG status did for the City. Chair Allen said that as a Certified Local Government, the City had received a grant from the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to complete the study, and also were able to apply for grants in the future. The grant was the first the City had applied for.

Mr. Presley asked what other benefits the District received from being a CLG District.

Ms. Robinson said as a CLG District, Northville received assistance from SHPO to make sure that the District was maintaining its historic preservation eligibility in order to maintain its CLG Status. Certified Local Governments were the only entities in the State of Michigan that were able to receive grants that SHPO was required to distribute on an annual basis, using 10% of the funding that they received from the Federal Government. There were approximately 20 CLG's in the State.

Member Field said that 4 Michigan communities were awarded \$112,000. Those were: Detroit \$24,000; Village of Franklin, \$10,000; Kalamazoo \$54,000; and City of Northville, \$24,000.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said that Northville actually received \$30,000, which funded the entire study.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said that other projects that could be funded were building, restoration, survey work, education and identification, including signage of historic district boundaries or interpretative signage, educating people about historic features of the community, and so on. The District

received CLG status in 2015. The first year after receiving CLG Status the District submitted an application for a grant for an intensive survey and were denied. They resubmitted in 2016 and received the grant. In the same year, SHPO gave Northville an additional \$6,000 to fund the entire survey project.

Chair Allen noted that Kalamazoo used their funding to create plans and specifications for a fountain rehabilitation, Franklin used their funds to increase energy efficiency of their Village Hall, and Detroit used their funds to nominate Hart Plaza for the National Register. He pointed out that it had taken a long time for the Historic District to receive CLG status.

Mr. Presley asked if the survey report needed to be codified in order to maintain CLG status.

Member Field said he thought the National Park Service didn't really care what local historic districts did.

Ms. Robinson explained that the national standards were used to develop the local requirements. There was a relationship with the National Park Service, but the local Historic District did not depend on the National Park Service in terms of its designation as a local district.

Ms. Robinson noted that the report had already been submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office, which had accepted it. The next legally required step after submitting the report to SHPO was that the Local Historic District Study Committee had to hold tonight's public hearing, and then submit the report to City Council for its acceptance and placement into law. The new boundaries would replace the existing Local Historic District.

In response to questions from Member Field, Ms. Robinson said if City Council did not accept the report, the local Historic District would still exist. However, it would be much more difficult for the Historic District to receive grants from SHPO if the City refused to update their local district information. Currently the local Historic District materials did not provide information that SHPO wanted, such as whether structures were contributing or non-contributing.

Member Field said at the May meeting he had questioned the use of the terms *contributing* and *non-contributing* because he could not find those in any statute. However, he had since found that information, and the local historic districts were asked to provide that information to the National Park Service. Yet the National Park Service did not tell local historic districts what to do.

Member Field continued that the existing survey was completed in 1972; it did need updating. For a long time the HDC had used pictures from home slides and other sources, and often did not have very complete information about homes in the Historic District. The new study was 847 pages long, with photos of every structure and multi-paragraph discussions about each one. This was commendable and helpful. Still, he was concerned about making two classes of folks in the District: those who had contributing homes and those who had non-contributing homes.

Planning Consultant Elmiger explained that the Northville Historic District ordinance contained the legal description of the Historic District boundary. That would be modified because the boundary was being modified, but she didn't think any other changes would be made to the actual ordinance, although it would probably reference the study.

Planning Consultant Elmiger further explained that the Historic District Commission's body of knowledge, included the ordinance, the study, the guidelines for demolition, design guidelines, etc.

Mr. Presley asked questions about process. Chair Allen said there would not be hearings regarding this study before the HDC. The next step after tonight was action by the City Council to accept the report. There would not be a public hearing at the Council level.

Mr. Presley was concerned about the study being used as HDC's body of knowledge, when the study contained known errors. Chair Allen reviewed the process followed thus far. From the beginning, residents of the District had been encouraged to send in questions along with correcting information, with the last and final deadline for comments being May 17 of this year.

Mr. Presley thought that each property owner should be sent the information about their property that would be included in the study.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said each property owner in the District had received a letter about tonight's public hearing. Additionally each property owner in the Historic District had been invited to a public meeting last year via a letter that explained what was going on. Everyone was informed that the study was occurring; they were also informed of the link to the information on the website. No one had been left in the dark.

Mr. Presley reiterated that the specific data for each property should have been sent to each building's owner for possible feedback. He was concerned that errors in the report would be codified. For instance, the garage at 402 Dunlap was listed as contributing, but it was rebuilt in 1989, and was rebuilt before that in the 1960s.

Chair Allen said certain errors were the result of trespass laws; the City could not enter people's back yards. He agreed it was important to get people's input, but he felt people in the District had heard about this study.

From the audience, Mary Elwart-Keys said she felt people were concerned that the document seemed unfriendly. A property owner had to go through the entire document to find their home. It would have been helpful to click on an address and go right to that property.

Member Bayly gave some history of the Historic District. Since the District's beginning in 1974, there had been changes and updates in the historic district standards and guidelines. She said that while the study represented an enormous change, it was also an enormous improvement. The first meeting of the Committee was video-taped and was available on the City's website. The City had reached out in newsletters and on the website. People had come to her and she had shared pages with them and helped them go through the report. The Committee and the City were not hiding anything: everything was available for people to see.

Mr. Presley said he felt those efforts were not enough. Each home should be sent its own specific information. If people then didn't respond, the City would have done all it could do. But to invite people to a meeting via public media was not enough.

Planning Consultant Elmiger said everyone in the Historic District was mailed a letter regarding tonight's public hearing.

Barbara Moroski-Borwne, 116 High Street, acknowledged the huge effort it took to complete the intensive survey report. She suggested the report have a disclaimer that might provide some flexibility to the Historic District Commission when they used the information to make decisions, in terms of the limits of the information, especially when surveyors were not able to enter back yards.

Discussion followed. Ms. Robinson said the report could be considered a living document. Planning Consultant Elmiger pointed out that the report was a survey; the survey was not the Secretary of Interior Standards. Ultimately, the HDC used Secretary of Interior standards to make their decisions.

Member Field said he had been at HDC meetings where members stated that a structure was a contributing structure, even though the survey report was still a draft report. He was concerned that once a property was labeled, it put HDC members on a different track than before it was labeled.

Member Field addressed the question of *period of significance*. Currently the Foreword of the Historic District guidelines read: . . . *In 1974, Northville City Council passed a resolution that the architectural theme for the Northville Historic District is Victorian, in the era from mid-1850's to the latter 1800's. More specifically, the greatest concentration of notable buildings are "Gothic Revival" style. The Historic District Commission exists to encourage preservation of the theme. . .*

Member Field questioned a period of significance now including homes that were only 50 years old, with such homes including brick ranches. He felt the study had become a bible to some HDC members, in that if a structure was designated contributing, the property owner would have to go through a lot of different steps in order to improve their home than if the structure was non-contributing.

Ms. Moroski-Browne addressed community engagement. While she felt appropriate processes were followed, many people had busy lives and until they understood how something affected them directly they did not engage. Receiving something written about their house might get their attention.

Referencing her letter dated June 6, 2019, Mary Elwart-Keys, 502 W. Main Street, said it was possible for a local historic district to have standards and guidelines that did not mirror the National Registry. The guidelines could be specific to Northville, and a pattern book could be created for the Historic District. She also suggested that there could be more than one historic district in Northville. Last, she was concerned that the requirements for authentic restoration of historic homes was outrageously costly, so that only people with deep pockets would be able to afford those improvements.

Ms. Elwart-Keys suggested that the Committee table the approval, acceptance and codification of the survey update in order to discuss a more realistic, easy to understand approach to the local Historic District.

Chair Allen suggested that such comments might better be made to City Council as that kind of direction was not the purview of this committee.

Jim Nield, 18234 Arselot, read prepared comments which emphasized his concern about the new survey, its function, and how structures were listed as contributing and non-contributing. He felt that many homes in the survey were incorrectly identified. The survey went beyond the original intent of the Historic District established in 1972, and should not be accepted, because it was inaccurate and subjective, and put new and more difficult restrictions on the District. The original intent of the District was limited to protect homes built in the 1800s and early 1900s. He suggested the Committee make a motion to pay the consultant but not accept the survey.

Chair Allen asked if the scope of the District had changed with the new survey. Planning Consultant Elmiger said it had not. Chair Allen asked who made the decision to include 50-year old homes in the period of significance. Ms. Robinson explained that period was in the National Register Standards.

Member Field asked if the National Register required inclusion of homes 50 years old. Ms. Robinson said while that was not a requirement, 50 years was the accepted guideline for a home to be considered

historic. Regarding evaluation of properties, since 1966 the National Park Service had 4 criteria of evaluation and 7 areas of integrity. Those were used to make the determination for every property in the District; decisions were not arbitrary. The period of significance could be less than 50 years if substantial significance could be demonstrated, or the period of significance could be longer.

In response to questions from Member Field regarding the original period of significance in the 1972 documents, Ms. Robinson said she could not speak to those documents.

Planning Consultant Elmiger noted there were 400 buildings in the current study; the original study included 61.

Member Field thought that the December HDC training had stated the period of significance in the Historic District ended in 1941. Could that date be used? Ms. Robinson said that date could be used, but then any changes after 1941 that were made to historic resources built before 1941 would be considered non-contributing.

Ms. Robinson said that all the buildings in the District were reviewed by SHPO staff, who actually had recommended finding that even more buildings were non-contributing based on a loss of integrity of the original structures. Commonwealth Heritage Group had convinced SHPO to include more structures as contributing in order to protect the Historic District.

Member Field remembered that Ms. Robinson had said at an earlier meeting that perhaps 95% of the structures in the Historic District had been changed. Ms. Robinson explained that they looked for the buildings that had been changed the least or that did not create a false sense of history.

In response to a further question from Member Field, Ms. Robinson said it was her decision to include buildings that were 50 years old as contributing structures.

In response to a question from Member Russell, Chair Allen said that the process for modifying a structure in the Historic District was the same whether it was contributing or non-contributing.

From the audience, Mr. Nield said he had sat in HDC meetings for a year, and the survey was being used to determine what kind of changes could be made to structures in the District.

Ms. Robinson said the City had accepted receipt of the survey document, and it was available for the HDC to use. However, the HDC should not use it to make decisions that would conflict with the current historic district since it was not yet codified.

A discussion of process followed. If the Committee so chose, they could make a recommendation tonight that City Council accept the report and begin the process for re-designating the boundaries of the Historic District.

Member Field said that contributing structures would require a public hearing if the owners were requesting demolition.

In response to questions from Chair Allen, Planning Consultant Elmiger thought City Council might want some time to study the document. City Council would not have a public hearing but she would pass on a request that the public be notified prior to Council action.

Member Bayly said that up until now the HDC would vote on whether a property should be deemed historic or just old (non-historic); mostly that conversation came up when they were talking about

extensive restoration or demolitions to a property. This different terminology was very similar to contributing and non-contributing.

Member Bayly said that historic preservation was a fine art and could be confusing. The process of going before the HDC was something that everyone who lived in the District or chose to come to the District needed to spend some time understanding before they made important decisions. If the City decided that they don't want an historic district any longer then everyone would need to come to terms with that.

Colette Rizik, 208 S. Rogers Street, said she was still struggling with why their house was put back in the District, because they were the only corner that had two non-contributing houses.

Chair Allen pointed out that the two homes on Rogers were always part of the historic district and offered protection to some of the nearby historic homes, north of Cady and East of Rogers, in terms of what could happen to neighboring properties.

Member Russell added that they were trying to maintain the size of the District; they did not want to erode the District. The ratio of contributing to non-contributing homes was no longer a concern, but had been a concern when the recommendation had been made earlier to remove the 2 properties on Rogers.

Member Bayly said that the Committee had received substantial community input to actually grow the historic district in the future. There were significant historic homes on S. Rogers moving toward 7 Mile, and the City might want to look at adding some of that to the District. Taking the S. Rogers properties out prohibited making that connection.

Ms. Rizik asked why the S. Rogers properties couldn't be picked back up when and if the District was expanded. Member Bayly said that the Committee was only looking at the established district. They didn't want to remove properties and later put them back in. Presently the boundary that included the properties on S. Rogers was unchanged.

Mr. Presley questioned why things such as scale and massing were not considered when a structure was considered contributing. Ms. Robinson said those things were not mentioned in the criteria for evaluation or the 7 areas of integrity. The Historic District's design guidelines were different than the Study Report, which used the criteria established by the National Park Service.

Mr. Presley thought the study was missing a major piece that defined what it meant to have an altered house in the Historic District. It was a breach not to consider the things that were used as a basis for approval by the HDC.

Seeing that no one else came forward to speak, Chair Allen closed the public hearing at 8:08 pm.

The Committee discussed adding a possible disclaimer to the report, which would state that the report was a living document, and was based on information available when the study was completed.

Member Field thought the disclaimer was a step in the right direction, but he was still opposed to labeling properties contributing which would lead the HDC to decide a structure could not be changed. Also, he could not support labeling common ranch homes as contributing. He gave examples of properties within the District where the expense of remodeling a contributing home priced it out of the market. He felt the District should allow people to grow and live in the real world.

Ms. Elwart-Keys noted the survey said that structures 50 years and older were within the period of significance. Did that remain the same moving forward so that every year other homes would be placed within the period of significance?

Chair Allen said the HDC had always used the 50-year standard in its evaluations.

Scott Lowery, 370 S. Rogers Street, said they were under contract to buy 305 Dunlap. His understanding was that whether a home was designated contributing or non-contributing, the standards for review were the same.

Chair Allen said the designations did matter to people; he agreed that the designations might create two classes of homeowners.

Member Field said he had called SHPO, and they indicated to him that the report was the Committee's report, not anyone else's. Could the Committee accept the report without accepting the contributing and non-contributing designations?

Ms. Robinson said if the Committee chose to adopt their own rules or delete the contributing and non-contributing designations, they would be jeopardizing their CLG status and would probably never get another grant.

Ms. Robinson said the benefit of having a listing of contributing/non-contributing resources was to gain a good understanding of the resources that added value to the Historic District, along with those resources that were part of the setting but didn't necessarily add historic value. All structures should be treated the same when reviewed for requested changes. A contributing structure's original form should be clearly recognizable.

From the audience, Ms. Moroski-Browne suggested that after the disclaimer paragraph, a definition of contributing and non-contributing be given.

Seeing that discussion had ended, Chair Allen indicated he was ready to entertain a motion.

**MOTION by Bayly, support by Russell, that the Local Historic District Study Committee accept the Final Report as presented, with the disclaimer that this report is presented as a living document with the information available at press time, and directs staff to refer the Final Report of the Northville Local Historic District Study Report, as prepared by the Commonwealth Heritage Group, Inc., Dexter, Michigan, to Northville City Council for their review, consideration and adoption as a revision to the Northville Historic District boundaries.**

**Furthermore, this Study Committee respectfully recommends future consideration by City Council to explore the expansion of the Northville Historic District boundaries along the westerly South Rogers Street boundary, down the southward corridor, toward Seven Mile Road.**

**The Committee also recommends this document be presented with the inclusion of a narrative discussion of the definition of *contributing* and *non-contributing* structures.**

**Motion carried 3-1 (Field opposed).**

The Committee asked Planning Consultant Elmiger to communicate with City Council that perhaps Council should hear this item in September or October so that residents had the opportunity to be present to give their opinions.

**ADJOURN**

Seeing that discussion had ended, Chair Allen adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cheryl McGuire, Recording Secretary

DRAFT