

HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF JUNE 17, 2019
Conference Rooms 202 & 203
151 Martin, Birmingham, Michigan

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Historic District Study Committee ("HDSC") held Monday, June 17, 2019. City Planner Nicholas Dupuis called the meeting to order at 5:43 p.m.

1. ROLL CALL

Present: Board Members Paul Beshouri, Jake German, Colleen McGough, Michael Xenos

Absent: Board Member Jonathan DeWindt

Administration: Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner
Laura Eichenhorn, Transcriptionist

Paul Beshouri volunteered to be chair.

Motion by Ms. McGough
Seconded by Mr. Xenos to appoint Mr. Beshouri as HDSC Chair.

Motion Carried 4-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Beshouri, German, McGough, Xenos

Nays: None

2. COLLABORATIVE PRESERVATION PROJECTS

City Planner Dupuis explained that the HDSC only meets when directed by the City Commission. He then presented the chart of collaborative projects discussed by the City Commission at the Long Range Planning meeting in January 2019 to be undertaken by the HDSC, the Museum Board, the Greenwood Cemetery Board and others.

The HDSC then discussed which projects on the chart seemed possible given the Committee's skill set.

Mr. Beshouri clarified that the HDSC's main task has been researching and recommending the creation or dissolution of historic districts to the City Commission.

City Planner Dupuis suggested that encouraging property owners to pursue historic designation is an large aspect of the HDSC's work, and that raising awareness of Birmingham's historical assets is also an inherent part of the HDSC's work.

It was explained that "Eco City" refers to a Birmingham area where many houses were built from ready-made kits sold by Sears. This area exists largely to the east of Woodward, north of 14 Mile and south of Lincoln, though a few exist to the west of Woodward as well.

City Planner Dupuis said he would describe the Eco City survey as more of a 'windshield study', that he would share the information he had with the Committee members, and that current Historic District Committee Vice-President Keith Deyer may be able to provide more information regarding Eco City as well.

The Committee changed "historic walking tour - update/expand" to "historic walking tour - create" after discussion that no historic walking tour exists as of yet.

Ms. McGough and Mr. Xenos agreed that creating a historic walking tour would be interesting for the Committee to pursue. Ms. McGough explained that the City's historic nature holds appeal for people curious about relocating to Birmingham, and that a walking tour could promote community interest in the community's historic assets.

City Planner Dupuis asked the Committee if a walking tour was feasible since many historic properties are far apart from one another.

Ms. McGough noted that there are a number of historic districts near each other which could constitute the walking tour.

Mr. German stated there could be more than one walking tour based around groups of historic properties that are nearer together.

Mr. Xenos said:

- The Committee could consult the group that puts together the City's garden tour for advice on how to structure a historic walking tour.
- The possible joint items listed between the HDSC, Greenwood Cemetery Advisory Board, Friends of the Museum and the Museum were not actually relevant to the HDSC's work, and he recommended removing those items from the list of projects the HDSC might participate in. Those items included updating, expanding, and digitizing the Greenwood Cemetery records, creating a historic headstone inventory and condition assessments for repairs, updating the Greenwood biographical information for the existing tour program, creating an interactive map of the Cemetery with online access, and locating Potter's Field at Greenwood.

City Planner Dupuis said he would set a joint meeting for discussion of the projects with the other Boards and Committees.

3. HDSC PRIORITY LIST

City Planner Dupuis presented the item.

Motion by Mr. Beshouri

Seconded by Mr. German to remove 'developing ordinance language for sandwich board signage in historic districts' from the HDSC's priority list.

Motion Carried 4-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: Beshouri, German, McGough, Xenos

Nays: None

Mr. Xenos said he would be interested in helping to develop infill guidelines for construction in Birmingham's historic districts, but also wondered how the HDSC would do that.

Mr. Beshouri said he was not sure the HDSC had the authority to develop infill guidelines for historic districts. He noted that infill guidelines require a lot of technical expertise in planning that is not generally part of the HDSC's work.

City Planner Dupuis said he was unsure how the HDSC would be directed to commence that task. He said if the Committee were to pursue that work, he would probably provide information and options and then the HDSC would craft recommendations to the City based on that.

Ms. McGough recommended keeping the item on the list for now, saying she would like to know how similar midwestern cities with similar historic housing stock construct their infill guidelines. She said it could be useful for finding ways to positively encourage property owners to maintain and register historic homes. She gave the examples of Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights in Ohio, Oak Park in Illinois, and the east side of Milwaukee, Wisconsin as communities worth researching.

Mr. Xenos stated that tax credits for historic homes would be a good way of incentivizing their preservation.

City Planner Dupuis noted the state is attempting to establish such a tax credit. This credit would allow a historic property owner's income tax liability to be reduced by up to 25% based on rehabilitation expenses.

Mr. Beshouri said it would also be interesting to see Birmingham's current language on infills in historic districts. He noted that Birmingham has historically designated houses, as opposed to historic districts like some other municipalities, which might make historic district infill guidelines less relevant to Birmingham.

Mr. Xenos and Ms. McGough discussed various homes designed by architect Wallace Frost throughout the City, and that without historic designation houses of historical and architectural value are not necessarily preserved.

The Committee also discussed that historically designating a home tends to lower its resale value since it limits what a new owner is permitted to do with the home.

Ms. McGough noted an owner purchased a Wallace Frost home near Holy Name Church, and that the couple chose to update the home instead of demolishing it. She said the progress has been beautiful and that the Committee should find a way to showcase what can be done with historic homes. She also suggested interviewing property owners that choose to maintain their historic properties in order to publicize the value of that decision. She also said she would like to see the Heritage House Plaque and Certificate program renewed by the Committee.

City Planner Dupuis suggested the Committee consider canvassing the City for both historic homes and heritage houses in order to creating an accurate resource. He noted that Committee members could note during their canvassing which plaques are rusted or in need of repair. He said he would provide the Committee with the most recent lists of historic and heritage homes available, as well as any available information on historic districts in the City.

Mr. Beshouri said creating a tour of Heritage Houses could also be a worthwhile project for the Committee to pursue.

City Planner Dupuis explained the Committee would need to request money from the City for the purchase of Heritage Home plaques. He said he would research whether the City traditionally charges property owners for those plaques.

The Committee discussed asking Museum Director Leslie Pielack and Historic District Committee member Gigi Debbrecht whether they had more information about heritage homes.

Mr. Beshouri requested information from City Planner Dupuis regarding how other municipalities create plaques or share information regarding older homes lacking official historic designation.

Motion by Mr. German

Seconded by Mr. Beshouri to focus the HDSC's work on:

- 1(a). Re-initiating the Heritage Home Plaque and Certificate Program,**
 - 1(b). Auditing designated Historical Homes in Birmingham,**
 - 2. Repairing all rusted plaques on historic buildings in the CBD,**
 - 3. Composing an informational plaque for the Community House, and**
 - 4. Publishing the Eco City Survey**
- pending information from City Planner Dupuis regarding background information on the tasks and how the Committee should pursue each item, prioritized in the order listed.**

Motion Carried 4-0.

VOICE VOTE

Yeas: German, Beshouri, McGough, Xenos
Nays: None

4. ADJOURNMENT

No further business being evident, the committee members motioned to adjourn at 6:27 p.m.

Nicholas Dupuis, City Planner

APPROVED