



# MINUTES

**City of Ypsilanti  
HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION  
Meeting held in person and by Zoom at City Hall Council Chambers**

**Tuesday, June 28, 2022 (Approved July 12, 2022)  
7:00 P.M.**

## **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Meeting Called to Order 7:04 pm

Chair welcomed everyone, told public when and how they would have an opportunity to address commission.

### **Commissioners Present:**

Alex Pettit – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti  
James Chesnut – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti  
James Ratzlaff – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti  
Stefan Szumko - Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti

### **Commissioners Absent:**

Delrhea Byrge—Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti, excused  
Jeff Muir – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti  
Jimmy Huffman – Washtenaw County, City of Ypsilanti

### **Staff Present:**

Ellen Thackery, Preservation Planner

## **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Motion: Szumko (second: Chesnut) moved to approve the agenda, with an amendment to change the wording under 8.1 to "Nomination of Vice Chair" instead of "Election of Vice Chair"

Approval: Roll call vote. Unanimous. Motion carried.

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS—none**

**PUBLIC HEARING—none**

**BUSINESS SESSION—none**

**OLD BUSINESS—none**

**NEW BUSINESS—none**

## STUDY ITEMS—

*\*300 W Michigan*

Staff Report: informal, because this is a study item. Staff offered that this building is the former EMU Business School, and the site includes the very large building, a concrete parking deck, and the courtyard space in between. Because EMU's proposed building would not have gone through local historic district commission review and approval at the time the building was built, the building is very large for the district. It is not a historic building (at least not at this point), so we are mainly looking at Standard 9, which says that proposed new work shall be...compatible with the historic materials, features, size, scale and proportion, and massing to protect the integrity of...the environment. We could also perhaps consider Standard 5 as well that states that distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved. Staff noted that the applicant seeks to stain the brick, and that it seems to staff that the curved overhang is really part of the original design team's intention so if there is a way to keep that, that would be really good for the building. There, could look at Standard 5. But, overall, the building is not historic so we are really evaluating what effects (if any) the proposal has on the building's historic neighbors and the larger historic district.

Applicant: Applicant Mark Smith attended in person. They are focused on opening the building onto Michigan Avenue and activating the space. The overhang hasn't been comprehensively investigated—it definitely has weathered and needs paint at least but might need much more intervention. Would try to keep it and enhance it. Seeks to stain the brick.

Discussion: Commissioners agree that opening building to Michigan Avenue is definitely a positive step. Building is present already—this isn't a new proposed building. It is here so commission is simply evaluating the work proposed going forward. Proposal is heading in the right general direction. Is there a functional purpose of the overhang? Applicant states that it doesn't really provide much shade. There are spots, however, where the trees/plantings have grown too much in and have not been maintained and so there is too much shade on the building in spots, and the low brick perimeter walls create an attractive nuisance and should be removed. Commissioner hypothesizes that the overhang likely does serve a functional purpose in reducing reflection off the windows below. Commissioner notes that commission doesn't have a lot of experience with brick stains. Applicant explains that this company, Nawkaw, has been selected to work on the Michigan Central Station in Detroit and the stain was used at an MSU library as well. Staff will include background information on the company and product with the packet when the actual application comes through to the commission. Brick is high quality so this stain would take well, and the project's designer thought that the brick stain would modernize the building. Product impregnates the brick [but staff notes that the company's website describes that the brick will still breathe], and the stain should last 20 years or more. A commissioner notes that the gray brick stain seems, to him, to blend the brick in even more and so is not a negative for the district. Is any work proposed on the parking garage? Not other than staining. Considering adding another level, but not definite at this point. Applicant's hope is that if this space gets activated for the public in the way he hopes, there may be more need for downtown or event parking and this structure could support that. Expanding the parking structure is expensive-- \$30,000 a space. Commissioner noted that the overhang is part of the original design intent and he thinks it should be preserved. Also noted that one downside of a stain is if you stain it, you must always maintain that, whereas if you leave the brick in its natural state, you don't have that

additional maintenance step. Applicant noted that there are minimum tree requirements—the Pearl Street side will be difficult to plant because there is concrete from the structure to the road—excavation would be required. So, instead, they might overplant in other areas or make a payment in lieu of street trees for some of that. Southern and western sides will be easier to plant trees. Commissioner noted that commission tends to shy away from materials that are mimicking other materials—metal that outright mimics wood would likely not be appropriate but metal that looks like industrial metal would likely be more acceptable. Commissioner noted that the glass block used on the tower feature seems part of the design intent as well and he wondered if it should also be preserved. Applicant stated that this glass block was used in only two locations—the glass tower and an interior conference room. This glass block is bronze in color but some of it has been replaced with clear glass over the years. It's in pretty good shape. The commissioner wondered if that glass block was a significant design piece as well; he mentioned that it reminded him of a Saarinen technique where bricks would be glazed or tiles would be used to accent certain areas of a building. Applicant would like to use clear glass so that the building and its activities become transparent, open—taking down the barriers and moats like the Renaissance Center in Detroit used to have. Commissioner noted that the proposals all seem to be going in the right direction and that the applicant and his team have been very thoughtful about what they want to do and that they're managing all of the pieces of the process well.

Applicant will be looking into window films, but the windows themselves will remain as they are, and individual tenants may have different needs for light and protection from light. Some of the interior blinds and films will vary from tenant to tenant. Commissioner noted that the interior blinds or curtains are beyond the purview of the commission. Applicant stated he was considering a heated sidewalk in front of the building and seeks for his improvements to be in line with the overall vision for the downtown. Applicant stated that he plans to submit his application for action for the July 12 HDC meeting. He asks the commissioners to look at their concept for the courtyard—it will have space for scientists and the public to walk and there will also be a performance space. Commissioners have expressed that the overhang is an important feature, and one commissioner asked if Mr. Smith could ask his design team if there is any appetite for saving or reusing the bronzed glass block elsewhere. One commissioner mentioned that the awning is significant and maybe staff could research whether mention of the overhang exists in the archives at EMU. Applicant mentioned that the overhang does afford them the opportunity to add soft downlighting that could change with seasons. One commissioner mentioned that the City has lighting guidelines that protect the night sky.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS**

1. 114 W Michigan—wood window restoration of the three second-floor windows, and a new EPDM roof
2. 101 S Huron—non-historic rear door replaced like for like

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **1. Property Monitoring**

- a. Commissioners/Staff discussed property concerns and property issues under review.

### **2. Updates from Staff**

- b. Conflict of interest forms—please sign and return

- 3. Commissioner Comments**—the stone sidewalks in front of 220 S Huron were broken during the construction work underway. Commissioners understand that sidewalk and road improvements are governed by MDOT and ADA regulations and that the HDC has no jurisdiction, but the HDC does ask if there is a way that their concerns about historic street features could be better integrated early in the process when the project is being planned? How can preservation concerns get a seat at that table earlier on? Entities working in the City need to know what historic materials need to be watched and that have value—there needs to be more awareness integrated into the process. Too, signage and/or curb colors could indicate historic district more clearly. City likely has many concerns that they're trying to inject into the project plan, but could preservation be part of those concerns and important historic resources be pointed out and planned for in the project?

## **AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

### **HOUSEKEEPING BUSINESS**

#### **Approval of the Minutes of June 14, 2022**

Motion: Ratzlaff (second: Szumko) moved to approve the minutes of June 14, 2022, as submitted.

Approval: Roll call. Unanimous  
Motion carried.

#### **Nomination of Vice Chair**

Ratzlaff nominated Chesnut for Vice Chair, Chesnut accepted. Chesnut nominated Ratzlaff, but Ratzlaff declined. Election for Vice Chair will be next meeting.

#### **Clarify schedule**

Currently meeting every two weeks, then in November and December it would be once a month. November 8, however, is Election Day and none of our usual venues are available to us. We likely need to cancel and then call a special meeting if necessary. Commission will pick this conversation up at the next meeting and staff will clarify in the meantime what if any actions are needed to be taken by the commission when the move is made back to once/month and does Council need any feedback on this idea? What was the Commission's original motion regarding their schedule? Staff will confirm.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair adjourned the meeting, citing the end of the agenda with no further items to discuss.

### **MEETING ADJOURNED at 8:15 p.m.**