

NORTHVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
SPECIAL JOINT TRAINING SESSION WITH
NORTHVILLE TOWNSHIP HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

February 23, 2012

Thursday, 7:00 P.M.

Northville Township Hall – Community Room

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairperson Marjorie Banner, Northville Township HDC, called the Special Joint Training Session of the Northville Township Historic District Commission and the City of Northville Historic District Commission to order at 7:10 P.M.

2. ROLL CALL:

Present: Bayly, Hoffman, Luikart, Vernacchia

Excused: Johnson, Field, Argenta

Also Present: Northville Township Historic District Commissioners and Sally Elmiger, City of Northville HDC staff liaison

3. CITIZEN COMMENTS: None.

4. JOINT TRAINING SESSION:

Marjorie Banner welcomed all in attendance and introduced the workshop sponsor representative, Ellen Thackery, Southeast Michigan Field Representative, Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) and National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the presenter, Kristine Kidorf, Historic Preservation Consultant and Volunteer for the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. Thackery explained that the workshop is sponsored through a grant from the Michigan State Housing Development Authority. She turned the meeting over to Kidorf.

Kidorf stated that she bases all her comments on PA 169, the enabling legislation that gives communities the authority to establish historic districts and commissions. She then gave a presentation that discussed the following topics:

- Requirements of the members of a Historic District Commission
- Historic District Commissioners' job description – to manage change, not to prevent change
- Why Historic District Commissions are important
- How Historic District Commissions make decisions about applications. Kidorf provided a process – a series of questions to ask to determine whether a proposal is appropriate per the Secretary of Interior Standards.

5. DISCUSSION:

At the end of the presentation, Kidorf answered the following questions posed by the Commissioners:

1. *The City of Northville's original historic district study report was conducted in the early 1970s. There has been significant change in the district since this time. Have other communities updated their original district study report?* Yes. If the community is re-surveying the district to determine which structures are contributing, and which are non-contributing, then the HDC can do this research

without permission from City Council. However, if the survey is being conducted to modify the boundaries of the district, then the City Council must appoint a study committee to do this work.

2. ***How should the HDC address new construction within the historic district to determine whether the proposal “fits” into the district?*** Updating the original study report would help answer this question because the report could identify the “defining characteristics” of the district. These characteristics could then be used to analyze any new construction proposals. She also mentioned that the National Register website has a bulletin that specifically addresses new construction in a historic district. MHPN is developing Advanced Commissioner Training, which will address this question. Ellen also added that she’ll e-mail an article that discusses how HDC’s can address new construction.
3. ***Should a Historic District Commission be strict or lenient when evaluating applications?*** Kristine stated that it comes down to the community’s values. It also depends on the economics of the community. Commissioners often have different ideas about this, but conflict between Commissioners should be considered a part of the democratic process.
4. ***Is there such a thing as a “precedent” when making decisions about applications to the HDC?*** Decisions made by a Historic District Commission should not be considered “precedent setting,” because each resource (building, site, etc.) is unique, and each request is unique. A decision on one building should not sway the decision on another building. It is important for the Commission to record, in minutes and motions, the reasons for whatever decision is made.
5. ***Are the Secretary of Interior Standards laws?*** Michigan’s Historic District law (PA 169) requires Commissioners to use the Secretary of Interior Standards and any locally-adopted guidelines in their deliberations. They are required, by law, to be the basis for decisions made by an HDC.
6. ***Does zoning trump the Historic District requirements?*** No, an applicant must comply with both. One doesn’t trump the other. For example, if the zoning code allows a building of a certain size on a property, but by applying the Secretary of Interior Standards and/or local guidelines, the HDC considers the building’s scale to be inconsistent with the district, then the HDC can require the applicant to reduce the scale of the building to meet the Standards/guidelines.

Kidorf will make her slides available to anyone wanting a copy.

6. ADJOURN:

Chairperson Banner adjourned the meeting at 9:15 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Sally Elmiger
Recording Secretary

Approved as submitted: 3/21/2012