



*Old Courthouse Square at
Main + Haron with grass + trees*

KEMNITZ

LANDMARKS HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT February 29, 1988

LANDMARKS HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE
FINAL REPORT February 29, 1988

PREFACE

The City of Ann Arbor has been designating historic districts since 1973. Public outcry over the loss of a cherished landmark on April 28, 1986, however, made it clear that a new concept was needed for protecting historic structures individually, rather than only through historic districts. The City Council responded by establishing the Landmarks Historic District Study Committee on July 14, 1986 to "identify, research and recommend the designation of appropriate Ann Arbor landmarks..." for protection under a local ordinance.

The Study committee members represent a diversity of backgrounds and expertise, and all have a demonstrated interest in Ann Arbor's history and architecture. They are united by a simple premise which they believe is shared by most Ann Arborites: that the City's identity -- what everyone loves and recognizes as Ann Arbor -- is embodied in its historic buildings. The logical conclusion, particularly as more and more development occurs, is that all historic buildings must have the protection afforded only by local designation.

Preservation of historically significant local buildings has been a goal of the city for over a decade. The 1973 *General Development Plan*, adopted by both the Planning Commission and City Council, urged that the city "safeguard" its heritage by "preserving significant historical and architectural sites and structures" and that the city support "...the efforts of the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission to ensure the preservation of historically and culturally significant sites, landmarks, buildings or structures; encourage adaptive uses... and the designation of new historic districts or additions to existing districts". The *Downtown Development and Conservation Strategy*, adopted in 1976, also stated the same goals, and the current Downtown Task Force is recommending designation of significant historic buildings in the downtown. By recommending the attached list of properties, the Study Committee is proposing a means to implement the adopted goals of City Council and Planning Commission as well as carry out the charge for which it was appointed.

Benefits of Preservation

The economic, social and psychological benefits of preservation have been amply demonstrated across the country from Portland, Maine to Seattle, Washington. Ann Arbor's own downtown has survived the pressures brought on by the construction of a regional shopping mall on the edge of town, due largely to the attraction of the downtown's many rehabilitated buildings. The Old West Side neighborhood, once red-lined by local lending institutions, now provides some of the City's most desirable real estate. As *Time* magazine described it: "Walking along an old street among old buildings, the implicit history and sense of continuity are both reassuring and invigorating. The graceful proportions of facades are not arbitrary but the result of craft wisdom worked out over generations of trial and error. The scale of buildings and streets, based on human size and pedestrian stride, makes intuitive sense."¹

¹ Anderson, Kurt, "Spiffing Up the Urban Heritage", *Time*, November 23, 1987, p. 76.

For home owners the benefits are more aesthetic than economic. Having pride in your home is an American institution and having a historic plaque saying "somebody important lived here" or "something important happened here" makes us aware of our past and aware that we are part of America's history and can serve pridefully as caretakers of our heritage. Home owners can be proud not only of their own efforts at beautification but can take pride in the public service they provide by keeping our past alive and in good repair. Caring for our old buildings is one way we demonstrate our concern and love for our community.

Preservation also makes good economic sense. Although property values depend more on the local real estate market than historic preservation per se, it should be stressed that ordinances for historic properties have not lowered property values.

Thus, preservation has been a benefit to the city in a number of ways. In already established districts the results of the historic review process -- which is meant to guide and not to prohibit change -- have been beneficial to the owner, to the structure, and to the visual texture of Ann Arbor.

The Selection Process

Many of the local buildings listed in the following report have already been recognized as historically or architecturally significant. They may already be listed on the National or State Registers, or have been previously documented in books or articles about historic buildings in Ann Arbor. Some have been ranked in architectural surveys commissioned by the city in the past, and have been awarded bronze markers by the Historic District Commission. But at this time they still have no legal protection from changes which could destroy their historic integrity. That can only be provided by a local ordinance.

Beyond these previous designations, what did we use as criteria in determining historical or architectural significance? The Committee created its own set of guidelines to evaluate individual buildings, sites and objects, using as a guide the standards created by the National Park Service to evaluate nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.

Buildings and/or sites were selected if they were (1) associated with the lives of people significant in Ann Arbor history, (2) if they were associated with events or historic processes that were significant in our local history, and/or (3) if the architecture either was a well-preserved example of a particular style, period or type of construction, or represented the work of a well-known builder or architect, or had high artistic values such as fine murals, stonework, or an especially well designed landscape. No age limit was set, and many buildings from recent decades were considered, but all the nominated structures are approximately 50 years old or older. In addition to meeting the above criteria, the Committee considered the integrity of location, design, setting, material, workmanship, feeling and association in making its final choices. Thus, buildings or sites which had been unsympathetically altered were usually removed from the list. Some buildings were considered so important that such alterations were not seen as significant enough to preclude designation.

INTRODUCTION

On July 14, 1986 the Ann Arbor City Council adopted the following resolution establishing the Landmarks Historic District Study Committee:

Whereas: the City of Ann Arbor has many buildings that are recognized as historic and/or architectural landmarks by the National Register of Historic Places, the State Register, and/or the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission through its Historic Building Marker program; and

Whereas: some of these buildings are in neighborhoods that have not yet been studied for possible designation as local historic districts and thus are not protected from either insensitive alteration or even demolition: and

Whereas: the loss of these key landmarks would substantially weaken both the character of their neighborhoods and the City's overall architectural heritage,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Ann Arbor City Council hereby establishes a Landmarks Historic District Study Committee to identify, research and recommend the designation of appropriate Ann Arbor Landmarks in accordance with Chapter 103, Section 8:408 of the City Code.

The Study Committee held its first meeting on September 30, 1986 and has continued to meet approximately every two weeks since.

FINDINGS

The Study Committee began its task by working up a list of buildings to review. Buildings that had or were eligible for Historic Building markers, buildings rated as A+ by the Washtenaw/Hill Historic District Study Committee, as well as selections suggested by Committee members, made up the initial list of over 170 buildings. (Buildings that were already protected by local historic district ordinances were not reviewed at this stage). The master list expanded at succeeding meetings until the Committee had looked at over 330 buildings.

The Committee's approach during this initial stage was to make the review process as broad as possible. They therefore resolved not to use any fixed age as a cutoff point. This allowed them to review properties built even as late as the 1950's. Examples of unusual and special technology were also included. In several cases groups of buildings were looked at as a collectively distinguished unit. As the process continued, objects such as special signs, hitching posts, historic paving material and even natural features were included in the discussion.

Having established these broad parameters and using concepts developed for the selection of state and federal landmarks, the Committee determined that the historic resources to be selected should constitute an "Ann Arbor Register of Historic Places". The Register would be a listing of all the significant historic and architectural resources in the City. The eight

historic districts already adopted by Council include both large neighborhoods and individual buildings. They would be incorporated into the Register at its inception.

The need for this new concept of a "Register" became obvious to the Committee when they realized that the present code refers exclusively to historic districts. It makes no distinction between such groupings and individual structures.

Over time, the Register will eliminate many of the inconsistencies now present in existing historic district ordinances. It would include basic elements of a common ordinance for all listed historic properties and also allow for existing ordinances to be revised to be more compatible with each other.

The Committee decided to submit an initial group of new entries and recommend that a standing study committee be established to nominate future entries. A somewhat similar process is used in Detroit where the Historic Sites Designation Advisory Board functions quite separately from the Historic District Commission.

In Ann Arbor, study committees at present are not appointed for a defined term, and in most cases remain on the City's records indefinitely whether active or not. Using the proposed concept of a Register, a Historic District Study Committee would still be appointed for each historic district, with strong representation from property owners and residents. These Committee members would serve until Council took action upon their final recommendations. For Register listings of individual properties, there would be a standing "Historic Designation Advisory Board", made up of members with appropriate expertise and interest who are appointed for 3 year terms.

From the beginning the present Study Committee discussed criteria for review. They agreed to rely upon the criteria included in the Historic District Code. These are adapted from the National Register and deal with broad areas of significance and integrity in architectural style, technology and historical association.

The Committee was in unanimous agreement that the specific preservation standards to protect individual properties on the Register should be as uniform as possible. The Historic District Commission's approval would be required for changes affecting the historic integrity of any protected property.

Also, in examining the Historic District Code it was evident that Ann Arbor's ordinance no longer corresponds to the amended state enabling legislation: state law now allows the local government to regulate all structures in a historic district, not just the historic ones. Since several of the existing districts already have standards affecting non-historic structures this change will make Ann Arbor's ordinance consistent with state law as well as with accepted preservation practice.

Because different communities define the term "landmark" in a variety of ways, the Committee determined that, for Ann Arbor, "landmark" should be used as a special extra designation that could be applied, at the request of the owner, to an "eligible" listing, whether listed individually or as part of a district. Properties so designated would both be more stringently protected and would also be eligible for special incentives to encourage their long-term preservation and even restoration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Amend Chapter 103, "Historical Preservation" to:

A. Change the name of the Historic District Commission to the "Historic Preservation Commission" to represent more appropriately the Commission's mandate as the city's agency for historic preservation.

B. Establish an "Ann Arbor Register of Historic Places", consisting of two categories:

1. Historic District, defined as an assemblage of buildings, structures and sites that share a common significant historic element, such as geography, period, style or theme. The parts of a district do not have to be contiguous. Archeological sites would be included in this category.
2. Individual Historic Property, defined as a historic site, building, object, or natural feature not part of a historic district.

C. Establish a standing "Historic Designation Advisory Board" to research, review and nominate new Register listings for Individual Historic Properties. The Committee shall consist of the current members of the Historic Preservation Commission and six Ann Arbor citizens selected for their demonstrated interest and expertise in Ann Arbor history and architecture. The term of office of the Historic Designation Advisory Board members who are not also members of the Historic Preservation Commission shall be for three years, which corresponds with appointments to the Commission.

D. New Register listings for Historic Districts would continue to be researched and recommended by Historic District Study Committees as in the past. The ordinance would state, however, that the terms of office for members of Study Committees for the various Historic Districts shall end when the Council takes action on that Committee's final recommendations.

E. Allow the Historic Preservation Commission to regulate proposed changes affecting the exterior appearance of all properties on the Register, both in Historic Districts and Individual Historic Properties, as is now allowed by state law.

F. Establish general standards to be used by the Historic Preservation Commission for reviewing proposed changes to historic individual properties as follows:

Any change to the exterior appearance of a listed property which is visible from a street or public space shall require the prior approval of the Historic Preservation Commission. All reviewed changes will be evaluated by the Historic Preservation Commission using the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of the Interior in the most recent edition of their publication "The Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings".

