Historic District Commission

March 04, 2020
Call to Order:

Approval of Minutes:
* November 6, 2019 Regular Meeting Minutes.

Announcements:
Historic District Commission Annual Address to City Council: May 12th, 2020 at 7:00 p.m.

Old Business:

New Business:
1. * Green-A-Thon 2020 (Sunday, April 19th from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.)
2. * Historic District Modification: 8009 Cox’s Drive.
   a. Application.
   b. 2016 Final & Preliminary Report along with supporting documentation.

Citizen Comments:

Member Comments:

Adjournment:

Materials Transmitted:
- Realtor Letter – 4415 East Milham Avenue.
- Communication from Mary Beth Block regarding the Historic District Commission Facebook Page.
- Communication from Amy Arnold, Michigan State Historic Preservation Office regarding Ordinance Update.

Asterisk (*) indicates printed material within agenda

Please notify Kyle Mucha at 329-4473 if you are unable to attend.
City of Portage
Historic District Commission
Wednesday, November 6, 2019

Meeting Called to Order: 8:25 A.M.

Members Present: Duniphin, Lopez, Maytnier, vanLonkhuyzen, Grunert, Custer, Nemeth, Meyle.

Members Absent: Duniphin moved, seconded by Grunert, to excuse Commissioner Barton; motion passed 8-0.

Staff:

Guest(s):

Approval of Minutes: Custer moved, seconded by Nemeth, to approve the October 02, 2019 meeting minutes as submitted; motion approved 8-0.

Announcement: Nick Meyle was welcomed to the Historic District Commission as its newest member.

Old Business:

a. Public Hearing: Ordinance Amendment; Legal Description Cleanup & Removal of Non-Historic Properties. Chairperson vanLonkhuyzen opened the public hearing. No resident/property owner present at the public hearing. With there being no further comment from the public at large nor from Commission members, Grunert moved, seconded by Nemeth, to approve the Final Report regarding the Historic District Modifications & clerical updates. Motion passed 8-0.

New Business:

Member Comments:

a. Duniphin indicated Traditional Holiday is set for December 07, 2019, where a few volunteers will be needed to help staff one of the historic buildings.

b. Duniphin informed the Commission that a letter was sent to the Portage Public Library inviting Steve Rossio – local historian – to attend the Commission meetings as a guest.

Adjournment: There being no further comments or business, vanLonkhuyzen adjourned the Historic District at 8:58 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Mucha
Zoning & Codes Administrator
February 18, 2020

Mr. Kyle Mucha  
Portage Historic District Commission  
7900 S. Westnedge Ave.  
Portage, MI 49002

Dear Portage Historic District Commission,

The Portage Youth Advisory Committee, in cooperation with the Portage Environmental Board and Park Board, is hosting the annual community event to celebrate Earth Day – and this year it is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day! For the 12th year of Green-A-Thon, there will be a twist! This year Green-A-Thon will pair with a first-ever sneak peek of the Portage Farmers Market! To make this unique event happen, **Green-A-Thon for 2020 will have a new location and day** - in front of City Hall (7900 South Westnedge) on **Sunday, April 19th** from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

While the Farmers Market is open, the Green-A-Thon will have games, seedling giveaways and numerous representatives from local organizations and businesses providing education about environmental ideas you can utilize in your home or business, opportunities to volunteer for “green” causes, as well as meet other individuals committed to promoting environmentally-friendly action.

We are inviting your organization to partake in this event. Participating in this event would allow you to promote yourself as environmentally conscious, provide the public with an opportunity to be more environmentally conscious and educate people on the importance of “going green.” There is no charge to participate or attend. However, you are encouraged to bring your own table and chairs as only a limited number is available on a first-come basis. Large tents will still be present for cover.

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) was created by the Portage City Council to give students an opportunity to share their ideas and participate in local government. The YAC hosts this event as a way to raise awareness of environmental issues that affect the citizens of Portage and to provide opportunities to become more ecologically friendly. Providing a forum for such opportunities is a critical step to ensuring a sense of social responsibility in practicing and encouraging sustainable behavior.

A registration form is enclosed. You can also choose to register online by going to the Youth Advisory Committee page at [www.portagemi.gov/441/Events](http://www.portagemi.gov/441/Events). The deadline for registration is April 8th.

If you have any questions, please contact Youth Advisory Committee Staff Liaison Erica Eklov in the Office of the City Clerk at 329-4511 or by email at [cityclerk@portagemi.gov](mailto:cityclerk@portagemi.gov). We would appreciate your participation in this event and look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

![Signature]

Erica L. Eklov  
City Clerk
TO: Historic District Commission

FROM: Christopher Forth, Interim Director of Community Development

SUBJECT: Historic District Modification – 8009 Cox’s Drive

DATE: February 26, 2020

An Application for a Certificate of Appropriateness has been received by Michael Kasten, owner of the historic property (District 6 Schoolhouse), located at 8009 Cox’s Drive. The applicant is requesting to raze the former schoolhouse building and remove the property from the historic district. For Commission information, the applicant submitted a similar request in 2016 (attached are the 2016 application materials). At that time, Historic District Study Commission voted to deny the request to raze the former schoolhouse building.

It is recommended that the Historic District Commission form a Historic District Study Committee (HDSC) to review the enclosed 2020 application as set out in Public Act 169 of 1970. Specifically, the HDSC must:

1. Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within the existing historic district.
2. Conduct basic research of the historic district and the historic resources located within the district.
3. Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within the historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places.
4. Prepare a preliminary report that addresses, at a minimum, all of the following:
   a. The charge of the committee.
   b. The composition of the committee membership.
   c. The historic district studied.
   d. The boundaries for the historic district in writing and on maps.
   e. The history of the historic district.
   f. The significance of the district as a whole, as well as a sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.
5. Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendation to the Portage Planning Commission, the Michigan Historical Commission and the State Historic Preservation Review board.
6. Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public.
7. Hold a public hearing within 60 days after the transmittal of the preliminary report.
8. Following the public hearing, prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the Portage Planning Commission to the City Council. If the recommendation is to modify the historic district, the final report must include a draft of the proposed ordinance.

To summarize, the applicant has requested to raze the school building (historically noted as 8009 Cox’s Drive) from the larger parcel listed as 8007 Cox’s Drive. The applicant indicates he is no longer able to find a suitable tenant or rent the building with costs accumulating (bills, taxes, etc.) due to required maintenance and building modifications. In the application, he has offered to donate the building to the city as long as the city pays the relocation costs.
Application for Certificate of Appropriateness for Modifications to Historic District Properties

Before construction, alteration, repair, removal or demolition affecting the exterior of a Historic District property, the property owner or contractor proposing to take such action shall obtain permission from the Portage Historic District Commission (HDC) per PA 169 of 1970.

The property owner must complete the information requested below and submit plans, drawings and pictures sufficient enough to clearly illustrate the proposed action(s).

The HDC will review items at the regularly scheduled meetings held on the first Wednesday of each month. The property owner and/or contractor are requested to attend the meeting. After HDC approval, city staff will issue a "Certificate of Approval." If a building permit is necessary, the property owner is responsible for contacting the Community Development Department.

For assistance in researching appropriate historic modification tips, consult the Secretary of Interior's Standards at www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm or the National Park Service's Preservation Briefs at www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm. For information on the Portage Historic District, see Chapter 38 of the Portage Code of Ordinances. Questions can be directed to HDC Staff Liaison Kyle Mucha, Zoning & Codes Administrator, at 329-4473 or muchak@portagemi.gov.

Applicant Name(s)    Michael Kasten
Date                 2/19/2020
Telephone Number(s)  office 269-327-0502  cell 269-207-1410
Address of Historic Property  8009 Cox's Drive  Portage, MI  49002
Description of Proposed Action  Demolition

Reason for Proposed Action  See attached

Materials to be Used (be as descriptive as possible)

**Attach all plans, drawings, and photos to clearly illustrate the proposed action(s).**
The building is no longer rentable as office space. It has been unoccupied since 2015 and no longer is up to current codes and does not meet ADA standards. To bring it up to these standards is not economically feasible.

In 2016, I made a similar request and was denied. I offered to donate the building free of charge to the city if they would remove it from the site. Obviously, they didn't think it had enough historical value to spend money to move it. Thus I have had the burden and expense to maintain it. To my knowledge, there hasn't been any action or venues that would value the furtherance of this building as a historical site.

I am requesting the commission to reconsider allowing the demolition of this structure or moving it to a site of their choosing.
TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Laurence Shaffer, City Manager

SUBJECT: 8009 Cox's Drive Historic Structure Demolition Denial - Information Only

SUPPORTING PERSONNEL: Erica Eklov, Administrative Assistant/HDC Staff Liaison

As information for Council, the Historic District Commission received a request in June 2016 from historic district property owner Michael (Mick) Kasten of Kasten Investments, LLC, seeking to demolish the historic District #6 Schoolhouse at 8009 Cox's Drive. As an alternative, Mr. Kasten also offered to donate the Schoolhouse to the city with the condition that the building be relocated from the current parcel, which he wishes to retain. In his application, Mr. Kasten ascertains that the building has deteriorated beyond repair, requires building code updates and is no longer feasible to rent to prospective tenants. As background, Mr. Kasten has owned the property since 1982 and the Schoolhouse was added to the city’s historic district during its creation in 1990. Mr. Kasten has previously expressed an interest in de-listing the property in 2004 and 2015.

Per Section 38-37 of the Code of Ordinances, "before establishing, modifying or eliminating a historic district, a historic district study committee, appointed by the City Council, shall comply with the procedures in Public Act No. 169 of 1970." City Council previously appointed the Historic District Commission (HDC) as a standing Historic District Study Committee (HDSC) in September 2007. The HDSC reviewed Mr. Kasten’s recent request, performed a site visit and prepared the required preliminary report, which was submitted for review and feedback to the Portage Planning Commission and the State Historic Preservation Review Board (as well as the Michigan Historical Commission as information only). Additionally, a public hearing on the matter was held on September 14, 2016 after the required 60-day notice. No member of the public attended the hearing and no additional public comment has been received on the proposal. During this time, the City Administration reviewed the property owner’s proposal to acquire the building, but has no identified use for the Schoolhouse and found the cost of relocation to be prohibitive. The HDSC has ultimately voted to deny Mr. Kasten’s request for demolition, but remains open to and hopeful for regarding the potential for relocation, either by the city or a third party. Further, the Planning Commission and the State Historic Preservation Review Board concur with the HDSC’s position.

In a historic district, demolition is a serious matter. Once razed, a historic structure is lost forever. Demolition should only be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable options have been exhausted. PA 169 notes that if a proposal will negatively affect a historic property and the HDC determines that alteration or loss of the property will adversely affect its public purpose, then the HDC is expected to establish a plan with the owner for the preservation of the property. This stipulation can only be exempted if the property owner can demonstrate that the property exhibits any of the following conditions:

a) A hazard to the safety of the public;
b) Impeding a major community improvement program that has all the required planning, zoning,
financing and environmental approvals secured;
c) Keeping the historic property will create an “undue financial hardship” for the owner when “government action, an act of God, or other events beyond the owner’s control created the hardship, and all feasible alternatives to eliminate the financial hardship, which may include offering the resource for sale at its fair market value or moving the resource to a vacant site within the historic district, have been attempted and exhausted by the owner”
d) Keeping the historic property is not in the best interest of the community.

The District #6 Schoolhouse is not currently a hazard to public safety, nor is it impeding a current public improvement program. The building is not an undue financial hardship to Mr. Kasten as he notes annual utilities are approximately $2,700 and the Schoolhouse is only seven percent (7%) of the entire property’s taxes (currently four percent as adjusted by the Office of the City Assessor). Finally, retaining the District #6 Schoolhouse remains in the public interest of the Portage community, as outlined in the History and Significance sections of the attached Final Report.

Under PA 169, a property owner may appeal an HDSC decision before the State Historic Preservation Review Board. If the appeal to the State Historic Preservation Review Board is unsuccessful, the owner may then appeal the decision to the circuit court. Per Attorney Brown, the City Council has no authority to change the decision or take action on it. With regard to the building code updates required with the Schoolhouse, the owner can choose to apply to the state for an exemption to the State of Michigan Barrier Free Code. Variances/exceptions to the Barrier Free Code are not reviewed at the local level (Construction Board of Appeals), but rather at the State level.

Sec. 38-39 of the Portage Code of Ordinances outlines the specifications for the city acquiring a historic property.

“If all efforts of the historic district commission to preserve a resource fail, or if it is determined by the council that public ownership is most suitable, the council, if considered to be in the public interest, may acquire the resource using public funds, public or private gifts, grants, or proceeds from the issuance of revenue bonds. The acquisition shall be based upon the recommendation of the historic district commission or standing committee. The historic district commission or standing committee is responsible for maintaining publicly owned resources using its own funds, if not specifically designated for other purposes, or public funds committed for that use by the city.”

Per Section 38-41, if the property owner chooses to proceed with demolition without HDC approval (i.e. a Certificate of Appropriateness), he/she is responsible for a civil infraction of not more than $5,000 and may be ordered by the court to pay the cost to restore or replicate a resource unlawfully altered, moved or demolished.

FUNDING: Per Daniel Deitz of Deitz House Moving Engineers, Inc. the solid brick building will likely cost $150,000 to $175,000 to relocate. This amount does not include utility wire raising, municipal service connections, tree trimming or site restoration. Department of Public Services Director Rod Russell estimates another $75,000 for site preparation and foundation work. This was for tentative siting at nearby Ramona Park.

The estimated cost for the building’s demolition is approximately $8,000 to $12,000.
(with additional costs if asbestos or lead removal/remediation needed).

Without access to interior walls and ceilings, the Community Development Department estimates building repairs could cost between $74,000 and $100,000. Also, dependent on the proposed use and occupancy for the building, a fire sprinkler system may be required.

**Attachments:**

1. October 5, 2016 Final Historic District Study Committee Report (with maps and photos)
2. Assessment Valuation for 8007/8009 Cox's Drive
City of Portage, Michigan  
Historic District Study Committee

Historic District Modification
“District #6 Schoolhouse”
8009 Cox’s Drive
Portage, Michigan 49002

Final Report
October 5, 2016

Introduction

Property addressed as 8009 Cox’s Drive and commonly known as the District #6 Schoolhouse is a historic district in the City of Portage. A request from Mr. Michael Kasten, owner of the property under Kasten Investments LLC, to demolish the schoolhouse building on the 5.53-acre property was received by the Portage Historic District Commission on May 23, 2016. The owner’s plan to demolish the historic structure would nullify the property’s historic designation, removing one of the 40 properties from the City of Portage roster.

Alternatively, the owner has offered the building to the city at no cost, with the condition that the building be relocated from the property on Cox’s Drive.

Authority

The Local History Districts Act, being Act 169 of 1970 as amended and the September 25, 2007 City of Portage City Council resolution designating the Historic District Commission as the standing Historic District Study Committee, pursuant to MCL 399.214, to review and make recommendations.

The Charge of the Committee

The committee is charged with reviewing the request and acting as set out in Public Act 169 of 1970. Specifically, the HDSC must:

1. Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within the existing historic district.
2. Conduct basic research of the historic district and the historic resources located within the district.
3. Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within the historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the national register of historic places.
4. Prepare a preliminary report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
   a. The charge of the committee.
   b. The composition of the committee membership.
   c. The historic district studied.
d. The boundaries for the historic district in writing and on maps.

e. The history of the historic district.

f. The significance of the district as a whole, as well as a sufficient number of its 
individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the 
district, relative to the evaluation criteria.

5. Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendation to the Portage 
Planning Commission, to the Michigan historical commission and to the state historic 
preservation review board.

6. Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public.

7. Hold a public hearing not less than 60 days after the transmittal of the preliminary report.

8. Following the public hearing, prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and 
the recommendations, if any, of the Portage Planning Commission to the City Council. If the 
recommendation is to modify the historic district, the final report must include a draft of a 
proposed ordinance.

The Composition of Committee Membership

Voting Members

The HDSC is comprised of members of the Portage Historic District Commission: Suzanne 
Nemeth, Russell Randall, Katie VanLonkhuyzen, James Ebert, Fred Grunert, Jessie Duniphin, 
Martha Deming Maytnier, John Lotz and Collin Forrest.

Non-Voting Participants

City of Portage Staff Liaison: Erica Eklov

Historic District Location

Property Address: 8007 Cox’s Drive (mailing address: 8009 Cox’s Drive)

Parcel ID# 00024-081-O

Written and Visual Boundaries of District

The description of the current historic district:

SEC 24-3-11 COM AT NW COR SEC 24, TH S 132 FT TO P.O.B., TH CONT S TO NW COR OF S ¾ OF W ¾ OF NW ¼ SEC 24, TH E 420 FT, TH N TO N LI OF SD SEC, TH W 120 FT TH S 137 FT, TH W 199.39 FT, TH N 5 FT, TH W 100.61 FT TO P.O.B., RES COX DR AND CENTRE AVE FOR ROW.

On June 9, 2016, Suzanne Nemeth, Katie VanLonkhuyzen and Martha Maytnier, along with 
Erica Eklov, visited the property to tour and photograph the historic resource. Photographs were 
taken of the structure proposed to be removed from the historic district, in context within 
surrounding buildings, neighboring parcels and the streetscape (see photographic attachments).

The property address for the entire parcel is 8007 Cox’s Drive (parent parcel). There are a total 
of five buildings on the property: the schoolhouse (currently designated office use), two utility 
sheds, one warehouse and one commercial office building. Only the schoolhouse is significant
and designated historic. (The Schoolhouse has a mailing address of 8009 Cox’s Drive, while the second office building is addressed as 8007 Cox’s Drive.)

The History of the Historic District

1. “Known as Pershing School, this was District #6 Schoolhouse built in 1927 by the Portage Schools. The brick building sit on the site of the earlier wooden schoolhouse, and is now used as a business office.” (Taken from Where the Trails Crossed page 48.)

2. “The District #6 school is unique as it is a true reflection of the growth of education in Portage and represents an important transition in our community’s educational history, a transition that saw Portage move from the one room school system to the consolidated public school system that is still utilized today.

Prior to 1927 this site was occupied by the District #6 one-room school. A classic wooden framed structure, the school featured the a-typical bell tower to call students to class, boy’s and girl’s outdoor privies and a small shed to house a horse used by the teacher. During the patriotic fervor of WWI, the 1918 class voted to name the school Pershing after the great World War I United States General John J. Pershing.

By 1925, exciting things were occurring within the Township. There was a steady growth of families moving into the community and an effort was underway to consolidate Portage Schools. Just three years earlier in 1922 Portage entered into a partnership with Western State’s Teachers College - today’s W.M.U., in which Portage would provide proper school buildings and equipment and Western would provide teachers. That same year a brand-new two story consolidated school opened in the center of the township. The old District #6 was pushing almost seventy years of age at this time and it was decided by the School Board that a new two room school should be built to continue with consolidation efforts and to better serve the growing student body. Always a frugal board, the one-room school was picked up and moved a bit to the east to accommodate the new two room building. In fact, the one-room would continue to be used for quite a few years as a school meeting hall until it was again picked up and moved, this time across Centre Avenue and converted into a private home.

The new #6 was an impressive, state of the art structure towering over the prairie of southeast Portage Township. Made of brick, it was much better insulated and therefore stayed warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. It featured a heating and electrical plant, modern class-rooms, indoor bathrooms and the like, all of which were designed to help raise the bar of education being received by Portage students. It also gave potential "investors" in the Township of Portage clear evidence that the Township was moving out of the past and into the future.

The #6 two-room proudly served the students of Portage through the latter half of the "Roaring Twenties," was a beacon to students during the "Great Depression of the 1930's," did its patriotic duty during World War II and continued on into the economic boom of the 1950's. As the student population exploded due to the Baby Boom after World War II, it was
decided that a new, larger and more modern school was necessary. Once again the school board, being frugal, spared the old two-room by constructing the new elementary school further to the south along Cox's Drive. In fact, the old two-room continued to serve as classrooms until being permanently retired sometime in the early 1960's. The building was repurposed and used as a clothing redistribution center through the 1970's before sadly falling into a state of disrepair.

This should have been the inglorious end of the District #6 two-room however it was acquired and converted into a business in the 1980's preserving it for future generations. It should be noted that despite the conversion of the interior, the exterior lines remain identical to what the structure looked like when constructed for the students of Portage almost ninety years ago.” (Taken from June 10, 2016 history researched and written by Portage District Library Local History Librarian Steve Rossio.)

The Significance of the District

Of the eight original schoolhouses that were constructed in Portage, five no longer exist; one has been moved and restored (#8 – Prairie Edge School now on display at Celery Flats Historical Area); one has been moved and heavily altered with none of the original façade present (#2 Carpenters Corners School – 6235 Oakland Drive); one remains on the original site and has been converted into a private home (#7 Lake Center School – 506 Bacon Avenue). Of the three "two room" school buildings (#5, #6 and #7) only the Cox’s Drive and Lake Center schools remain. Of the "public" buildings of Portage, buildings that show the transition from original farming community to the educational and economic core that Portage is today, only the Cox’s Drive structure remains.

Additional Information

On May 18, 2016 the City of Portage Building Inspector and Fire Marshal performed a walk through inspection of the building at 8009 Cox’s Drive. The purpose of the inspection was at the request of a potential tenant for a proposed change of occupancy (use) from a business to an assembly (church). The potential tenant and property owner were also in attendance during the inspection.

The results of the city building inspection indicated that the following items were found to be in need of correction/modification (the list is not inclusive of other electrical, plumbing or mechanical items that may also be in need of repair):

1. The ceiling for the building was sagging in some areas and showed potential signs of water damage;
2. The foundation walls for the building showed signs of water leakage. In addition, a small room in the basement was once used as a cistern and now appears to have storm water from the adjacent parking lot entering through the exterior basement wall.
3. Mold was found in several areas of the building;
4. Accessibility for the building (handicap ramp) needs to be provided. In addition, barrier free rest rooms and fixtures need to be provided;
5. Proper handrails need to be installed on the stairways for the interior entryway and the basement;
6. Emergency lighting and exit signage needs to be installed throughout the building;
7. The cooking stove/oven (circa 1990) located in the basement needs to be removed or a proper ventilation hood needs to be installed.

In addition, the proposed use (church) wished to remove several of the interior walls to reconfigure the building layout. In doing so, signed and sealed plans from a State of Michigan registered architect or engineer would be required.

Feedback
A public hearing on the proposal was held on Wednesday, September 14, 2016, which was set 60 days prior (per state law) and advertised in the Kalamazoo Gazette on Monday, July 18, 2016. The preliminary report was provided to the Portage Planning Commission, as well as the Michigan State Historic Preservation Review Board and the Michigan Historical Commission. In addition, the preliminary report was available for public viewing in person at the Office of the City Clerk and electronically on the HDC’s web page. No public comment, written or otherwise, was received on the proposal. The Planning Commission reviewed the report at its August 4, 2016 regular meeting and supported the recommendation 7 to 1. Further, the State Historic Preservation Review Board reviewed the preliminary report at its regular meeting of September 23, 2016 at which time they also supported the recommendation to deny demolition, with request to better note the exterior alterations in the final report.

Recommendation
Following the study of the Historic District at 8009 Cox’s Drive and the feedback received, it is recommended that the request from property owner Mr. Michael Kasten (Kasten Investments, LLC) to modify the Historic District via demolition be denied. Of the 40 sites in the Portage Historic District, only four are schools; part of the original Portage Public Schools’ framework. Cox’s Drive is one of only three ever constructed 2-room schoolhouses in Portage and the only one not converted to private living. By state law, the HDSC can only remove a property from the historic register if it has met one of three criteria:

(1) The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled establishment of the district. – Cox’s school remains unaltered on the exterior from the time of its designation in 1990. However, the exterior was modified between 1982 and 1987 when the current owner modified the dual-door and transom window entry to a single, glass-enclosed entrance. He also replaced the windows with modern, tinted aluminum windows and in-filled the east/rear window openings with brick before installing small aluminum windows. Two additional exterior basement access doors were also replaced with modern steel and glass doors. The owner also painted the original red brick exterior. Nonetheless, the original character of the building’s design remains.

(2) The historic district was not significant in the way previously defined. – Its significance remains one of the originals township schools as mentioned above.

(3) The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures. – This is not the case for any City of Portage site.

The Cox’s Drive School serves as the only original school constructed of brick and is notable for its unique architectural style. Portage Public School District demolished the only other pre-
World War II school building, the 1922 Central Administration/Agricultural School, in 2014. The next oldest remaining “modern” school is dated 1949.

Next Steps

While relocation of a resource from its original location is not ideal, if relocation is a viable option, the HDSC will support such an action. The City Administration has evaluated the potential of acquiring the resource; however, there is no evident need for the building currently. The HDSC remains supportive of finding alternative options for preservation of the resource, including but not limited to: finding an outside interested third party willing to assist in relocation and assumption of the resource; the city assuming the resource and relocating the building to a city-owned property, etc.

In the interim, the City Assessor’s Office has evaluated the schoolhouse at 8009 Cox’s Drive in its present office capacity relating to the property owner’s concerns with obsolescence. The owner calculated the carrying costs on the empty school at $2670.90 (electricity and gas). Assessing staff have noted the school entails approximately 7% of the property tax liability for that entire parcel and is roughly $1,050 in summer and winter taxes. The valuation of the office building is very small and any potential relief would also be small relative to the total value of the property. Nonetheless, staff have tentatively adjusted the valuation for the historic office building from $39,847 in 2016 to $27,652 for 2017.

It is requested that the property owner properly “mothball” the historic District #6 Schoolhouse for the immediate future and continue to seek either a prospective tenant or third party interested/able to relocate the resource within city boundaries. In turn, the HDC will also continue efforts to assist the property owner in finding potential opportunities for continued use or relocation until a future date to be determined.
TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Vicki Georgeau, Director of Community Development
SUBJECT: Historic District Modification, 8009 Cox's Drive

Attached is a communication and report from the Portage Historic District Study Committee involving a request received from Michael Kasten (Kasten Investments LLC), owner of the property located at 8009 Cox's Drive, to demolish the former District #6 Schoolhouse building and nullify the property's historic designation. Alternatively, the owner has offered the building to the city at no cost, with the condition that the building be relocated from the subject property. The preliminary report summarizes the request and provides important background information. The preliminary report was reviewed by the Historic District Commission on July 14, 2016 and the Historic District Study Committee is recommending denial of the request. A public hearing will be held by the Historic District Commission on September 14, 2016.

The overall 5.53 acre subject property (parcel #00024-081-O) is addressed as 8007 Cox's Drive and occupied by five buildings: the former schoolhouse building, two utility buildings, one warehouse building and one commercial office building. The former schoolhouse building, which is addressed as 8009 Cox's Drive, is the only historic and significant structure on the property. As such, the request to demolish the former schoolhouse building would nullify the property's historic designation removing one of the 40 properties from the City of Portage roster. While the interior of the schoolhouse building was converted to commercial office use in the 1980s, the exterior of the structure remains essentially the same since its construction in 1927. In his request, Mr. Kasten indicates that he has been trying to rent the schoolhouse building for the past three years without success. Mr. Kasten states that the building has fallen into a state of disrepair and the cost to bring it up to code overshadows the value going forward.

In accordance with the Local Historic Districts Act (Public Act 169 of 1970), the preliminary report is being forwarded to the Planning Commission for review and comment. The Planning Commission is advised to review this matter and, subject to any additional comments, staff advises the Planning Commission recommend that the Historic District Modification involving 8009 Cox's Drive be denied based on the findings contained in the Historic District Study Committee preliminary report dated July 14, 2016. The Planning Commission recommendation will be forwarded to the Historic District Commission in advance of the September 14, 2016 public hearing. At the conclusion of the public hearing, the information and recommendations will be forwarded to City Council for final action.

Attachment: Communication and report from Portage Historic District Study Committee
PLANNING COMMISSION

August 4, 2016

The City of Portage Planning Commission meeting of August 4, 2016 was called to order by Chairman Welch at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers of Portage City Hall, 7900 South Westnedge Avenue. No citizens were in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:

Chairman Welch led the Commission, staff and citizens in the Pledge of Allegiance.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Christopher Forth, Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services; Michael West, Senior City Planner; and Bryan Beach, Assistant City Attorney.

ROLL CALL:

Mr. Forth called the roll: Bosch (yes) Schimmel (yes), Welch (yes), Stoffer (yes), Patterson (yes), Dargitz (yes), Shoup (yes) and Joshi (yes). A motion was offered by Commissioner Stoffer, seconded by Commissioner Dargitz, to approve the role excusing Commissioner Richmond. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Chairman Welch referred the Commission to the July 21, 2016 meeting minutes contained in the agenda packet. A motion was made by Commissioner Dargitz, seconded by Commissioner Bosch, to approve the minutes as submitted. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0.

SITE/FINAL PLANS:

None.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

1. Preliminary Report: Ordinance Amendment #15/16-A, Off-Street Parking and Loading Regulations. Mr. Forth reviewed the staff report dated July 29, 2016 and summarized the various ordinance sections proposed for amendment. Commissioner Stoffer asked about the proposed increase from 50 to 100 parking spaces in Section 43-520.N.3 in conjunction with the proposed increase in Section 42-520.N.1 from 10% to 25%. Mr. Forth discussed the rationale for the increase and the original intent of the ordinance sections to address larger developments. Mr. Forth indicated the change was intended to avoid unnecessary delays to the applicant in the site plan review process. Commissioner Dargitz asked for clarification regarding the proposed change to Section 42-520.I that would allow for administrative determination of parking requirements for uses not specifically mentioned in the Zoning Code and also asked whether maintenance standards referenced under Section 42-521.I could be applied to private roads such as MLK Drive. Mr. Forth stated the proposed change to Section 42-520.I was again intended to avoid any unnecessary delay in the site plan review process for a use that could otherwise be administratively approved. In regard to Section 42-521.I, Mr. Forth indicated the maintenance standards would apply to any maneuvering lane or drive that is associated with an off-street parking lot and that independent, private roads would not be specifically addressed under this section.

Commissioner Dargitz stated she likes the addition of Section 42-521.L. Commissioner Schoup agreed, however, asked whether the provisions of this section should be required at larger development projects (e.g. electric car charging stations at Crossroads Mall, Meijer, etc.). Commissioner Stoffer asked for clarification regarding the data contained in the table on page 7 of the staff report and also examples of specific restaurants to compare minimum required parking vs. actual parking provided for the use. Mr. Forth attempted to clarify the data in the
table on page 7 of the staff report and also provided examples of minimum required parking compared to actual parking provided for Latitude 42 on Portage Road and Texas Roadhouse on South Westnedge Avenue.

The public hearing was opened by Chairman Welch. No citizens spoke regarding the proposed changes to off-street parking and loading/unloading regulations. A motion was then made by Commissioner Bosch, seconded by Commissioner Dargitz, to adjourn the public hearing for Ordinance Amendment #15/16-A, Off-Street Parking and Loading Regulations, to the August 18, 2016 meeting. The motion was unanimously approved 8-0. Chairman Welch discussed the previous reviews of this ordinance amendment and asked that the Commission, when possible, provide questions or comments to staff at the earlier workshop meetings or at least prior to the public hearing to allow sufficient time for staff to research and provide responses in an effort to expedite the process.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Historic District Modification, 8009 Cox’s Drive. Mr. West summarized the staff report dated July 29, 2016 regarding a request pending before the Historic District Commission from Michael Kasten (Kasten Investments LLC), owner of the property located at 8009 Cox’s Drive, to demolish the former District #6 Schoolhouse building. Mr. West also summarized the findings of the preliminary report prepared by the Historic District Study Committee and the recommendation to deny the demolition request. Mr. West stated the former District #6 Schoolhouse building was the only historic and significant structure on the property and demolition of the building would nullify the property’s historic designation. Mr. West indicated the structure is the only surviving 2-room schoolhouse in Portage and while the interior of the building was converted to office use in the 1980s, the exterior of the structure remains essentially the same since its construction in 1927. Mr. West stated that staff was recommending denial of the demolition request based on the findings contained in the Historic District Study Committee preliminary report dated July 14, 2016.

Commissioner Patterson referred the Commission to the three state law criteria contained on page 5 of the Historic District Study Committee preliminary report that need to be satisfied in order to remove a property from the historic register. Commissioner Dargitz asked whether the Planning Commission needed to follow these specific criteria or whether individual opinions could be provided. Mr. West and Mr. Forth responded stating that individual opinions could be offered as part of the review and discussion, however, any recommendation would need to include five affirmative votes of the Commission and should be based on information pertinent to the request. A motion was made by Commissioner Bosch, seconded by Commissioner Patterson, to recommend that the Historic District Modification involving 8009 Cox’s Drive be denied based on the findings contained Historic District Committee preliminary report dated July 14, 2016. Prior to voting on the motion, additional Planning Commission discussion occurred.

Commissioner Stoffer discussed the industrial zoning and land use designation of the property and asked whether future decisions concerning historic structures should include a review of the immediate zoning/future land patterns. Commissioner Stoffer also stated that he thought the structure would be better suited in another area of the city such as Celery Flats. Mr. West indicated the former District #6 Schoolhouse has been located at the site since 1927 and has been used for office purposes since the 1980s. Mr. West stated that zoning decisions and land use designations could consider the location of historic structures but should not be based on an individual structure, but rather the nature and character of the surrounding area. Mr. West stated this area of the city has long been characterized by industrial and office land uses including vacant land owned by Pfizer. Mr. Forth indicated that office uses are also allowed in the industrial zoning districts. Mr. West stated that an alternative to relocate the former District #6 Schoolhouse was being evaluated by the city, as well as possible private parties. Commissioner Shoup stated the structure does not look like other historic structures located at in the City of Portage (Celery Flats area) or in the City of Kalamazoo (Henderson Castle). Commissioner Shoup also stated that he believes the building has lost some of its historical significance [criteria (2) in the preliminary report] and the owner should be allowed to demolish the structure. Commissioner Dargitz disagreed and stated the building contains unique architecture from the 1920s and preservation is important since so little of Portage’s history still remains. Commissioner Stoffer stated he believes the structure should either be relocated to a more appropriate location with other historic structures, or the owner should be allowed to demolish the structure. Commissioners Patterson and Bosch stated that they believe the Commission is veering from their charge to provide a recommendation regarding whether or
not to demolish the building, based on the criteria set forth by state law for removal of a property from the historic register. Commissioner Bosch stated that personal opinions are fine, however, these opinions and the discussion should be based on the criteria set forth by state law to evaluate these types of requests. Commissioner Joshi expressed concerns regarding continued deterioration of the structure if the request to demolish is denied and if an alternative to relocate the structure does not happen. Mr. West stated the interior condition of the building was just recently discovered by the city based on a request to have the Building Inspector and Fire Marshal perform an inspection for purposes of a possible new tenant for the building. Mr. Forth stated that Building Maintenance standards are applicable to this building, same as any other building, and will need to be addressed by the property owner if the request to demolish the structure is denied by City Council.

Following additional discussion and role call vote: Bosch (yes) Schimmel (yes), Welch (yes), Stoffer (yes), Patterson (yes), Dargitz (yes), Shoup (no) and Joshi (yes), the motion to recommend that the Historic District Modification involving 8009 Cox’s Drive be denied based on the findings contained Historic District Committee preliminary report dated July 14, 2016 was approved 7-1.

STATEMENT OF CITIZENS:

None.

8:05 p.m.  - The Commission took a short recess.
8:10 p.m.  - The Commission reconvened the meeting in City Hall Conference Room No. 1

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Community Impact Projects Grant Fund – additional discussion. Mr. Forth referred the Commission to a supplemental August 4, 2016 staff report that discussed additional information and research prepared by staff and the City Attorney regarding a Community Enhancement/Neighborhood Improvement Grant Program proposed by Commissioner Dargitz. Mr. Forth summarized the additional information presented in the staff report, possible limitations and legal issues associated with a separately funded grant program and an alternative for Planning Commission consideration that would involve a CIP-funded project involving improvements on public property only. Mr. Forth stated this CIP project could act as a “placeholder” similar to the Local Street Calming Program and utilized when a project has been identified for funding. Mr. Forth indicated that projects could be submitted by any neighborhood resident or organization, evaluated and a recommendation for financing be provided to City Council. Mr. Forth stated the information prepared by Commissioner Dargitz could be incorporated into the CIP project profile that explains the program with a summary of the criteria used to evaluate each project for financing. Mr. Forth stated this information could also be used in outreach efforts undertaken in advance of the CIP on-line survey and CIP Open House held annually in September in order to ensure all residents of the city are aware of the program.

Chairman Welch stated the inherent constraints of a separately funded grant program along with legal concerns would seem to make the alternative suggested by staff a more viable option. Commissioner Dargitz stated she was not opposed to the alternative approach; however, was concerned with the limitation that projects could only be located on public property. Attorney Beach indicated that Michigan law prohibits the use of public funds for improvements on private property. Attorney Beach stated that he contacted the attorneys for the Cities of Novi and Holland, where similar grant programs have been created, and despite their legal advice, the programs were created. Attorney Beach indicated that since these grant programs involve a relatively small amount of money, the policy decision was made to accept any inherent risk with creating the program.

Commissioner Dargitz stated that any CIP based project would need to include active citizen participation in the planning, design and maintenance to ensure ownership is taken by the specific project. Commissioner Dargitz also stated that additional community outreach would need to occur early in the CIP project to inform and engage interested citizens, neighborhood and business groups. The Commission and staff next discussed issues associated with use of public dollars for improvements on private property, Michigan law, policy decisions made
by City Council and risk management evaluation. Mr. Forth discussed other CIP projects that have been undertaken to accomplish similar community enhancement goals such as sidewalk/trail extensions, traffic calming, neighborhood lighting and way-finding signage within the City Centre Area and Lake Centre Business Area.

After additional discussion, the Commission agreed to pursue an alternative CIP-funded “placeholder” project for Community Enhancement/Neighborhood Improvement project and discuss at an upcoming meeting. Mr. Forth stated additional information would be provided to the Commission at an upcoming meeting regarding the details of a CIP “placeholder” project, along with additional outreach efforts that could be accomplished (Portager newsletter, city web site, on-line survey, etc.) prior to the September CIP Open House.

ADJOURNMENT:

Chairman Welch and Commissioner Bosch indicated they would not be present at the August 18, 2016 meeting.

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Christopher Forth, AICP
Deputy Director of Planning, Development and Neighborhood Services
City of Portage, Michigan
Historic District Study Committee

Historic District Modification
District #6 Schoolhouse
8009 Cox’s Drive
Portage, Michigan 49002

Preliminary Report
July 14, 2016

Introduction

Property addressed as 8009 Cox’s Drive and commonly known as the District #6 Schoolhouse is a historic district in the City of Portage. A request from Mr. Michael Kasten, owner of the property under Kasten Investments LLC, to demolish the schoolhouse building on the 5.53-acre property was received by the Historic District Commission on May 23, 2016. The owner’s plan to demolish the historic structure would nullify the property’s historic designation, removing one of the 40 properties from the City of Portage roster.

On September 25, 2007, the Portage City Council appointed the Historic District Commission as a standing Historic District Study Committee (HDSC). The HDSC is charged with review and recommendation for the requested Historic District Modification at 8009 Cox’s Drive (District #6 Schoolhouse).

Alternatively, the owner has offered the building to the city at no cost, with the condition that the building be relocated from the property on Cox’s Drive.

The Charge of the Committee

The committee is charged with reviewing the request and acting as set out in Public Act 169 of 1970. Specifically, the HDSC must:

1. Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within the existing historic district.
2. Conduct basic research of the historic district and the historic resources located within the district.
3. Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within the historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the national register of historic places.
4. Prepare a preliminary report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
   a. The charge of the committee.
   b. The composition of the committee membership.
   c. The historic district studied.
   d. The boundaries for the historic district in writing and on maps.
   e. The history of the historic district.
f. The significance of the district as a whole, as well as a sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.

5. Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendation to the Portage Planning Commission, to the Michigan historical commission and to the state historic preservation review board.

6. Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public.

7. Hold a public hearing not less than 60 days after the transmittal of the preliminary report.

8. Following the public hearing, prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the Portage Planning Commission to the City Council. If the recommendation is to modify the historic district, the final report must include a draft of a proposed ordinance.

The Composition of Committee Membership

Voting Members

The HDSC is comprised of members of the Portage Historic District Commission: Suzanne Nemeth, Russell Randall, Katie VanLonkhuyzen, James Ebert, Fred Grunert, Jessie Duniphin, Martha Deming-Maytnier, John Lotz and Collin Forrest.

Non-Voting Participants
City of Portage Staff Liaison: Erica Eklov

Historic District Location

Property Address: 8007 Cox’s Drive (mailing address: 8009 Cox’s Drive)
Parcel ID# 00024-081-O

Written and Visual Boundaries of District

The description of the current historic district:

SEC 24-3-11 COM AT NW COR SEC 24, TH S 132 FT TO P.O.B., TH CONT S TO NW COR OF S ¾ OF W ¾ OF NW ¾ SEC 24, TH E 420 FT, TH N TO N LI OF SD SEC, TH W 120 FT TH S 137 FT, TH W 199.39 FT, TH N 5 FT, TH W 100.61 FT TO P.O.B., RES COX DR AND CENTRE AVE FOR ROW.

Aerial and parcel maps are attached to this report.

On June 9, 2016, Suzanne Nemeth, Katie VanLonkhuyzen and Martha Maytnier, along with Erica Eklov, visited the property to tour and photograph the historic resource. Photographs were taken of the structure proposed to be removed from the historic district, in context within surrounding buildings, neighboring parcels and the streetscape (see photographic attachments).

The property address for the entire parcel is 8007 Cox’s Drive (parent parcel). There are a total of five buildings on the property: the schoolhouse (currently designated office use), two utility sheds, one warehouse and one commercial office building. Only the schoolhouse is significant and historic. (The Schoolhouse has a mailing address of 8009 Cox’s Drive, while the second office building is addressed as 8007 Cox’s Drive.)
The History of the Historic District

"Known as Persing School, this was District #6 Schoolhouse built in 1927 by the Portage Schools. The brick building sit on the site of the earlier wooden schoolhouse, and is now used as a business office." (Taken from Where the Trails Crossed page 48.)

"The District #6 school is unique as it is a true reflection of the growth of education in Portage and represents an important transition in our community's educational history, a transition that saw Portage move from the one room school system to the consolidated public school system that we still utilize today.

Prior to 1927 this sight was occupied by the District #6 one-room school. A classic wooden framed structure, the school featured the a-typical bell tower to call students to class, boy's and girl's outdoor privy's and a small shed to house a horse used by the teacher. During the patriotic fervor of WWI, the 1918 class voted to name the school Pershing after the great World War I United States General John J. Pershing.

By 1925 exciting things were occurring within the Township. There was a steady growth of families moving into the community and an effort was underway to consolidate Portage Schools. Just three years earlier in 1922 Portage entered into a partnership with Western State's Teachers College - today's W.M.U., in which Portage would provide proper school buildings and equipment and Western would provide teachers. That same year a brand-new two story consolidated school opened in the center of the township. The old District #6 was pushing almost seventy years of age at this time and it was decided by the School Board that a new two room school should be built to continue with consolidation efforts and to better serve the growing student body. Always a frugal board, the one-room school was picked up and moved a bit to the east to accommodate the new two room building. In fact, the one-room would continue to be used for quite a few years as a school meeting hall until it was again picked up and moved, this time across Centre Avenue and converted into a private home.

The new #6 was an impressive, state of the art structure towering over the prairie of southeast Portage Township. Made of brick, it was much better insulated and therefore stayed warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. It featured a heating and electrical plant, modern classrooms, indoor bathrooms and the like all of which were designed to help raise the bar of education being received by Portage students. It also gave potential "investors" in the Township of Portage clear evidence that the Township was moving out of the past and into the future. The #6 two-room proudly served the students of Portage through the latter half of the "Roaring Twenties," was a beacon to students during the "Great Depression of the 1930's," did its patriotic duty during World War II and continued on into the economic boom of the 1950's. As the student population exploded (due to the Baby Boom after World War II) it was decided that a new, larger and more modern school was necessary. Once again the school board, being frugal, spared the old two-room by constructing the new elementary school further to the south along Cox's Drive. In fact, the old two-room continued to serve as classrooms until being permanently retired sometime in the early 1960's. The building was repurposed and used as a clothing redistribution center through the 1970's before sadly falling into a state of disrepair.
This should have been the inglorious end of the District #6 two-room however it was acquired and converted into a business in the 1980’s preserving it for future generations. It should be noted that despite the conversion of the interior, the exterior lines remain identical to what the structure looked like when constructed for the students of Portage almost ninety years ago.” (Taken from June 10, 2016 history researched and written by Portage District Library Local History Librarian Steve Rossio.)

The Significance of the District

Of the eight one-room schools that were constructed in Portage, five no longer exist; one has been moved and restored (#8 – Prairie Edge School now on display at Celery Flats Historical Area park); one has been moved and heavily altered with none of the original façade present (#2 school – 6235 Oakland Drive); one remains on the original site and has been converted into a private home (#7 school – 506 Bacon Avenue). Of the three "two room" school buildings (#5, #6 and #7) only Cox’s Drive school remains, the others (#5 and #7) have been demolished. Of the "public" buildings of Portage, buildings that show the transition from original farming community to the educational and economic core that Portage is today, only the Cox’s Drive structure remains.

Additional Information

On May 18, 2016 the City of Portage Building Inspector and Fire Marshal performed a walk through inspection of the building at 8009 Cox’s Drive (parent parcel 8007 Cox’s Drive). The purpose of the inspection was at the request of a potential tenant for a proposed change of occupancy (use) from a business to an assembly (church). The potential tenant and property owner were also in attendance during the inspection.

The results of the city building inspection indicated that the following items were found to be in need of correction/ modification (the list is not inclusive of other electrical, plumbing or mechanical items that may also be in need of repair):

1. The ceiling for the building was sagging in several areas and showed signs of water damage;
2. The foundation walls for the building showed signs of water leakage. In addition, a small room in the basement was once used as a cistern and now appears to have storm water from the adjacent parking lot entering through the exterior basement wall.
3. Mold was found in several areas of the building;
4. Accessibility for the building (handicap ramp) needs to be provided. In addition, barrier free rest rooms and fixtures need to be provided;
5. Proper handrails need to be installed on the stairways for the interior entryway and the basement;
6. Emergency lighting and exit signage needs to be installed throughout the building;
7. The cooking stove/oven (circa 1990) located in the basement needs to be removed or a proper ventilation hood needs to be installed.
In addition, the proposed use (church) wished to remove several of the interior walls to reconfigure the building layout. In doing so, signed and sealed plans from a State of Michigan registered architect or engineer would be required.

Recommendation

Following the study of the Historic District at 8009 Cox’s Drive, it is recommended that the request from property owner Mr. Michael Kasten (Kasten Investments, LLC) to modify the Historic District via demolition be denied. Of the 40 sites in the Portage Historic District, only four are schools; part of the original Portage Public Schools’ framework. Cox’s Drive is one of only three ever constructed 2-room schoolhouses in Portage and the only surviving one. By state law, the HDSC can only remove a property from the historic register if it has met one of three criteria:

1. The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled establishment of the district. – Cox’s school remains unaltered on the exterior.

2. The historic district was not significant in the way previously defined. – Its significance remains one of the original schools as mentioned above.

3. The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures. – This is not the case for any City of Portage site.

The Cox’s Drive School serves as the only original school constructed of brick and is notable for its unique architectural style. Portage Public School District demolished the 1922 Central Administration/Agricultural School building in 2014. The next oldest remaining “modern” school is dated 1949.

Next Steps

While relocation of a resource from its original location is not ideal, if relocation is a viable option, the HDSC will support such an action. The Portage City Administration has initiated evaluation for the potential of acquiring the resource; however, there is no evident need for the building currently. The HDSC is currently researching alternative options for preservation of the resource, including but not limited to: finding an outside interested third party willing to assist in relocation and assumption of the resource, the city assuming the resource and relocating the building to a city-owned property.
Study Committee Report
8009 Cox's Drive Photos
Front façade - looking east

Southwest corner - looking northeast
Rear (east) elevation – looking west

Northeast corner – looking southwest
North elevation – looking south

Northwest corner – looking southeast
Corner of Cox's Drive and East Centre Avenue (schoolhouse indicated)

View of rear elevation and lot from East Centre Avenue (looking west)
North View Cox's Drive

South View Cox's Drive
Front entry – upper level (south)

Front entry – upper level (north)
Bathroom on left, office on right.
North doors off upper level entry.
Middle entrance off upper level entry.
Upper level bathroom (northwest corner)

Office #1 (northeast corner)
Office #1 (looking west)

Office #1, bathroom (northwest inset) corner
Office #1 closet/side room (looking west)

Entry to Conference Room (looking south)
Southeast corner mud room

Conference Room (door to back mud room/entry – looking southeast)
Office #2 and closet (looking southwest)

View to Office #2 and front entryway (looking west)
Office #2 (looking southeast)

Office #2 Closet (original moldings)
Southwest corner room (looking south)

Front upper level entry (looking west)
cubby in upper right of photo

Interior of storage room (built-in wall)

Level entryway

Southwest storage room of upper
Original flooring in storage room

Interior of built-in cubby storage
Storage room interior - original door (looking east)

Storage room interior view to upper level entryway (looking north)
Basement hall (looking north)

Basement hall (looking south)
Basement exit to exterior in southeast corner (looking northwest)

Original basement doors and windows
Basement storage room #1 - south end

Original basement window - southeast
Central Basement Storage & Utility Room(s)

Basement Storage Room #2 – north end
View of Upper level floor supports

Central Basement Storage Room - access to electrical panel (looking south)
Central Basement Storage Room – Utility area and cistern access doorways (shower stall)
bathroom (looking north) – Central basement storage room
Bathroom (looking north)
Central Basement Storage Room

Water damage
Central Basement Storage Room
to basement hall (looking west)

Central Basement Storage Room - View

bathroom (sump pump in closet)

Central Basement Storage Room -
utility area
Central Basement Storage Room and

utility area
Central Basement Storage Room and
Basement kitchen – looking east

Basement kitchen – looking south
Looking west
Rear basement room off kitchen

Looking south
Rear basement room off kitchen
Lower level entry

Lower level entry – Looking west

Rear basement room off kitchen & rear

[Image of the lower level entry on the left and a rear basement room on the right]
MATERIALS TRANSMITTED
November 11, 2019

Berner Real Estate
4201 Romence Road
Portage, MI 49024

Dear Berner Real Estate

RE: 4415 East Milham Avenue (MLS # 19047880)

In 1990, the property at 4415 East Milham Avenue was placed on the City of Portage historic register in public recognition of its architectural integrity and/or historical significance. Enclosed is a copy of the Ordinance adopted by the Portage City Council, Chapter 38, creating the Portage Historic District and the Historic District Commission (HDC). The Ordinance is largely based on "The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation," as are most historic district ordinances in the State of Michigan and the entire country.

As you are the listing agency for the property, I thought it important to send confirmation of the property’s historic designation and the significance of disclosing this information to any potential buyer of the property. The Portage HDC wants to ensure potential buyers are aware that, prior to any change made either to the exterior of a structure or within the legal property boundaries of a historic site, the HDC must review and approve an application for a "Certificate of Appropriateness." The only exterior changes that do not require approval of the HDC are those which repair or replace existing features without changing the design, materials or colors.

The HDC consists of nine Portage residents, including property owners within the district, an architect, a realtor, an interior designer, a former builder and other historic-minded volunteers dedicated to the preservation of the city’s heritage. The HDC is committed to doing everything possible to help preserve and enhance the historic qualities of a property, including providing recommended material and design sources and local experts. The HDC meets monthly on the first Wednesday of each month, typically, at Portage City Hall at 8:15 a.m. Anyone is welcome to attend these meetings to share thoughts about a historic property or become familiarized with HDC procedures.

Please feel free to contact me at 329-4473 or muchak@portagemi.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Kyle Mucha
Zoning & Codes Administrator / HDC Staff Liaison
cc: Portage Historic District Commission
Good morning, Kyle.

The City Manager has requested that we decrease the number of Facebook pages that the city maintains and merge the ancillary pages into the main City of Portage Facebook page. The HDC Facebook page, with only 102 page likes and infrequent activity, can easily be merged into the city's main page. Unless you have concerns, we will begin the process to merge the HDC page with the City of Portage page in the coming days. This process may take a few days and will allow us to advise the current followers that all HDC activity can be viewed the city's page. These likes / followers will be carried over to the city's page as well.

When you have a need or wish to post something to Facebook concerning HDC activity / events, please provide me (with a cc: to Mary Ruple) with the information, along with any graphic files. We will post it to the city's Facebook page using the HDC branding.

Thanks much, and please let me know if you have any questions.

MB

Mary Beth Block
Communications Manager | City of Portage
7900 South Westnedge Avenue, Portage, Mi. 49002
o 269.329.4405 | f 269.324.9244
blockm@portagemi.gov | portagemi.gov
SHPO had no significant comments since these were mostly administrative, technical updates. The State Historic Preservation Review Board had no comments at their January 17 meeting. The Michigan Historical Commission doesn’t meet until February but they typically do not have any formal comments on study committee reports.

Amy L. Arnold
Preservation Planner

State Historic Preservation Office
Michigan Economic Development Corporation
300 N. Washington Square | Lansing, MI 48913
517-335-2729
Arnolda@michigan.gov

The State Historic Preservation Office has moved! We are now in the MEDC Building at 300 N. Washington Square in Lansing.

From: Kyle Mucha
Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2020 2:37 PM
To: Arnold, Amy (MSHDA)
Subject: Portage Historic District Modification

Afternoon Amy,

Are you able to provide preliminary comments from the January 17th meeting as it pertains to the City of Portage Historic District Modification?

Thank you,

Kyle Mucha
Zoning & Codes Administrator
7900 South Westnedge Ave
Portage, MI 49002
269.329.4473

CONFIDENTIALITY: Pursuant to the Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986, 18 U.S.C. Sec. 2510, et seq. (the "ECPA"), notice is given that the information or documents in this electronic message are legally privileged and confidential information, intended only for the use of the individual or entity to whom it is sent. If you are not the intended recipient, please be aware that any disclosure, distribution, use or copying of the contents of this message is prohibited. If you have received this message in error, notify the sender immediately by return mail or contact helpdesk@portagemi.gov and delete this message and any attachments from your system. Thank you.
This report is a technical update of the city’s historic district ordinance. We have no comment accept to remind the city that modifications and eliminations to local historic districts must follow the process set forth in Public Act 169 of 1970.

- Building relocation for 1324 W. Milham occurred in 1993.
- Boundary changes for 3812 West Milham in 2015, with the removal of 17 acres.
- 10234 East Shore Drive. Combination of 3 properties into one.