

## OAKLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

— DRAFT MINUTES —

### REGULAR MEETING FEBRUARY 1, 2022

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**Meeting called to order at 7:13 PM.**

**Roll call:** Jim Craft, Jerry Murphy, Stephanie Suszek, Rosie Richardson, Dave Decker.

Motion to approve minutes from December 7, 2021 meeting: Seconded by Richardson, **motion passed.**

#### **New Business**

Replacement for Melinda: still looking for new member candidates, particularly from southwest Oakland County. Decker might reach out to Ruth DuFresne and will provide Craft with contact info for Jackie Stamper and/or Jill Eastcott, so that he can contact at least one of them. Could try Jackie Coulter from Wixom and/or work with historical societies in South Lyon or Milford for new member leads. No one was nominated to fill Secretary/Treasurer role; try next month.

#### **Follow-up**

Were certificates of thanks sent to Melissa and Melinda (perhaps by Egbo)?

December 9 presentation to Board of Commissioners went well.

Richard to follow up with JoAnne Stringfellow re: archiving of OCHC minutes – keep on next meeting agenda as an open point.

Craft updated the library drop-off list and most booklet distribution has been completed; libraries remaining may include Brandon, Highland, Holly (unless Walls did this one?), and Southfield. Craft will continue to distribute.

#### **Committee Reports**

Will need to get an update on the meeting with Lisa Brown from Egbo, Walls, and Stamps.

**Website update from Decker:** Oakland County's Creative Operations Officer (Public Communications department) Pam Tremble stated the IT department will not let OCHC have an outside-hosted URL; we must be on oakgov.com. The County will assign us a content editor (TBD – because OCHC is not on org chart, it is unclear who that editor will be, but will probably be the same as for the Board of Commissioners). Pam is willing to meet with us and work to help us get our site updated. The County website will be migrating to a new Wordpress platform soon. Our URL is oakgov.com/historic and we can change or add anything after the "/" (so oakgov.com/historic/calendar or even oakgov.com/historicalcommission). Decker will contact Pam to set up a meeting with her, to also include Suszek, Craft, and our TBD content editor if possible

**Finding Guide update from Decker:** next History Coalition meeting will include a focus on developing finding aids. Decker has been working through this with the History Center's collections and will develop a template/survey for local historical societies to fill out.

**African-American History update from Richardson:** waiting on mayor to approve the Elizabeth Denison Forth street sign. Considering a gala or similar event to raise funds, as well as applying for small grants. History Center is reprinting one of the EDF biographies and perhaps proceeds from these book sales could be put towards this project, too. The ancestors of Diane Hays (on the Board of History Center) were the first African American people in Michigan; their stories could be part of another project, as well.

**Essay contest discussion (everyone):** broadly, this could involve coordinating with schools and local historical societies to design a research project that documents student experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Essay contest topic(s) will need to be formulated, but could include: how epidemics affected education and children in the past; compare/contrast pre-pandemic life and schooling with virtual learning and other pandemic-era adjustments; an oral history project with students conducting interviews and/or narrating. Prizes could include tablets, gift cards, and/or publication of the winning essays. Essay submissions could be part of a traveling exhibit. A "COVID kit" list of pandemic artifacts to collect (i.e., newspapers, masks, signage, and other ephemera) could be made available to local historical societies; these objects might inspire essay submissions and/or become part of an exhibit. Essay contest would be geared toward upper elementary, middle, and high school students, with different guidelines and maybe different writing prompts. **Richardson will draft an essay contest rubric for approval at March meeting.**

**Local History as American History update from Craft, Richardson, Suszek:** working on posters and Power Points that help convey the idea that Oakland County history is part of American History. Both projects ideally would be long-term, with posters and Power Points produced multiple times a year for several years, building a collection of resources. Additional funding from the County would be required to cover printing costs for posters (1 set of 50 posters printed every quarter for three years, rotated every three months between locations). Power Points will include recorded voice narratives; these presentations will be given to ISD so they can be accessible to teachers throughout the county. Craft put together a possible topics list that can inform the content of both posters and Power Points. **Craft to continue working on Arsenal of Democracy (aiming to debut at March OCHC meeting), Suszek – Rise of Leisure, Decker – Early Settlement, Richardson – Great Migration.** Goal: get at least one finished topic ready to prototype (poster for County approval, Power Point for ISD approval). Richardson also recommended using Local Access to promote these histories/these projects, Decker suggested YouTube. Richardson suggested centering Oakland County on each poster with each related American history point spread around it, flowchart-style. Make sure we're reaching out to teachers early on to make sure Power Points are something they will use – present them as a resource we're making available, that is brief and consistent with curriculum standards. Decker

and Craft discussed possible ways of approaching the topic of Early Settlement, as part of wave of migration from eastern states/Erie Canal history, as well as making connections to the War of 1812 (veterans, bounty lands), to Detroit, and to Lewis Cass and his creation of Oakland County as a showpiece during Michigan's Territorial era. Murphy recommended tying in early settlers, whose family names show up on roads, buildings, parks, and sites all over the county – this could encourage viewer interest in Power Points and posters and help them recognize the connections we're trying to make between local and American history (and how those things have shaped our area). Group also discussed ways to ensure teacher and student buy-in and interest; Decker pointed out History Center visitors engage with what they're seeing when it's directly related to them, their home, and their sense of place. Another potential Oakland/American topic was added to the list: Parkdale – Rochester and the Polio vaccine, currently the site of Pfizer; Decker noted that Rod Wilson and his wife have resources related to Parkdale and Polio vaccine.

**At risk properties update from Decker:** the **Pickering Farm (Franklin)** project might not succeed because the land purchaser has fallen through. Decker brought two new at-risk properties to the Commission's attention: **Warner Mansion (Farmington)** has serious structural issues requiring an estimated \$300,000 - \$500,000 to fix. If it is turned over to the City, it might be knocked down. As it is currently used as a museum, possibly could apply to SHPO for a grant for "interpretive displays" (which could be applied toward resolving the structural issues prior to display installation). Craft wondered if the City might implement a small tax increase to cover restoration. **McConnell House / American Legion (Pontiac)** is the second at-risk property, but outlook is much more promising. In the past, it was approved for a marker and the paperwork will be resubmitted. Goal is to get a historic marker installed and the property listed on the National Register. **For next agenda:** Besides connecting Ron Campbell to local orgs trying to protect these types of at-risk sites, **what else should we be doing as part of our historic preservation charge?** Suggestions made at this meeting included: putting preservation resources and a directory in the finding guides we develop, presenting a series of historic preservation workshops on specific topics like windows, lobbying for a history millage.

**Rochester School update from Murphy:** Rochester Community Schools admin building at University and Wilcox was built in 1889 with subsequent additions. A committee of 25 citizens met to decide whether to recommend it be renovated, sold, or knocked down. In April 2021, Board of Ed decided to sell; RFPs are due March 28, 2022. The citizens committee was pretty unanimous that the property be renovated and repurposed, but not demolished by purchaser. The building is already on the state register and committee is working to get it listed on the National Register, too. Tax breaks (~45%) are available to buyers who repurpose historic buildings (lofts, civic center, small business incubator are all options), which could give eventual purchaser added incentive not to knock down the building. Richardson pointed out that OCHC could likely find the RFP online to see what guidelines have been given to potential buyers.

**McMath-Hulbert Observatory update from Craft:** Craft and Murphy have connected Ron Campbell to the small group of amateur astronomers who are concerned with the observatory. Craft drafted a vision statement for this group with ideas for ways they can partner with other larger organizations to provide education programming at the observatory, if the current owner can be persuaded. Group could try to partner with Oakland County Parks to create programming (perhaps Egbo could help facilitate a connection?), as well as Mt. Kitts, U of M, or Cranbrook; it could become a gathering place for lots of Michigan-based astronomy societies and it could also accommodate general visitors. Perhaps give it a fun new name like Kinsler Astronomic Center and get grants for updated equipment (MacGregor or Kresge Foundations?) and give Kinsler an award for maintaining the facility, or even a dinner event and press coverage.

Motion to adjourn, seconded.

**Meeting adjourned at 9:00 PM.**