



24 August 2009

Attn: County Commissioner Smith, Chair, and County Commissioner Judge, Vice-Chair  
Ways and Means Committee, Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners

Dear Members of the Washtenaw Co. Board of Commissioners, Administrator Guenzel,

The Washtenaw County Historic District Commission (WCHDC) is serious about our Ordinance provision "to strengthen the local economy". Our intent extends to recent cooperative inter-agency efforts aimed, in part, at sustaining the Historic Preservation Plan element of the Washtenaw County Comprehensive Plan. We respectfully seek your support of these efforts, as explained further in this letter.

Specific actions of the County Board of Commissioners which not only will stabilize historic preservation in Washtenaw County, but also will maximize our contribution to local economic development include:

- (1) Passage of a millage under Act 88 provisions for economic development.
- (2) Engagement in local economic development through funded of activities and programs based on the historic resources of Washtenaw County and the status of the WCHDC as a unit of Certified Local Government (CLG).

The passage of an Act 88 millage will provide revenue essential for existing programs that have positive impact on uniquely local economic activities. For example, Heritage Driving Tours were developed under the sponsorship of the Washtenaw Historic District Commission. The Convention and Visitors Bureaus have valued these tours for promotion of tourism in Washtenaw County.

In addition, the local designation of historic resources provides tax credits to both commercial and individual property owners. These tax credits encourage work appropriate to their designated properties. Properties can only be locally designated with the continuing availability of the WCHDC as a Certified Local Government.

Few projects can match the attractive quality, character and employment opportunities that historic preservation offers. Washtenaw County is well-positioned to maximize these opportunities, having an established staffed HDC. Our work expands these opportunities. In fact, Manchester, Michigan, established a new historic preservation program under our auspices as a CLG. Recently, the new historic preservation program resulted in selection of historic Manchester by Rob Reiner as a filming location. Amid current statewide emphasis on attracting the film industry, Washtenaw County is ahead of the game.

Many communities have benefitted from participation in the “Main Street” Revitalization Program administered by State agencies. Participating communities are required to mount local marketing plans. For many communities, these marketing plans succeed using the best practices of historic preservation. Preservation values and methods can be utilized by any community as part of local revitalization. Public outreach sponsored by the WCHDC provides historic preservation information to those who can use it in their communities.

Historic preservation programs can also address economical rehabilitation of historic housing stock. Historic preservation has demonstrated positive effect on neighborhood stabilization and community property values. Many aspects of historical rehabilitation result in environmental benefits. The primarily rural jurisdiction of the Washtenaw County HDC reinforces farmland and farmstead preservation. Protected Historic District examples include the Gordon Hall estate and three local farmsteads.

At the Federal level, Historic Preservation is promoted by the U.S. Department of Interior and our National Park Service. The National Historic Preservation Program operates as a robust mission of the National Park Service. Many national parks exist primarily as historic resources among preserved natural resources. Along this federal model, Washtenaw Historic Preservation has affinity to County Parks and Recreation. With its own dedicated funding and a compatible conservation ethic, the WCHDC and County parks can benefit from sharing expertise and administrative efficiencies. Parks and Recreation can benefit from support for its historic resources such as Sharon Mills and Parker Mill. The WCHDC recently cooperated with Parks and Recreation, to install a historical marker concerning Native American trails at Parker Mill.

Unfathomed potential for promotion and economic development await actions of the County Board of Commissioners toward maintaining a vital County Historic Preservation Program with the WCHDC. In this respect, the appointed members of the WCHDC stand ready in service to our Mission, our Ordinance and Washtenaw County.

We urgently advise your support of an Act 88 millage to fund constituent-focused Washtenaw County Historic Preservation programs and to further local economic development activities based on our incomparable historic resources.

Sincerely,



Alice J. Ralph  
WCHDC Commissioner, on behalf of the WCHDC

(Please request from our qualified Staff liaison, Melissa Milton-Pung, the Washtenaw County Comprehensive Plan Historic Preservation element and other published documents about the benefits and opportunities of Washtenaw Historic Preservation.)