

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR
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MEMORANDUM

TO: Wesley Prater, Chair
Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners

THROUGH: Robert E. Guenzel
County Administrator

FROM: Anthony VanDerworp, Director
Department of Planning and Environment

DATE: March 16, 2005

RE: Resolution Authorizing the Appointment of a Historic District Study Committee to
evaluate the Othneil Gooding House for Historic District designation.

BOARD ACTION REQUESTED

York Township has requested that the Board of Commissioners accept jurisdiction over and create Historic District Study Committees for two properties: (1) the Othneil Gooding House; and (2) the Judd Road Bridge. The Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environmental Services has reviewed the available documentation for each proposed Historic District and recommended that the County only proceed with the Othneil Gooding House as a possible Historic District. Thus, the present Resolution requests the Board of Commissioners to adopt a Resolution appointing individuals recommended by the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission to a Study Committee to evaluate the Othneil Gooding House for Historic District designation.

BACKGROUND

Under Ordinance 115, the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners may establish one or more historic districts in cities, villages or townships where the local entity agrees to give jurisdiction over that historic district to the County.

Before establishment of a historic district, the Board of Commissioners shall appoint an historic district study committee. The committee shall contain a majority of persons who have a clearly demonstrated interest in or knowledge of historic preservation and contain representation from one or more duly organized local historic preservation organizations.

Upon receipt of the Study Committee Report, the Historic District Commission makes a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners regarding establishment of an historic district. If a district is approved by the Board of Commissioners, the Historic District Commission shall administer the historic districts (including review and approval of any proposed change to the size or features in the district).

The York Township Board has adopted a Resolution (Attachment A) and has executed a contract (Attachment B) requesting the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners to appoint a Historic District Study Committee to evaluate the following properties for possible Historic District designation:

The Othneil Gooding House, located at 95 W. Judd Road in York Township, consisting of a Greek Revival farmhouse, two barns and 2 acres of land with significant landscape features. The house was built by Othneil Gooding in 1850 and is featured in the 1874 Washtenaw County Atlas. A letter has been received from the owner requesting that the property be studied (Attachment C).

The Judd Road Bridge, owned by the Washtenaw County Road Commission, was built on property that Gooding granted via quit claim deed to the Toledo, Ann Arbor and Northern Railroad in February 9, 1872. A wooden bridge was built over the line in 1878 and the bridge survived until 1954, when it was destroyed in an accident. The current bridge was built in the same style and profile as the original, and reopened in May, 1954.

DISCUSSION

The current owner of the Gooding House and the Friends and Neighbors of the Judd Road Bridge approached York Township to have the above-described properties listed as historic districts. Under Michigan law, the County does not have original jurisdiction over historic districts located in other governmental entities. A County, may, however proceed with the historic district process if the local governmental entity where the proposed historic district is located, agrees to give the County jurisdiction over the proposed historic district. York Township approved a Resolution giving the County jurisdiction over the proposed historic districts and requesting that the Board of Commissioners establish a Study Committee.

The Township also provided a letter with supporting information for its request to the County (see Attachment D). As stated in the letter, the Township would like to see these properties preserved for the following reasons:

- Petition received by 241 residents to request the Township Board to preserve the Judd Road Bridge;
- Judd Road (between Platt and Moon Roads) has been designated in the Township Master Plan as a Special Corridor that has a recognized scenic character that should be protected;

- Preserving the bridge is consistent with the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan for Washtenaw County regarding preserving unique historic resources;
- Bridge replacement will result in the loss of over 200 trees, many of which are over 100 years old; and
- Residents feel that they are safer with the current bridge which acts as a traffic calmer.

The Road Commission has provided a letter in opposition to the historic designation of the Judd Road Bridge (see Attachment E). As stated in the letter, the Road Commission is opposed to a district designation for the bridge for the following reasons:

- The Road Commission has been working with the Township for several years to replace this structure;
- The bridge has both structural and functional deficiencies as evidenced by its 6-ton weight restriction, narrow width, lack of sufficient site distance and substandard railing;
- Any further delay in the project could result in additional safety concerns and the loss of federal and state funding for the project;
- The Road Commission has received, on two separate occasions, clearance from the State Historic Preservation Office; and
- Based on documented deficiencies and with the commitment of federal and state funding, a failure to address these concerns could result in future liability for the Road Commission.

Additional Considerations:

The Road Commission has stated that the bridge requires replacement due to structural and functional deficiencies and that funds are not currently available to replace the bridge as a one-lane facility. The Road Commission has held several meetings with the Township and residents to redesign the bridge to reduce community impact (see Attachment E) and has stated that failure to replace the bridge will result in closing the bridge.

The Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environmental Services reviewed the existing documentation to determine whether the house and/or the bridge should be designated as an historic district. After completing this review, County staff concluded that the Othneil Gooding House was a proper asset to be evaluated for possible Historic Designation. County staff, however, recommended against including the Judd Road bridge for evaluation as an Historic District because while preserving the bridge would further certain historic objectives of the comprehensive plan, the Plan also recommends “meeting the needs of safe travel while maintaining rural character through context sensitive design” (Transportation Recommendation 5.1). As noted above, the Road Commission has indicated that the bridge must be replaced for safety purposes and that there are no funds to build a one-lane bridge.

Given these considerations, the Board of Commissioners is only being asked to accept jurisdiction over and appoint a study committee for the Othneil Gooding house.

The Washtenaw County Historic District Commission recommends that the following individuals be appointed to the Othneil Gooding House Historic District Study Committee: Jack Valentine, Kay Merx, Susannah Olague, Tom Bennett and Jane Kartje of York Township. WCHDC Commissioners Jasper Pennington and Jean King, will serve as advisor and the County's Department of Planning and Environmental Services will provide staff for the WCHDC.

IMPACT ON HUMAN RESOURCES

Staff will need to review the property periodically.

IMPACT ON THE BUDGET

None

IMPACT ON INDIRECT COSTS

None

IMPACT ON OTHER COUNTY DEPARTMENTS OR OUTSIDE AGENCIES

Further delay in the bridge project could result in loss of federal and state funding for bridge replacement and could result in closing the bridge to vehicular traffic.

CONFORMITY TO COUNTY POLICIES

This request conforms with County Policy

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Resolution from York Township
- B. Contract between York Township and Washtenaw County
- C. Letter from Hugh McCann, owner of Othneil Gooding House
- D. Letter from Joe Zurawski supporting historic district designation.
- E. Letter from Anthony VanDerworp to Steve Puuri requesting input on the proposed district and response from Steve Puuri.
- F. Photos of current bridge, Gooding House, proposed replacement bridge and 2002 aerial photos

A RESOLUTION APPROVING THE APPOINTMENT OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE AS RECOMMENDED BY THE WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION FOR THE PURPOSE OF EVALUATING THE OTHNEIL GOODING HOUSE FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION

WASHTENAW COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

April 20, 2005

WHEREAS, the Othneil Gooding House located at 95 W. Judd Road in York Township has potential to be nominated as a historic district; and

WHEREAS, interested citizens approached York Township to have this property, as well as the Judd Road bridge, listed as historic districts; and

WHEREAS, York Township has passed a Resolution asking the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners through the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission to conduct this work on their behalf; and

WHEREAS, upon receiving the request from York Township, the County's Department of Planning and Environmental Services reviewed the existing documentation concerning both the Othneil Gooding House and the Judd Road Bridge to determine if either property should be evaluated as Historic Districts; and

WHEREAS, this review concluded that the Othneil Gooding House was a proper asset to be evaluated for possible Historic Designation; and

WHEREAS, the same review recommended against including the Judd Road Bridge as an asset to be evaluated for possible Historic Designation for the following reasons: 1) while preserving the bridge would further certain historic objectives of the comprehensive plan, there is also a need to ensure public safety; 2) the Road Commission has stated that the bridge requires replacement due to structural and functional deficiencies; and 3) funds are not currently available to replace the bridge as a one-lane facility; and

WHEREAS, under Michigan's Historic Districts Act (P.A. 169 of 1970, as amended in 1992), a historic district study committee must be established to evaluate the property and determine if it meets criteria to be included in a historic district; and

WHEREAS, under P.A. 169, the County Board of Commissioners has the authority to establish such a historic district committee; and

WHEREAS, as dictated by the law, the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission is presenting a list of nominees to serve on the Othneil Gooding Historic District Study Committee; and

WHEREAS, the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission recommends that the following individuals be appointed to the Othneil Gooding Historic District Study Committee: Jack Valentine, Kay Merx, Susannah Ologue, Tom Bennett and Jane Kartje

WHEREAS, the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission also recommends that WCHDC Commissioners Jasper Pennington and Jean King serve as advisors and that the County's Department of Planning and Environmental Services provide staff to the Committee.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners accepts jurisdiction from York Township over the historic district process for the Othneil Gooding house located at 95 W. Judd Road in York Township and hereby appoints the following individuals to the Othneil Gooding Historic District Study Committee to evaluate whether the Othneil Gooding house should be designated as an Historic District:

Jack Valentine
Kay Merx
Susannah Olague
Tom Bennett
Jane Kartje

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners hereby acknowledges that Jasper Pennington and Jean King will serve as advisors, and that the County's Department of Planning and Environmental Services will provide staff to the Committee.