

**Washtenaw County Historic District Commission**  
**STAFF REPORT**  
**February 2009**

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**1) CLG Grant Opportunity**

As initially discussed in the January meeting, one of the areas of preferred focus for these funds, as defined by the SHPO's office, is "projects that support cultural economic development, such as partnering with a community arts organization, space for an art center or activities supporting the performing arts." This Request for Proposals was included in the January board packets. As you will recall from our December meeting, we had initially decided against applying for funds this year, due to lack of staff time available for a grant project and cutbacks in the General Fund. Upon receiving this year's CLG grant announcement, it was clear to us that this new area of focus immediately presented an opportunity for implementation of goals outlined in Washtenaw County's Community Success Strategy and the Arts Alliance's Cultural Plan.

In response to this opportunity, staff sought project concepts that paired the support of an arts organization with a historic preservation project, and initially came up with three potentials:

- Riverside Arts Center A – bricks and mortar improvements to third floor for classroom space
- Riverside Arts Center B – partnership program with EMU Art Department to offer classes on site
- Arts Alliance Survey of Cultural Facilities – existing conditions assessment of all arts and cultural venues in the County, with a focus on those located in historic buildings (Kerrytown Concert House, State Theater, etc.)

Two of these ideas (Riverside Arts Center A & B) were discussed at the January HDC meeting, while the third was suggested when a potential local funding match was identified. Staff met personally with members of the SHPO's office in mid-January, and presented all three ideas equally. The Riverside Arts center concepts were not accepted, due to their past receipt of two CLG grants, more mature organizational position (no longer a start-up), the SHPO's desire to "use CLG dollars as seed money to leverage for future projects," and the desire to see discrete project outcomes instead of the partial funding of a larger project. The Arts Alliance/Cultural Facilities concept was received favorably, although the SHPO's office saw it as a much larger project that they doubted they could fund adequately without substantial (\$40-\$50k) local match (much larger than the standard 60/40 match for this grant). The Arts Alliance is unable to fund this size of a match at this time.

Given the small pool of money this year (\$90k statewide) the SHPO's interest is in helping seed projects which are compact and part of an incremental approach. After declining the ideas outlined above, the SHPO staff parceled out the Arts Alliance cultural facilities idea into a much smaller chunk. They asked if there was a specific building that could be focused upon within the Washtenaw County CLG area, and Staff mentioned that the Chelsea Center for the Arts. This organization is located in the historic former St. Mary's Parish School building in Chelsea, and is in desperate need of assessment and rehabilitation. Staff had met with Aubrey Thornton Martinson, their Executive Director, in April 2008, and did an extensive tour of the building as part of the historic preservation services offered to Washtenaw County local units of government. Martinson is strongly interested in caring for the building, but Chelsea Center for the Arts' major benefactor, Purple Rose Theater, is focused much more on programs than building improvements. This could be an opportunity to assist an arts-focused organization in the proper care and use of their historic building. Additionally, this could be an opportunity to build interest in historic preservation in Chelsea, as we have had difficulty in recent years developing a positive community feeling toward historic designation. The SHPO strongly encouraged us to apply for the CLG funds with this concept for the Chelsea Center for the Arts.

At this point, we have developed a working proposal for a Rehabilitation Master Plan and a National Register nomination, balanced with a substantial in-kind match from Chelsea Center from the Arts and volunteer assistance, and provided it to the SHPO's office. Staff looks forward to discussing this CLG grant proposal with the HDC at the next meeting, and requests the support of the HDC for this grant application.

**2) Gordon Hall**

Staff was invited to submit a letter of support for the Dexter Area Historical Society and Museum's application to the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Johanna Favrot Grant funds. The grant proposed the creation of a historic property rehabilitation plan for Gordon Hall, a critical next step in the appropriate care and maintenance of this local historic district. Staff worked with Caryl Burke of the grant writing committee to review a draft copy of the grant application, provided a letter of support, and also made phone calls of support to the National Trust Midwest Regional Office and their Michigan field representative in Lansing.

**3) Nanry House**

Per past staff reports and a letter of concern from Superior Township (2008), as well as the continued concerns of HDC Commissioners regarding this property's level of disrepair, this matter remains an issue of interest for the HDC. Staff has inquired with the property owner, Mrs. Davids, and her representatives regarding their interest in potential moth-balling of the structure, and obtained a bid from a local contractor for repairs. Thanks to an offer of inter-governmental cooperation by Superior Township, this matter is now being pursued by Bill McFarlane, Superior Township Clerk. This is an appropriate solution, as contact with the property owner will be managed by the most local unit of government.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Melissa Milton-Pung". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

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**Melissa Milton-Pung, Principal Preservation Planner  
Washtenaw County Department of Planning and Environment**