

City of Lathrup Village
Historic District Commission
Minutes of the May 18, 2022 meeting

Members Present: Dane Johnson, Secretary, HDC
Annette Kingsbury, Chair, HDC
Robin Roberts, Vice-Chair, HDC
Brigid Taylor, HDC

Members Absent: John Dunivant, HDC
Diane Weems, HDC

Others Present: Barb Kenez
Steve Blum, Surnow Company
Kelda London, acting City Clerk

Meeting was conducted in the Council Chamber.

Agenda Items:

1. Meeting was called to order at 3:10 pm by Chair Kingsbury.
2. Roll call was conducted, with each member present.
3. Approval of agenda: Motion by Roberts, second by Taylor, to approve the agenda. Motion passed unanimously with each member present stating their vote.
4. Approval of minutes: Motion by Taylor, second by Roberts, to approve the minutes of the June 29, 2021 meeting. Motion passed unanimously with each member present stating their vote.
5. Public Comment: None
6. New Business:
 - Kingsbury noted that the purpose of the HDC, as noted in the historic district ordinance, contains items that the board has not engaged in.
 - Roberts raised the topic of house tours based on the houses from the *Gateways to Happiness* book. She indicated that Ann Arbor has transparent signs showing historic images of houses. Could this be done in Lathrup to show how houses used to look? Kingsbury commented that it is quite expensive. Roberts further

noted that such signs would be in the right-of-way between the sidewalk and street, and that homeowners may not want such signs. Another drawback may be showing the outline of the floor plan of each house. This may be a security risk. Perhaps plans would not need to be included. There were many more images in the book than houses that were actually built, so all images would not be necessary. Perhaps a walking tour could be developed. Taylor questioned if the original 40 houses were too spread out for that. Roberts confirmed that they are spread out. Perhaps a grant could be applied for to pay for the signs. Kingsbury will check with Oakland County. Roberts indicated that the Historical Society cannot afford to pay for the signs. Johnson asked what the respective roles are of the Historic District Commission and the Historical Society. Perhaps Marjorie Yedlin or Karen Rousseaux could clarify the role that the Study Committee played in developing the Historic District Ordinance.

- Steve Blum was present to provide an update on Annie Lathrup School. He indicated the following:
 - Surnow has been a presence in Lathrup Village since 1978. Blum came to the company in 2019 and is currently Vice-President.
 - Sam and Max Surnow have developed more in the Village than any other developer and own most of the commercial property in the Octagon at the center of the city.
 - Lathrup Village and Birmingham are the primary bases for the company.
 - In Birmingham, the company has gotten more involved in the historic community. Blum pointed to the Post Office and Wachler Jewelry at Maple and Woodward as examples of their work on historic buildings. He also cited 550 Merrill Street, the old Birmingham Schools building; and 191 N. Chester, the old Church of Christ Scientist, which had been flagged for residential development by the City.
 - He stated that Surnow does not build and flip. They renovate and restore.
 - Leslie Paddock, Director of the Birmingham Historical Museum, provided Surnow with historic photographs of the company holdings, and new photographs were shot.
 - Birmingham won an award from the Michigan Historical Society.
 - Blum indicated that the Annie Lathrup School is a big puzzle to solve.
 - Surnow has a vision of a vibrant, walkable downtown for Lathrup Village, and thinks that is what the market wants.
 - Lathrup Village has “superpowers” that other communities do not have: street layout, proximity to I-696; stock of buildings. These should make it easy to leap over Royal Oak or Huntington Woods.
 - Regarding the residential potential of the school, a similar project was completed in Plymouth. Multi-family housing is being built in the area. Can the school be turned into residential use, with new housing around

it? Most developers want a blank slate, but Surnow will not pursue that approach.

- The north addition to the school is problematic structurally and in terms of design.
- Regarding the cessation of the Lathrup Academy project: T.R. Ahlstrom wanted to rival other schools. Surnow proposed a cost of approximately \$3 million for renovations. Ahlstrom was to raise the money, but fundraising was not successful. Working capital was needed but was just not there. It made no sense to move forward, and Surnow did not want to sell the building and lose control of its future. Ahlstrom ended up giving money that was raised to a Ukrainian church in Chicago.
- Kingsbury noted that Susie Stec had mentioned a residential proposal. Blum confirmed that a large residential developer from Minneapolis developed a plan, but the numbers did not work. It is difficult to make residential work in the school because of the architectural limitations. There is a smaller pool of people interested in living in such a setting in Lathrup Village. Houses must be priced right, and the numbers did not work.
- Surnow has begun to see the school as a civic centerpiece with housing built around it. Surnow would retain ownership of the building.
- Roberts indicated that Lowe's has a grant program for renovating schools. Kingsbury asked if that applied to schools privately owned. Roberts indicated that Federal tax credits could work if done properly. Blum has been in contact with some agencies but will introduce themselves to the Michigan SHPO.
- Roberts indicated that the SHPO must approve the plan to receive Michigan and/or Federal tax credits.
- Roberts asked about moving City Hall into the School. Blum indicated that if City Hall could work in the building, then this is a civic use that could include offices, police needs (some, maybe not all). Would a jail be onsite or separated?
- Surnow brought in Stantec, the number one architecture and planning company in the world, who have designed structures at Kettering University and Grand Valley State University, as well as Amazon, among others. They have been exploring the school for offices, public spaces, retail spaces, landscaped spaces, etc. They are exploring expansion and contraction of spaces for flexibility, as well as parking lots for events.
- Multi-family housing is in demand in Michigan and people want new homes in this area.
- Surnow is exploring up to 200 apartment units. VOGT conducted a marketing study and identified the numbers, finishes, and amenities that could work here. One goal is to edge out the Northland development of 1,000 units.

- In the Lathrup survey, interest in and acceptance of new housing was high. People preferred ownership, not rental, complemented by food and beverage options on the west side of Southfield Road, with crosswalks.
- Blum stated that the HDC would help determine the appearance.
- Kingsbury stated that this idea would work within the town plan.
- Blum stated the project would increase the density of the area. Buildings would perhaps be three stories with the appearance of townhouses, although development of actual townhouses would not be appropriate according to Blum. The question is how to weave the structures into the community and serve a population in which 60% are 65 years old or older, requiring elevators rather than walk-ups. The topic of archive space for the Historical Society was raised. In the short-term this could be part of flexible city space with room for some displays at special events.
- At the present time, it is not feasible to hold an open house in the school due to safety issues.
- Kingsbury raised the issue of the Southfield Road project and how the two projects would intersect. There has been discussion with the Oakland County Road Commission about ways to slow traffic. SEMCOG prioritizes what projects are on the list for development. If they think of Southfield Road as a high-speed road like Telegraph or Woodward, that is to our detriment. Trying to minimize stoplights, crosswalks, curb cuts, etc. would keep traffic moving by moving people out of the way. The proposed boulevard project would increase the traffic volume.
- Kingsbury stated that four or five years ago there was a community charrette resulting in overwhelming interest in the School as City Hall. There was also resistance because City Hall is paid for. Regardless, the City must act soon because of growing police department needs. Taylor asked if rent was the issue. Blum indicated the maintenance fee would be smaller and questioned if more space could be rented out.
- If the school became City Hall, the current City Hall would be razed and replaced with housing and parks.
- Johnson expressed concern about the architecture.
- Roberts stated that the HDC has oversight over the school but is not sure about the overall site. If the HDC has oversight of the land, then we will have a seat at the table for how the process moves forward.

7. Old Business and Tabled Items: None.

8. Other Matters for Discussion: None

9. Meeting was adjourned at 4:34 pm by Chair Kingsbury.