

OAKLAND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

— DRAFT MINUTES —

REGULAR MEETING APRIL 5, 2022

Meeting called to order at 7:03pm.

Roll call: Rich Stamps, Stephanie Suszek, Dave Walls, Dave Decker, Jim Craft, Jerry Murphy

Motion made by Jim to approve minutes from March 1, 2022, seconded by Dave, unanimously approved.

Old Business / Follow-up items

Replacement for Melinda Possible new OCHC member - Ruth Dufresne? She is interested, but Decker hasn't been able to connect with her yet. We'll keep her on the list. No volunteers yet for Treasurer; revisit next time. **Could JoAnn be the Treasurer? Stamps to ask.**

Certificates of thanks to Melissa and Melinda. Egbo is working on this; **Stamps will get them signed and delivered.**

Archiving of OCHC minutes - They are archived electronically - do we want them upload to our webpage? Yes, we want them up on our website. **Suszek to send JoAnn Stringfellow the previous month's meeting minutes after they are approved at monthly meeting.**

At risk properties - Decker has a list, and hopes to expand it at the April 25, 2022 meeting of the History Coalition. Coalition members to add properties that they know of to the list. Decker to 4/25 resend invite to Murphy and Suszek. Update from Murphy re: Rochester Schools Admin Building (early 1800s) – RFPs have been turned in by 3/28/22 but school staff are on spring break; Tiffany Dzurman of Rochester-Avon Historical Society reports that the legacy committee is not entirely committed to preservation of the building; the school district is less interested in historic preservation, but RAHS has picked up the cause. City of Rochester rejected the school's proposal (no preservation language) in favor of adopting a third proposal with HP language re-inserted. Uncertain how much of the historic school will be preserved. **Murphy to keep talking with Dzurman and will share info with OCHC.** OCHC can attend any public meetings that get scheduled. OCHC could investigate/ask RAHS history of the property, when first schoolhouse was built, etc.

Tax millage proposal, SB 653: Stamps spoke with Mike McGuiness. Charles H Wright and Detroit Historical Society are trying to follow the millage model of the DIA and Detroit Zoo. Oakland County contributes to that millage. Wright and DHS have hired a consultant – Eddie F. McDonald, EFM Associates, who was helpful in getting Zoo and DIA their millage – and have submitted Senate Bill 653, which has some challenges: Oakland County to be taxed to support Wright and DHS, McGuiness contacted them – we're in favor of a history millage, but Oakland

historical societies should be included and they are currently excluded in the bill. Also the 500,000 residents requirement is an issue. Millage has to be approved by OC BOC before it could go to Lansing. Oakland County millage goals: fund an eventual county museum and a “war chest” of funds/resources for historic preservation. Important that OC historical societies receive millage funding as municipalities start pulling funding from city historical societies. November is the new goal for the Oakland-Wayne County millage for Wright and DHS. Millage meeting starts right after the OC History Coalition meeting on 4/25/22 and will be a chance for Oakland County historical societies to learn about the millage process.

Committee reports

Visit to County records storage - Stamps made an appointment with JoAnn; met with Joel and Adam and Jake, toured a 1928 storage building Administration Annex (one of the oldest buildings in the center!). New records are stored in bankers boxes (approx. 38 in incoming area), they come from every County department. There are 38,000 boxes of records and every box has a barcode for organization. Joel knows what’s inside of them. Many are from Prosecutors Office, which are off-limits to us. Folders are color-coded (green for drugs, red for murder, etc.) and info is used by prosecutors office when examining cold cases. Court records include a 1912 case in which Eugene Smith purchased property in Farmington Hills, but a judge forced him off his land because he was Chinese. Potter’s field records include an Oakland County lynching of an African American man. Records purges include hundreds of boxes each year. Records repository is in the basement of 1200 building.

Meeting with Lisa Brown was a success with access to land records. Avenu Insight website was used to do digital management of land records. Oakland County shifted last year to Super Index on the Oakland County website and in the process lost access to the acreage reports housed on Avenu Insight, which go back to the 1820s. Decker spoke to Register of Deeds; Fred Miller runs the current index; the acreage reports are now available for free through the Super Index. Developers still have to pay to access records, but due to Decker, Egbo, and Walls’s efforts, researchers and historians can have access for free! Tract index may be compared to census and genealogical info about family, land purchases 1820s land patent records; tract index shows when settlers actually arrived – it can be earlier than the patent date. Tract index traces subsequent transactions, for example, speculators selling off parts of the property, which continues to change hands through history. Change in tax amounts can show when a house was built on a property.

Web site: Decker has reached out Haley (Oakland County) to set up a meeting within the next two weeks. We should mention that we want to archive our minutes on the website.

Parks and Rec meeting report from Egbo re: the observatory. **Leave on agenda for May meeting.**

Finding Guide update from Decker and Walls: we need to flesh it out for the website, once we find out who’s got what. This will be a History Coalition item.

African American history update from Richardson and Egbo: **leave on agenda for May meeting.**

Essay contest update from Richardson: **leave on agenda for May meeting.** (Rochester branch of the AAUW has just announced an essay contest for 8th graders!)

Local History as a subset of American History update from Craft, Richardson, and Suszek: Craft is working on a PowerPoint on the Arsenal of Democracy in Oakland County, and has a preliminary draft of the narrative, as well as slides and photos; editing it down to simplify. Wants to include Bloomfield's Bill Knudsen for his important role in the arsenal. Also leads to complicated narrative for high schoolers...Current holes in narrative: difficulty in finding housing after 1942 – in Oakland County, housing crisis might have resulted in trailer parks, a few in Pontiac and Royal Oak/Madison Heights, perhaps? Was there state legislation passed to regulate trailer parks, so that people weren't just parking on vacant lots, and so that they could have access to plumbing? Did businesses owning trailer parks have to pass health inspections? Access to county records could really be helpful for this research. Crystal Lake development in Pontiac (former housing projects) - Nov 1945 resolution passed by city to sell formerly housing land to a company for \$10k. Images indicate campers were parked there, possibly? Other Arsenal topics to include: manufacturing plants besides the main ones in Pontiac – small machine tools suppliers and specialty suppliers (flash bombs) – Skillman Library in Detroit has possibly useful records but is closed to the public. Craft still looking for examples of these smaller supplier places in Oakland County, E-flags. Are there ways to learn if Hispanic population grew during this period? Census and War Labor Department are not helpful. Bring draft posters to Coalition meeting (Suszek to give to Decker). Project is moving forward!

Report on the Oakland County Historical Resources meeting, proposal to join - Stamps and Decker participated via Zoom; Stamps contacted OCHR leader to ask about membership – one category is Associate Members (\$50), which OCHR can do – Jim moved and Walls second, motion passed – Stamps will follow up on our joining; OCHR group is small, Lake Orion Library and several others, but they are doing some good work digitizing.

Other Business

Stamps to request update to County Directory which lists OCHR members incorrectly

Idea for a History Coalition meeting: OCHR could sponsor a presentation by Decker on using acreage reports and other resources to show land research guide

Next meeting May 3, 2022, 7:00pm

Adjourned at 8:30pm