

City of Portage, Michigan Historic District Study Committee

Historic District Modification
2663 Mandigo (East “T”) Avenue
Portage, Michigan 49002

Preliminary Report July 12, 2017

Introduction

Property addressed as 2663 Mandigo Avenue (also known as 2663 East “T” Avenue) is a historic district in the City of Portage. A request from Kalamazoo County Treasurer Mary Balkema and current property owner of the property following a tax foreclosure, to demolish both homes and all outbuildings on the 7-acre property was received by the Historic District Commission on June 9, 2017. The owner’s plan to demolish the historic structure would nullify the property’s historic designation, removing one of the 40 properties from the City of Portage roster.

Authority

The Local History Districts Act, being Act 169 of 1970 as amended; the City of Portage City Council resolution dated September 25, 2007 designating the Historic District Commission as the standing Historic District Study Committee, pursuant to MCL 399.214.

The Charge of the Committee

The committee is charged with reviewing the request and acting as set out in Public Act 169 of 1970. Specifically, the HDSC must:

1. Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within the existing historic district.
2. Conduct basic research of the historic district and the historic resources located within the district.
3. Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within the historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the selection criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the national register of historic places.
4. Prepare a preliminary report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
 - a. The charge of the committee.
 - b. The composition of the committee membership.
 - c. The historic district studied.
 - d. The boundaries for the historic district in writing and on maps.
 - e. The history of the historic district.
 - f. The significance of the district as a whole, as well as a sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.
5. Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendation to the Portage Planning Commission, to the Michigan historical commission and to the state historic preservation review board.

6. Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public.
7. Hold a public hearing not less than 60 days after the transmittal of the preliminary report.
8. Following the public hearing, prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the Portage Planning Commission to the City Council. If the recommendation is to modify the historic district, the final report must include a draft of a proposed ordinance.

The Composition of Committee Membership

Voting Members

The HDSC is comprised of members of the Portage Historic District Commission: Katie VanLonkhuyzen, Suzanne Nemeth, Fred Grunert, Jessie Duniphin, Martha Deming Maytnier, Mike Barton, Dabney Dalton and Collin Forrest.

Non-Voting Participants

City of Portage Staff Liaison: Erica Eklov

Historic District Location

Property Address: 2663 Mandigo Avenue (also known at 2663 East “T” Avenue)

Parcel ID# 00035-145-A

Written and Visual Boundaries of District

The description of the current historic district:

SEC 35-3-11 BEG AT A PT 1810 FT W OF SE COR SEC 35, TH N 699.14 FT, TH S 66 DEG 52 MIN 51 SEC W TO A PT 448 FT N OF S SEC LI, TH S 448 FT TO S LI OF SEC 35, TH E 599.62 FT TO POB.

Aerial and parcel maps are attached to this report.

The property address for the entire parcel is 2663 Mandigo Avenue (parent parcel). There are a total of seven structures on the property: the 1865 two-story farmhouse and its associated detached single-car garage, corn crib, small barn, chicken coop, outhouse and root cellar, as well as a circa 1960 ranch house. The ranch house is not considered historic or contributing. The farmhouse property previously had a summer kitchen structure in the rear yard which caved in from demolition by neglect in 2014. (The farmhouse has a mailing address of 2731 Mandigo or East “T” Avenue, while the ranch house has a mailing address of 2663 Mandigo or East “T” Avenue.)

On June 10, 2017, Study Committee members Jessie Duniphin, Mike Barton, Martha Deming Maytnier and Collin Forrest, visited the property to tour and photograph the historic resource. Photographs were taken of the structures proposed to be removed from the historic district, in context within surrounding buildings, neighboring parcels and the streetscape (see photographic attachments). The Committee members found no visible evidence of water damage on the exterior of the roof of the farmhouse while walking its perimeter. Committee members were able to view the interior ceilings through the farmhouse’s windows, but it was unclear whether the state of the ceilings was a result of water damage or incomplete renovations. Committee members pulled back a section of vinyl siding and found the structure/wood underneath to be

sound and rot free. Sections of the stone foundation on the farmhouse were exhibiting missing or crumbling mortar joints in need of repair. A modern brick chimney on the exterior of the north elevation was also noted to be separating from the house; however, removal of this chimney would not be detrimental to the significance of the property.

The History of the Historic District

“A house was built on this site by Hiram Allen about 1860. It was enlarged and modified over the next 40 years, incorporating several architectural period features. There are numerous outbuildings, an old well, and a cobblestone ‘folly’ in the front yard. This was a Michigan Centennial Farm.”

(Taken from Where the Trails Crossed page 60.)

The Significance of the District

The 150-year-old farmhouse at 2663 Mandigo (East “T”) Avenue and adjacent outbuildings are historically significant to preserve per the above description. It is important to preserve the rural, natural setting of their location, especially in light of the Michigan Centennial Farm designation. This historic property, with its surviving rural outbuildings and layout, is a rare resource in the City of Portage’s suburban setting. It remains a visual and contextual reminder of the pastoral beginnings for what was once Portage Township. The proposed removal of this parcel from the historic district will have a significant contextual impact on the historic resources. Despite the long-term property neglect and evidence of hoarding, the Committee has reservations on the proposed total demolition. Of the 40 sites in the Portage Historic District, only eight still retain original accessory buildings; 2663 Mandigo is one of only two properties that retains its original “farmstead” layout reflecting daily rural living (i.e. chicken coop, corn crib, cellar, etc.) The 1960s ranch house is not historically significant.

Recommendation

Following the study of the Historic District at 2663 Mandigo Avenue, it is recommended that the request from property owner and Kalamazoo County Treasurer Mary Balkema to modify the Historic District via demolition be partially denied. The 1960s ranch house is a non-contributing resource and its demolition would not adversely affect the historic nature of the property. At present, demolition of the ranch house is approved.

By state law, the HDSC can only remove a property from the historic register if it has met one of three criteria:

(1) The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled establishment of the district.

- While the property suffers from maintenance neglect and the summer kitchen fell in 2014, the property largely remains unaltered on the exterior.

(2) The historic district is not significant in the way previously defined.

- Its significance remains one of the originals farmsteads as mentioned above.

(3) The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures.

- This is not the case for any City of Portage site.

Area Parcel Map



Aerial Map

2663 Mandigo Avenue

