



City of Rochester Hills
AGENDA SUMMARY
NON-FINANCIAL ITEMS

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Legislative File No: 2023-0513 V2

TO: Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Chris McLeod, Planning Manager, ext. 2572

DATE: December 4, 2023

SUBJECT: Request that City Council direct the Historic District Study Committee prepare a study and recommendation regarding the elimination of the locally designated historic district (a noncontiguous district that which regulates three (3) individual properties (previously one (1)), located at 1021 Harding Ave. (former address) - Parcel Numbers 15-15-327-016, 15-15-327-017 and 15-15-327-018, east of S. Livernois Road, north of Avon Road.

REQUEST: The Historic District Commission has requested that City Council direct the Historic District Study Committee prepare the appropriate studies and recommendation regarding the elimination of the locally designated historic district (a noncontiguous district that which regulates three (3) individual properties (previously one (1)), located at 1021 Harding Ave. (former address) - Parcel Numbers 15-15-327-016, 15-15-327-017 and 15-15-327-018, zoned single-family residential. The district (property) formerly included a farmhouse, barn and pumphouse.

BACKGROUND: The former Eureka Fruit Farm at 1021 Harding is an individual historic district that was designated by the City of Rochester Hills in 1978. The 1.8 acre property previously contained two contributing (historic) buildings, the house and barn, and two non-contributing buildings, a pumphouse and shed. The house was constructed in about 1865 and in 1870 Henry Ostrom established the Eureka Fruit Farm on the property. Ostrom appears to have retained the property until his death in 1913. Henry Ostrom was a successful berry farmer and introduced the custom of driving the berries to Detroit by team, avoiding “commission men” and selling direct to the consumer. Eighty-five berry pickers were employed at the farm at the height of the season.

The district is significant with events or persons significant in the history of Rochester Hills as it pertains to agriculture and the Eureka Fruit Farm. The house was the residence of the Ostrom family, who were the founders and operators of the Eureka Fruit Farm from its establishment in 1870 until at least 1910 and likely until 1913, when Henry Ostrom died. The barn dates from 1905, within the district’s period of significance.

The previous owner of 1021 Harding requested that City Council de-designate the property due to a significant fire in the house in 2017, stating that he was unable to make repairs to the house due to his lack of insurance at the time of the fire. Council directed the Historic Districts Study Committee to study the requested de-designation in December 2020. The study committee visited the property in January 2021, held the required public hearing, and in April 2021 adopted a final study committee report recommending against the de-designation as the property retained its original physical characteristics from when the property was designated. In [October 2021](#), City Council reviewed and declined the de-designation request, expressing a desire to maintain the historical character of the property while recognizing the current buildings on the site may not be structurally viable or salvageable.

After the City Council denial, the owner appeared before the Historic District Commission at their December 2021 meeting and was subsequently granted a Notice to Proceed with Demolition. Since the demolition, the approximate 2-acre property was split into three (3) separate parcels. The westernmost property has been sold and the current owner is seeking to construct a house on the property. As a

noncontiguous district property and with the main structures having been demolished, City Staff directed the new owner to the Historic District Commission to discuss the expectations for compliance with the City's Historic Districts Ordinance and review. At that meeting, the Historic Districts Commission made a motion to recommend to City Council that the property be considered for de-designation since the historic buildings and contributing elements of the property were no longer present onsite (see attached meeting minutes). The following summarized ordinance provisions provide requirements for this multi-step process:

- Chapter 118, Historical Preservation of the City's Code of Ordinances, identifies the process for establishment, modification or elimination of Historic Districts within the City.
 - Section 118-126 of the Ordinance establishes Council's authority to review such requests.
 - Sec. 118-126 Authority: The City Council may at any time establish by Ordinance additional historic districts, including proposed districts previously considered and rejected, may modify boundaries of an existing historic district or may eliminate an existing historic district.
 - The Ordinance establishes a standing Historic Districts Study Committee (HDSC) to review such requests and make recommendations to City Council. The Ordinance requires the initial request to be made to City Council and then City Council may refer it to the Study Committee for review.
 - Sec. 118-129, Initial determination and investigation: Upon receipt of a request to establish, modify or eliminate an historic district, the City Council, after making a determination that there are reasonable grounds for such a request, may refer the request to the Study Committee to conduct an investigation in accordance with this section.

If Council determines there are reasonable grounds for the request to delist and refers it to the Committee, the Ordinance outlines the process that must be followed. The process requires development of preliminary and final reports, a public hearing held by the HDSC, review of the report by the State and City's Planning Commission and a final recommendation to City Council. Before the HDSC can review the information, Council must refer it to them. Based on prior City Council discussions regarding delisting requests, the City Attorney has indicated that should Council consider the delisting, it must be forwarded to the City's Historic Districts Study Committee in conformance with the Ordinance.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that City Council refer the HDC's request to the Historic Districts Study Committee for review and that the Committee conduct a study to determine whether the three parcels (15-15-327-016, 15-15-327-017 and 15-15-327-018, formerly known as 1021 Harding Ave.), should be de-designated as noncontiguous historical properties and report back to Council with a complete report of their findings and recommendations.

APPROVALS:	SIGNATURE	DATE
Department Review		
Department Director		
Mayor		
City Clerk		

Contract Reviewed by City Attorney Yes N/A