

DRAFT PRELIMINARY REPORT
ROCHESTER HILLS HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE
EUREKA FRUIT FARM, (fka) 1021 HARDING ROAD
ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN
February 2024

CHARGE OF THE HISTORIC DISTRICTS STUDY COMMITTEE

The historic districts study committee was appointed by the Rochester Hills City Council on December 15, 1999, pursuant to the Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, Chapter 118, as amended in 2009. The study committee is a standing committee charged with conducting the duties and activities of a study committee on a continuing basis. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary study committee report for a proposed historic district. Study committee members serve two-year terms. A list of current committee members follows.

Pursuant to Chapter 118, Section 129, the City Council referred a request for elimination of the Eureka Fruit Farm, a single property historic district located at (fka) 1021 Harding Road to the Historic Districts Study Committee on December 4, 2023. The study committee is to make a recommendation back to Council as soon as possible.

STUDY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Janis Ferry is a nearly life-long Rochester Hills resident and recently retired from medical billing. She has worked with Arts and Apples, Paint Creek Center for Art, and her neighborhood Homeowners Association board. Her hobbies include painting and travel.

Julie Granthen is chairperson of the Historic Districts Study Committee and is also a member of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission. She has been a Rochester Hills resident for over fifty years. She grew up in the community and is a graduate of Adams High School, Oakland University (B.A. Economics and M.B.A.) and the University of Toledo (J.D.). She is a retired professor and attorney and serves on the Oakland University Alumni Board of Directors.

Bryan Lemanski moved to Rochester Hills from Clawson where he served on the Zoning Board. An engineer and attorney, Mr. Lemanski has been involved with the Michigan Intellectual Property Law Association and the University of Michigan Alumni Mentor-Mentee Program.

David McCracken is a Real Estate Investor/Property Manager who has lived in Rochester Hills for 8 years and is interested in the city's history. He also serves on the Green Space Advisory Board and is a board member of the Junior Chamber International Rochester Area.

Michael McGunn is a retired architect and has lived in Rochester Hills for 23 years. He previously served on the Zoning Board of Appeals and the Building Authority. He was treasurer of the Irish Genealogical Society of Michigan.

Jason Thompson is also Chairperson of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission. He has received a bachelor's degree in history from Oakland University, and a Master of Public Administration from Oakland University. His academic and work activities include a strong background in research and grant writing.

Charles Tischer is also a member of the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals. A native of the Rochester Hills area, he has a BA in Political Science/Public Policy from Western Michigan University. He is a Trustee of the Avondale Board of Education.

Kristine M. Kidorf, Kidorf Preservation Consulting, a 36 CFR 61 qualified architectural historian, assisted the study committee with their work.

INVENTORY

An initial survey was conducted by Avon Township (now Rochester Hills) in 1978, out of which the property at (fka) 1021 Harding Road was designated a local historic district. In 1993 and 1994, the staff members of the Rochester Hills Museum updated the photo documentation of properties previously designated. A photographic inventory of the district was conducted in 2002 as part of the *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*. Copies of the inventory forms are located at the Rochester Hills Planning Department, the Rochester Hills Museum, and the State Historic Preservation Office. After a severe house fire in 2017, at the owner's request, in December 2020, the Rochester Hills City Council directed the HDSC to study de-designation. As part of that process historic research and photographs were taken in January 2021. The recommendation of the HDSC in April 2021 was that the district did not meet the criteria for de-designation. Photographs were taken in January 2024 as part of the preparation of this report.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DISTRICT

The existing district consists of approximately 1.8 acres, consistent with the previous parcel (now 3 separate lots) located on the south side of Harding Road, about a half-mile east of Livernois Road. The north edge of the rectangular parcel rises above Harding Road but then gently slopes to the southern edge of the property. Several bushes and smaller evergreen trees are at the top of the embankment along the road. A gravel driveway enters the property from Harding Road and runs straight south. There is a cluster of large, mature trees at the northeast corner of the property, and scattered along the east and west sides. There are remnants of an orchard on the east side of the property towards the south. There is a small grassy area along the south edge of the property. Various types of fencing are placed randomly in the south half of the parcel. There are no buildings on the property.

COUNT OF HISTORIC AND NON-HISTORIC RESOURCES

There are currently no historic and no non-historic resources in the district after their removal due to fire. Zero percent of the resources contribute to the district.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Parcel ID 15-15-327-016, 017, and 018

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The existing district consists of three parcels that in total emulate the entire parcel that remained of the property historically associated with the house and barn that used to be on the property. The property boundaries are the same as in the 1938 Rural Property Inventory.

Across and to the west on Harding Road are houses that range from about 1910 to the 1950s and a church of an unknown date. Surrounding the property to the south is city owned open space.

HISTORY OF THE DISTRICT

The existing district is approximately 1.8-acres in size, the same size as the parcel that remained of an approximately forty-acre farmstead that straddled Harding Road. The house that previously existed on the property was constructed about 1865 according to the 2002 *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey*.

Henry Wellington Ostrom was born in Belleville, Ontario, Canada on March 17, 1828. He immigrated to the United States in 1867. According to the *Rochester Souvenir Directory* published in 1907 by W. H. Barnes, Ostrom established the Eureka Fruit Farm in 1870. The 1880 census lists Henry W. Ostrom and his wife Ellen. The 1880 farm census lists Henry as having 16 acres tilled, a farm valued at \$1,000 with \$50 of farming implements, and \$150 worth of livestock. He hired labor for four weeks in 1879 and had two horses, one milk cow, one calf, one pig, and eight chickens. The farm produced one hundred pounds of butter in 1879. In 1879 he farmed five acres of corn, eight acres of oats, and four acres of wheat. He produced one hundred bushels of potatoes in 1879. There were twenty-six bearing apple trees and nine bearing peach trees. The total value of produce sold in 1879 from the market garden was \$300 and the fifteen cords of wood sold were valued at forty-five dollars.

It is unknown what became of his first wife Ellen, but in October 1884 Henry at 50 years old married twenty-eight-year-old Louisa Ann Gottschatz of Canada. The 1900 census lists a daughter Ella born in 1883, so it is possible that Ellen died during or soon after childbirth. The five other children listed in the 1900 census are Lizzie (1885), Laura (1887), Lucy (1889), May (1891), and Wellington (1895). In the 1910 census only the younger three children, Lucy, May, and Wellington are shown as living at home.

The 1896 Oakland County Illustrated Atlas shows the property containing 42 acres on both the north and south side of Harding Road with a square about where the house is located. The 1908 atlas shows the same property with forty acres.

A historic photograph of an unknown date shows the previous house with a two-story barn in the background. In the photograph the house shows its original elements such as cornice brackets and decorative porch posts and brackets.



Photo 1 H.W. Ostrom house, Eureka Fruit Farm, unknown date, courtesy of former property owner, house and barn no longer extant

The 1907 *Rochester Souvenir Directory* published by W. M. Barnes states that the Eureka Fruit Farm had “twenty-four acres of bush berries with more varieties than any other farm in the township.” Ostrom drove his berries to Detroit using his own team and bringing his own cashier to sell directly to customers and avoiding the middleman. This procedure was reported to be new to the area and made the Eureka Fruit Farm more profitable.

A May 27, 1909 article in the *Detroit Free Press* reads, “Rochester - Henry W. Ostrom, a prosperous farmer. One mile south of here. Was kicked by a mule while feeding his stock. His right leg was broken. He is 81-years old and proprietor of the Eureka Fruit Farm.”

A February 2, 1910 article in the *Detroit Free Press* lists the farm for sale, although it is unknown whether it sold at that time. The ad reads: “FORTY-ACRE FARM for sale: the buildings cannot be built for cost of farm: pleasant, healthy location: nine-room brick house. Basement barn: three-fourths mile from Rochester schools, three-fourths mile from D.U.R.; good cement sand pit on farm. G.T. passing 20 rods from sand pit, southeast corner. For particulars address H. W. Ostrom, owner, Rochester, Mich.”

Henry W. Ostrom died at the age of 85 on April 26, 1913 in Avon Township after what appears to be a nearly two-month long illness. The cause of death was listed as chronic bronchitis. His daughter Ella testified to his personal information on the death certificate. He is buried in Rochester.

The 1925 Oakland County Atlas shows the same forty acres belonging to Isaac E. Boomer. A brief search for information on Mr. Boomer indicates that he lived in Highland Park, Michigan and was president of the Michigan Builders Supply Company. He was possibly behind the construction of the 1920s era houses on the north side of Harding Road. By the time of the 1938 Rural Property Inventory the now demolished house and barn were listed as a homesite with 1.8 acres owned by Mrs. W. W. Jersey. The house was listed as having been built in 1863 and

the site plan shows a front porch and a rear porch at the south end of the upright, as well as a glass enclosed porch at the south end of the rear ell. The east side porch was not shown. The house was listed as having a wood shingle roof, pine floors, and plaster interior walls with pine trim. The barn is listed as having been constructed in 1905 with dimensions of 60x24x12 with a concrete foundation, finished lumber exterior, and a wood shingle roof. The barn basement dimensions are noted as 60x24x8. It seems likely that the barn described in 1938 was the now demolished barn on the property.

The 1947 Oakland County Atlas appears to show the current property(s) as about 2.9 acres belonging to L. Smith, with the remainder of the original forty acres belonging to a variety of surrounding property owners. The part of the original property on the north side of Harding Avenue was subdivided into a number of small lots.

The Miller family purchased the property in 1974. In November 2017 the house suffered a significant fire. After the fire, the owners applied for a de-listing of the property and were denied in October of 2021. However, in December 2021, new owners of the property applied to the Rochester Hills Historic Districts Commission for a Notice to Proceed to demolish the house, barn, pumphouse, and storage shed on the property due to the poor condition of the structures. The Historic Districts Commission issued a Notice to Proceed for demolition of the four structures on December 9, 2021. In 2022 the remaining parcel was split into 3 separate vacant parcels.

CRITERIA FOR DISTRICT ELIMINATION

Pursuant to Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances, Chapter 118, as amended in 2009, and PA 169 of 1970 as amended, if considering elimination of a historic district, the study committee shall follow the procedures set forth in this division for issuing a preliminary report, holding a public hearing, and issuing a final report, but with the intent of showing one or more of the following:

- 1) Lost physical characteristics. The historic district has lost those physical characteristics that enabled establishment of the district; or
- 2) Insignificance. The historic district was not significant in a way previously defined; or
- 3) Defective procedure. The historic district was established pursuant to defective procedures. (Section 118-34, Rochester Hills Code of Ordinances)

Lost Physical Characteristics

The house at (fka) 1021 Harding Road suffered a fire in November 2017. The only outbuilding that was considered contributing was the barn which was possibly constructed in 1905. The pumphouse construction date was unknown and the storage shed was constructed on the property about 2002. In early 2022 all four buildings were demolished after the owner received a Notice to Proceed from the Historic Districts Commission.



Photo 2 1021 Harding from the 1978 Avon Township “Inventory of Historic Properties,” Rochester Hills Museum



Photo 3 Looking south at 1021 Harding, January 2021.



Photo 4 Looking southeast at 1021 Harding, January 2024

The National Register of Historic Places, through its document, *National Register Bulletin 16A*, discusses evaluating historic integrity.

“Historic integrity is the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property's prehistoric or historic period. Historic integrity is the composite of seven qualities:

- location
- design
- setting
- materials
- workmanship
- feeling
- association

Historic integrity enables a property to illustrate significant aspects of its past. For this reason, it is an important qualification for National Register listing. Not only must a property resemble its historic appearance, but it must also retain physical materials, design features, and aspects of construction dating from the period when it attained significance. The integrity of archeological resources is generally based on the degree to which remaining evidence can provide important information. All seven qualities do not need to be present for eligibility as long as the overall sense of past time and place is evident.”

The property at (fka) 1021 Harding derived its significance from the time of the establishment of the Eureka Fruit Farm in 1870 until when the Ostrom’s sold the property, either in 1910 when it was listed for sale, or at some point after Henry Ostrom’s death in 1913. The house and barn on the property contributed to the district.

Using the criteria above to judge historic integrity, the property no longer resembles its historic appearance and does not retain any of the physical materials, design features, or aspects of construction from the period of significance. Although the land remains in its original location and the setting has not significantly changed, the property no longer has its original historic buildings. The property no longer retains the characteristics of a late 19th century farmstead. Because all of the buildings in the district have been demolished, the district has lost its original physical characteristics from when it was designated. It no longer retains its historic integrity. The district qualifies for de-listing because it has lost its original physical characteristics from when it was designated.

Insignificance

In 1978, when the Avon Township Historic District Study Committee conducted their investigation of potential historic districts in the township, they had relatively little guidance. Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act, PA 169 of 1970, instructed study committees to conduct studies and research and make a written report on the cultural, social, economic, political, architectural, or historical significance of the property under consideration. The law did not specify how to go about this study, what the report should include, or what criteria should be used to evaluate historical significance. Furthermore, in the 1970s methods to identify and evaluate historic properties were less sophisticated than they are today.

A primary purpose of the 2002 Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey was to re-evaluate all of the properties that were designated in 1978. This was because the practice of historic preservation had progressed greatly since then and techniques for identifying and evaluating historic properties have advanced notably. Michigan's Local Historic Districts Act has been amended extensively. The 1992 amendments specify requirements for study committee reports in some detail and require study committees to be guided by the evaluation criteria for the National Register of Historic Places.

Rochester Hills' historic preservation ordinance has also undergone substantive amendment, in large part to follow state law. The original ordinance limited the local historic district to one hundred feet from the primary structure. This was amended in 1995 to include the entire parcel in the local historic district. Thus, it became necessary to evaluate all of the resources on each historic property. Finally, the former Avon Township had grown and changed tremendously since 1978. It was necessary to evaluate the historic districts within the context of the Rochester Hills of 2002.

After the 1992 amendments to Public Act 169 of 1970, and prior to 2002, Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended (PA 169) required that study committees "shall be guided by" the criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. In 2002, the State Historic Preservation Office, per Section 399.205 (3) of PA 169, adopted rules regarding local historic district designation that every study committee is required to follow. Those rules state that any local historic district—single or multiple resource—"shall follow" the criteria for listing in the national register. Any local historic district established between 1992 and 2002 was created under the "shall be guided by" requirement, which then existed in Public Act 169. Previous to the 2002 rules, PA 169 of 1970 allowed the local community more autonomy in determining what they considered to be historic and worthy of protection. Therefore, not meeting the national register criteria is not valid grounds to de-designate a single resource historic district designated before 2002.

The 2002 survey found that the Eureka Fruit Farm/1021 Harding Road was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places and this was reconfirmed in 2021 when studied for de-designation. National Register Criterion A was relevant to the designation of 1021 Harding Road, however, with the demolition of the house and barn that were on the property, it no longer conveys its association with Criterion A, or any of the other National Register Criteria.

The National Register Criteria

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

Agriculture is the central theme in the city's history and is its most significant pattern of events. Note that the events referred to in National Register Criterion A are not necessarily single events. As explained in *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*: "Criterion A recognizes properties associated with single events, such as the founding of a town, or with a pattern of events, repeated activities, or historic trends, such as the gradual rise of a port city's prominence in trade and commerce."¹ Further in the 2002 survey report evaluation standards are given in order for a former farm to meet the agricultural context. It states, "Domestic property types including single and multiple family houses may contribute to the agricultural theme when they are associated with other farm buildings or landscape features. A farmhouse alone is significant under the theme of agriculture only when it is associated with a farm of outstanding significance to the agricultural history of the township."²

The original study committee determined that the property contributed to the pattern of settlement and agriculture as the house was associated with the Eureka Fruit Farm, established in 1870, a significant farm in Avon Township. According to the 1978 Avon Township "Inventory of Historic Resources", the property as described in the 1907 Rochester Souvenir, "is the original bush berry farm of Avon Township, and was established thirty-seven (37) years ago by the present proprietor, H.W. Ostrom, who is now eighty years old. This farm has twenty-four acres devoted to bush berries and has more varieties than any other farm in the Township. Mr. Ostrom introduced the custom of driving berries to Detroit by team, avoiding commission men, carrying his own cashier and selling direct to consumer, and his enterprise, industry and thrift have built one of the most profitable berry farms in the state, with fine farm and home buildings, and every convenience for work, giving employment to eight-five pickers at the height of the season."

In summary, with the demolition of the house and barn historically associated with the property, it no longer conveys significance to the history of Rochester Hills. It is no longer eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

¹ National Park Service, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin 15 (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), 12.

² Jane Busch, *Rochester Hills Historic Districts Survey* (Rochester Hills: City of Rochester Hills, 2002), 26.

Defective Procedure

The procedures followed in establishing the Eureka Fruit Farm/1021 Harding Road Historic District were not defective. When the property was designated a local historic district in 1978, the Avon Township Board and Avon Township Study Committee correctly followed the procedures prescribed by state law at that time. The study committee adopted evaluation criteria, conducted an inventory, prepared inventory sheets on each property, prepared a preliminary and a final report, drafted an ordinance, and undertook the required transmittals and public hearing. Of the several hundred properties that the study committee inventoried, sixty-five were recommended for local historic district designation. The Avon Township Board designated thirty-one of these as non-contiguous historic districts each containing one building and the remainder as part of the Stoney Creek and Winkler Mill Pond Historic Districts.

The historic districts ordinance that Avon Township adopted in 1978 limited a non-contiguous district to the designated structure on the property and the area within one hundred feet from that structure (or to the property line if that was less than one hundred feet away). In 1995, the city of Rochester Hills amended their ordinance to include the entire parcel with all of its historic and non-historic resources.³ This was done to comply with the changes in state law.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study committee report suggests that the property at (fka) 1021 Harding Road should no longer be designated as a local historic district. The original study committee report understood the significance of Henry W. Ostrom and the Eureka Fruit Farm to Avon Township and its agricultural history, but with the demolition of all of the buildings associated with the Eureka Fruit Farm, the property no longer retains its historic integrity and does not convey its historic appearance, workmanship, setting, or feeling. The district qualifies for de-listing because it has lost its original physical characteristics from when it was designated.

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³ Rochester Hills Historic Districts Study Committee. "Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report, Demay-Potere Farm Historic District, Rochester Hills, Michigan" no date, p. 13.

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DISTRICT MAP

**EUREKA FRUIT FARM/1021 HARDING ROAD
EXISTING DISTRICT MAP**



ROCHESTER HILLS, OAKLAND COUNTY

— = EXISTING DISTRICT BOUNDARY

— = 60'



PHOTOGRAPHS OF EXISTING DISTRICT



1-Looking southwest at driveway and gate at 1021 Harding Road, January 2024



2-Looking southeast at former location of house, January 2024



3-Looking south at former location of barn, January 2024



4-Looking east at property, January 2024



5-Looking southeast at overview of property, January 2024