



# Memorandum

**TO:** City of Grosse Pointe Planning Commission

**FROM:** Julie Connochie, AICP  
Stephanie Peña

**SUBJECT:** Consideration of Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report Adopted February 15, 2021

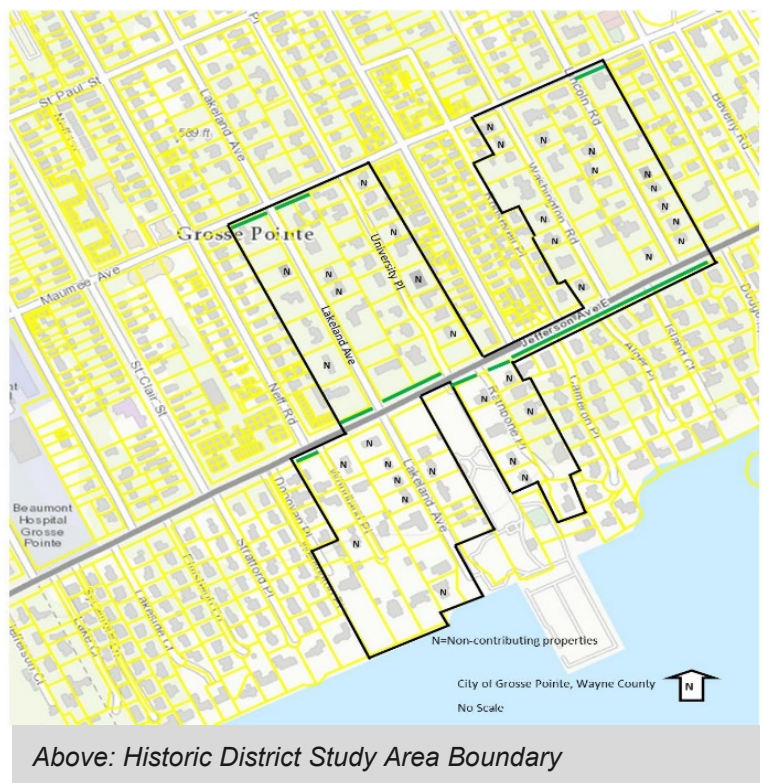
**DATE:** March 12, 2021

In accordance with the *Local Historic Districts Act 169 of 1970*, on February 16, 2021 the Planning Commission of the City of Grosse Pointe received the adopted preliminary historic district report unanimously approved by the Historic District Study Committee the previous day. The preliminary report designated a subset of the study area set by City Council to be eligible for consideration as a historic district. This finding and the supporting background contained in the preliminary report was also transmitted to various state agencies and made available to the public, as required. The purpose of the stage of the review process is to obtain public and technical review comments to help inform the Historic District Study Committee before it makes a recommendation to City Council as to whether to create a historic district within the study area.

At the March 15, 2021 Planning Commission meeting, the Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report will be reviewed, per the state law. No formal action is required, but the Planning Commission may make recommendations to the Historic District Study Committee for consideration. While there is no set standard or limit for the scope of Planning Commission reviews, it is common at this stage for a Planning Commission to consider whether a potential historic district conforms with the goals of the City’s Master Plan, in particular, the land use policies and objectives included therein. The following memorandum provides a brief overview of the findings of the Preliminary Report and its consistency with the Grosse Pointe Master Plan.

## PRELIMINARY HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT SUMMARY

Pursuant to *Act 169 of 1970*, the City Council-appointed Historic District Study Committee was tasked with analyzing the





implementation of a potential Grosse Pointe Estate Historic District in a swath of land roughly bounded by Elmsleigh Place to the west, Maumee Avenue to the north, Lincoln Lane to the east, and the waterfront to the south. The boundary preliminarily proposed by the Historic District Study Committee is shown in the map above. The proposed district encompasses parcels of land zoned R-1A (Single-Family Residential) and ER (Estate Residential) that are unique districts consisting of larger homes and lots, built between 1898 and 1940. As designated by PA 169 of 1970 and Michigan's State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the proposed historic district must contain significant historic resources that can include buildings, structures, or objects to be designated a local historic district.

To evaluate the significance and worthiness of a historic district designation, PA 169 of 1970 and SHPO point to the following National Register of Historic Places 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.*
- B. *That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or*
- C. *That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possesses high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.*

The Historic District Study Committee issued a Preliminary Report of its findings and adopted that report on February 15, 2021. In that report, the Committee found the proposed area to meet all criteria due to its role in the development and expansion of both the City of Grosse Pointe and the City of Detroit (Criteria A & B) and its association with prominent architects and the architectural styles represented by the homes within the proposed historic district (Criterion C).

## **RELATIONSHIP TO THE GROSSE POINTE MASTER PLAN**

We have reviewed the City's Master Plan for consistency with the proposed historic district and offer the following comments. The following sections of the Master Plan, taken in order, specifically relate to the proposed district:

### **Chapter 3 – Community Goals and Objectives**

- *“Encourage the preservation of the remaining stately residences of the City by developing specific zoning regulations for larger lots and larger buildings in specific areas of the City” (Residential Objective #3, pg. 30).*
- *“Develop a scoring system for new residential construction or significant modifications to ensure that designs are compatible with the traditional character of the community. Higher scores will be awarded to traditional styles of architecture, recessed or detached garages, quality building materials, etc.” (Residential Objective #9, pg. 30).*

Both of these objectives relate to the creation of additional design standards to preserve the historic character of Grosse Pointe's neighborhoods and ensure that new construction will fit seamlessly into the neighborhood fabric. Establishing a historic district is one way to implement such standards, though the City has other options (zoning, design guidelines) for doing so.

- *“Continue to administer housing stock maintenance programs including a property maintenance code, code enforcement upon transfer or sale, landlord licensing, and assisted housing rehabilitation” (Residential Objective #7, pg. 30).*



Historic districts may facilitate access to tax incentive opportunities for homeowners who conduct the rehabilitation and preservation of historic structures within historic districts, supporting this objective.

#### **Chapter 4 – Future Land Use Plan and Policies**

- *“The intent of this [ER] district is to encourage reinvestment in these beautiful homes rather than facilitate their demolition by allowing the lots to be divided” (pg. 38).*

Implementation of a historic district would help encourage reinvestment in the historic homes in the ER district, which is included within the proposed district boundaries. Historic preservation is a stronger tool than zoning for preventing detrimental alterations or demolition of these important historic resources in the future.

- *“Unfortunately, there are a number of trends in the housing industry that threaten the traditional character of the community. (pg. 39)”*

The establishment of a Historic District would assist in addressing this issue by restricting modifications and/or requiring Historic District Commission review to ensure proposed changes are consistent with historic architecture. Residential Development Policies within the Master Plan intend to guide future development away from modern trends that ultimately devalue the surrounding historic features of Grosse Pointe, which is also consistent with a historic district approach.

- *“Residential design standards, lot coverage requirements, accessory structure provisions, and more flexible zoning regulations are a few of the tools that should continue to be used to encourage reinvestment and compatibility” (pg. 39).*

This item is similar to the residential objectives discussed in the preceding section. The City has implemented many of these zoning standards, but the ordinance is still lacking in its ability to regulate design, materials, scale, and compatibility of new residential structures. Establishing historic design guidelines and criteria for review would help further this policy.

#### **Chapter 7 – Implementation Plan**

Finally, the creation of new residential zoning and design standards is identified as a high-priority item in the Master Plan Implementation Plan (pg. 62). While many zoning changes have been implemented, true design standards have not been adopted.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Planning Commission must review, but is not required, to take action on the Preliminary Report. However, there are several actions the Commission may take:

1. Review the report and defer to the Historic District Study Committee to present its recommendation in a final report to City Council following the April 20, 2021 public hearing.
2. Review the report and find that it is consistent with the Master Plan and share the Planning Commission’s assessment of that topic with the Historic District Study Committee.
3. Review the report and share with the Historic District Study Committee the Planning Commission’s assessment on technical matters such as issues with the potential district boundaries, the level of historic data contained in the report, or the overall direction of the preliminary report to create a historic district.

We will be present at the March 15, 2021 Planning Commission meeting to address any questions or concerns.