State Historic Preservation Office  
Michigan State Housing Development Authority  

Staff Comments, November 17, 2014  
Carriage Town Local Historic District Boundary Modification, Flint

The report is based on an inaccurate understanding of the authority of the historic district study committee. It is not the study committee’s role to modify existing district boundaries in order to allow the demolition of resources. Requests for demolition within an established local historic district must go to the historic district commission. State law gives the commission the authority to either grant a notice to proceed or to reject the proposed demolitions. We are not saying that Carriage Town historic district may not benefit from modification of the district boundaries. However, the district should be reviewed as a whole and reasonable boundaries developed based on history, significance, and integrity, not on proposed use or development intent.

It is unclear why the study committee conducted interviews with members of the community on proposed plans or uses for the resources within the area under study. This is not the study committee’s role. Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended includes a public hearing in the local historic district study process to provide an avenue for public input. The study committee’s role is to document the history and significance of the district and to assess the integrity of the resources in it based on the National Register criteria. *National Park Service Bulletin 15: Defining Boundaries for National Register Historic Districts* states “Selection of boundaries is a judgement based on the nature of the properties significance, integrity, and physical setting.” The bulletin also states that owner objection should not affect the identification of the boundaries. The study committee must base its decisions on the history, significance, and integrity of resources and not on proposed use, rehabilitation costs, financial feasibility of rehabilitation, SEV value, etc. As written, the report provides almost no discussion of the history or integrity of the 58 resources said to be in the study area. Therefore, in our opinion, this report does not meet the requirements set forth in Section 299.203 of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended.

There is no discussion in the report of the history and significance of the Native American site that was discovered in the Stone Street area. This site should be reviewed using the National Register Criteria including Criterion D: Information Potential. Retention of the current district boundaries to protect this site might be an outcome of such a review.

The map included in the report is not adequate. The street names are too small to be readable. The map should include the current district boundary depicted by a heavy, dark line. The proposed boundary change should be included on the same map in by a dashed line. The map should include lot lines and should show vacant lots, contributing, and non-contributing buildings. The map should include the name of the district, city, county, date and a north arrow.

The report should include photographs of streetscapes and of individual buildings within the area to give the reader an understanding of the types of buildings that are in the district and their integrity.
Carriage Town Historic District Review Committee
Preliminary Report

Carriage Town Historic District Review Committee

Report of Aug 22nd, 2014

Mr. Darnell Earley,
Emergency Manager,
City of Flint
1101 S. Saginaw St.
Flint, MI 48502

Aug 22nd, 2014

Dear Mr. Earley,

In August of 2013, you finalized the selection of five people to undertake a review of the western boundary of the Carriage Town Historic District. The individuals were named to the committee and we began meeting, generally on a set Thursday at noon at the Good Beans Café. The meetings were very informal and discussions were open and frank. We all came to the table with an open mind and we became familiar with the short-term history that got us to the point of having had to make a decision here.

The particular area under review is that section of the Carriage Town Historic District that lies west of Grand Traverse from 5th Ave in front of Hurley Hospital down to the Flint River and encompassing Atwood Stadium and the ill-fated Stone St Redevelopment Area were an ancient woodlands burial site was rediscovered during initial excavations for new housing. This ancient cemetery predates the arrival of the Saginaw Chippewa’s and remains have been dated from 600 to 1600 years old.

Carriage Town has undergone significant redevelopment as a result of Federal stimulus dollars being invested in the area. The Genesee County Land Bank has overseen the rehabbing of 17 single-family homes and 2 multi-family units. All of the houses have been sold to private homeowners and the multi-family units have been consistently rented.

We came together to review the opinions of stakeholders, look at relevant information and make our recommendation.

The majority of the committee believes the western boundary of the historic district should be moved east 2 blocks from its current location on Begole St. to Grand Traverse. The western boundary would continue south along Grand Traverse to the intersection of Grand Traverse and the Flint River.

Here are our findings.

Sincerely,

Tim Monahan
Myron Shelton
Sally Jaeger
John Bourbeau

Heather Burnash

Carriage Town Historic District Boundary Review Committee
Executive Summary:

From September 2013 through April 2014, the Carriage Town Historic District Boundary Review Committee met informally at the Good Beans Café for the purpose of interviewing key persons that reside in or are involved with the redevelopment of the Carriage Town Neighborhood, the University Ave corridor, Hurley Hospital and Atwood Stadium. Mr. Michael Brown acting as the City of Flint’s Emergency Manager appointed the committee. The committee’s objective was to develop recommendations that it believed would lead to improving the conditions of a very unstable and quickly deteriorating area of housing, vacant lots and a few commercial properties. The recommendations of this committee are reflective of a majority of the group. Ms. Heather Burnash strongly opposes moving the boundary.

A summary of these recommendations is as follows:

- The City of Flint should actively enforce Historic District Ordinances and support Historic District Redevelopment for the purpose of retaining that part of history not already lost.

- Move the western Carriage Town Historic District boundary off of Begole to Grand Traverse removing 10 blocks from the current historic district.

- With the removal of these mostly vacant blocks, The City of Flint should then assess whether the (new) Carriage Town Historic District now meets the criteria of having enough of the original housing stock to qualify as a federally recognized historic district.
• The City of Flint should allow Hurley Hospital to remove the 8 residential houses they own in the area that has been removed from the historic district for the purpose of stability and public safety.

• The City of Flint should work with Kettering University, which now owns Atwood Stadium, to quickly allow for the removal of several vacant structures around Atwood Stadium for the purpose of stability and public safety.

Overview:

The Carriage Town Historic District was created by the City of Flint Ordinance 2707 which was passed in April of 1979. It currently encompasses all of the area north of the Flint River to 5th Ave from Saginaw St on the east to Begole St and Atwood Stadium on the west. Although mostly a residential area, Carriage Town also plays host to Genesee Health Systems (formally Community Mental Health), Carriage Town Ministries, a Christian based shelter and residential housing program, and the Catholic Charities offices. It also has a small but robust shopping area consisting of Hoffman’s Antique Store and DecoDeli, Nic’s Consignment Emporium, Voght’s Flower Shop and La Familia Mexican Restaurant.

The Intersection of University Ave and Grand Traverse consist of a party store, gas station, dry cleaners and a hair stylist establishment. Carriage Town Ministries has taken control of the old Hamady’s lot on the northeast corner and turned it into a nice green space with benches and trees. Kettering has removed an old gas station on the southeast corner and created more green space.

The area we have been asked to review is that section of the district that lies west of Grand Traverse St. from the Hurley frontage on 5th Ave. down to the Flint River, including Atwood Stadium.
The City of Flint created the historic district in its Code of Ordinances, Specifically ARTICLE XIX. HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION and it is here that the current Carriage Town Historic District boundaries can be found:

Carriage Town: The area bounded by a line beginning at the point created by the intersection of the center line of the Flint River and the easterly row line of N. Harrison Street, then north along the easterly N. Harrison Street row line until it intersects the easterly row line of N. Saginaw Street, then north along the N. Saginaw Street row line until it intersects the northerly row line of E. Fifth Avenue, then west along the E. Fifth Avenue row line until it intersects the northerly row line of W. Fifth Avenue; then west along the W. Fifth Avenue row until it intersects the westerly row line of Begole Street, then south along the Begole Street row line until it intersects the northerly row line of W. Third Avenue, then west along the W. Third Avenue row line until it intersects the westerly row line of Prospect Street, then south along the Prospect Street row line extended until it intersects the center line of the Flint River, then east along the Flint River center line to the point of beginning (POB).
Geographically, Carriage Town is the point of origin for Flint, Michigan. The platted “Village of Grand Traverse” was incorporated in 1837 and included the entire present Carriage Town neighborhood but the original northern boundary went to 7th Ave instead of stopping at 5th Ave. The western boundary of the village was Stone St and the current historic district western boundary is Begole St and includes Atwood Stadium. Carriage Town was historically a “walk to work” neighborhood where the workers at the carriage factories along Water St. lived in the neighborhood and walked down to the river factories that produced most of the nations horse-drawn carriages.

The area to the south of the Flint River was the platted Village of Sydney and was also incorporated in the 1830’s. The City of Flint was incorporated in 1855 and included both the villages of Sydney and Grand Traverse.

The Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association (CTHNA) was formed in 1982 as an attempt by local preservationist and local business people to prevent the further decay of historic assets located in the neighborhood. CTHNA was incorporated in 1984 and received 501c3 tax-exempt status in 1991.

The area bought into question for this committee to review was specifically the western boundary. As it stands now, that boundary starts at intersection of Begole and 5th Ave and runs south on Begole to University Ave where it turns west in front of Atwood Stadium to Prospect St and then south along Prospect until it intersects the Flint River. Although Prospect itself does not go to the river, the line is understood. This jog in the western boundary was done to include Atwood Stadium in the current Carriage Town Historic District.

The committee was asked to review and make a recommendation on this western boundary. To do so, the recent history of the area needs to be
discussed. The area we are looking at is all of the Carriage Town Historic District west of Grand Traverse.

Beginning in 1996, Hurley Hospital began to acquire houses north of what was then 3rd Ave. Their plan was to remove all structures north of University (3rd Ave.) from Grand Traverse to Prospect, including the closed Heartland Manor Nursing Center and build a new adult assisted living-nursing center modeled after “The Pavilions of Grand Traverse.” When told that the removal of these historic homes was not permitted, Hurley then boarded them up and has left them to decay over time.

This is part of the real tragedy of this particular area. The 9 homes that Hurley Hospital had purchased by 2000 where all occupied at the time of purchase and were viable structures. As tenants moved out, Hurley did not rent the units out again but left them empty. The local neighborhood association (CTHNA) tried to work with Hurley to keep the area from falling into further decay but nothing came of this effort and the relationship soured.

This particular area has also been the target of several failed redevelopment efforts. The Stone St redevelopment plan included building 8 new homes and rehabbing 7 of the homes still considered viable. This project was below University Ave and west of Grand Traverse. Before rehabbing began, 2 of the houses fell to arson and over time, 2 became to structurally deficient that tearing them down was necessary. In Jan of 2008, skeletal remains of what is now know to be from “an ancient woodlands Indian burial ground” where found while workers where excavating for new housing infill.

The Stone St Redevelopment Project completed the rehabbing of only 3 single family homes. The Saginaw Chippewa’s filled in the foundations that had been dug along Stone St. for 4 of the new construction homes. The Native Americans and volunteers, guided by archeologists from the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe
Culture, spent 3 summers sifting the piles dug out for the foundations and filling the holes back in.

It was the understanding of all parties involved in the redevelopment project that the Saginaw Chippewa’s would take control of the area and develop a plan for the site. The Genesee County Land Bank was to deed the 8 lots over to the Saginaw Chippewa’s but at the present time, this has not happened. The Chippewa’s seem reluctant to move forward even though the remains of 20 people, mostly adults have been reburied on the site. No plan has been presented to the Land Bank for consideration and 4 of the lots on the east side of Stone St. have actually been adopted by a family to develop a community garden on.

Two others houses, one of which was adjacent to the Indian site, have since been removed. The city of Flint requires complete removal of foundations in demolitions. In this particular area though, to prevent any possible disturbance of ancestral remains, the foundations of these 2 houses were collapsed, the basement floors punctured and backfill was used to fill the remaining hole.

No commercial or residential development will occur on this particular site and the entire area, from the Flint River to Hurley Hospital, it is considered likely that human remains from this ancient cemetery would be found. Any development using federal funds must meet The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation’s Section 106 Archaeological standards, which would require an archeologist on-hand for all “ground disturbing work.”

In November of 2010, an attempt was made by the then Director of Community and Economic Development for the City of Flint, Ms. Wendy Johnson, to develop a plan for the northern 4 blocks of the target area. Deemed “The Hurley/Stone St. Project, a Substantial Addendum to the City of Flint’s NSP-3 Application was made to U.S Housing and Urban Development. This addendum retargeted 1.94
million dollars into rehabbing several of the Hurley owned houses, removing some of the houses deemed beyond repair, and then building new houses on the empty lots.

The Neighborhood Association, the city administrator, several city council reps and engineers from Rowe Professional Services conducted extensive tours of the area, reviewed possible plans that included the vacant Spencer Funeral Home on University Ave and came to consensus on a plan for the 4 blocks. Rowe Professional Services then conducted an extensive review of the Hurley Houses and only one house was deemed financially feasible for rehabbing. The structural damage to the foundations, roof systems and walls on the other homes made redevelopment unlikely. (see attached report dated Dec 17, 2010)

As the Native American’s began to understand what had been uncovered, HUD Section 106 standards came into play for this Hurley/Stone St Project as well and support from the city was lost. At the same time, the City of Flint was under great pressure to complete another HUD project so the addendum was withdrawn and the money was again retargeted to “Smith Village.”

This area of Carriage Town has been the focus of several projects but none have come to fruition. It is very unlikely that any federal money will be used in the near future on development here.

The committee conducted an extensive review of this area of the historic district that is being recommended for removal including a review of the history of the specific area and the inventory of the historic resources located in the target area. The area consists of 52 residential and commercial structures, many which have garages and several with out buildings. One of the residential structures on Grand Traverse has a storefront attached and the building is owned by Catholic Charities. The Market Fire House is being converted to a brewery, There are 6 multi-family units, 3 of which are completely rehabilitated and are fully occupied.
Of the other 3 multi-family structures, all are deteriorated significantly but The Flint Public Arts Project is attempting to bring new life back to 2 of them including the former Spencer’s Funeral Home on University Ave.

One significant figure the committee uncovered is that of the 38 residential single-family homes in the target area, 26 are of them are unoccupied and for most of these, only federal grants would make rehabilitation financially feasible. The average home value (SEV) is significantly less than even the cost of a new roof.

Most of the residential structures and Atwood Stadium may be eligible for inclusion into the National Registry of Historic Places based on age alone. This area was a part of the walk to work neighborhood whose residents either worked at or supported the local carriage industry and was built-up prior to the turn of the century.

There are approximately 130 legal parcels located in the target area. 68 of them are vacant lots. They either had houses that have since been removed or never were developed. A significant part of the review area includes empty residential lots to the east of the stadium and south to the river. Many of these once contained houses but have been lost.

The committee reviewed the 2010 findings from Rowe Engineering Services (attached) about houses in the review area owned by Hurley Hospital and we considered the financial costs of rehabilitating and then maintaining the houses they owned. Most of the 9 houses are in such poor shape that the financial resources to save them and bring them back to a “habitable state” would be significant.

Hurley Hospital had developed a plan for the target area to the south of the hospital from 5th Ave to University that included dense multi-family residential
housing up along 5th Ave and new single family houses south along University Ave. This plan was termed "The Parson Plan" named after the firm that was used to develop it.

**Summary of Findings**

**Hurley Hospital**

The committee met with John McGuirk of McGuirk Realty who represented Hurley Hospital. Mr. McGuirk was the real estate agent that represented Hurley Hospital when the hospital began to acquire house in the historic district and was acting as their agent for the purpose of our meeting. Some heated exchanges took place between Mr. McGuirk and Leanne Barkus, a past member of Flint's Historic District Committee and current president of the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association in discussion as to how we got to this position. Ms. Barkus pointed out that Hurley Hospital, when purchasing homes in the historic district, obligated itself to maintain these historic structures in accordance with Historic District Ordinances and Hurley has failed completely in doing so. She argued that the city failed to enforce the rules even when asked to do so by it's own Historic District Committee.

The Committee then decided that it was not in our mission to assess how the deteriorating conditions became so bad historically but that we were tasked to determine the best avenue out of the current situation. How it got this way is not the issue but how do we best move forward is the task at hand.

Mr. McGuirk stated that if the area under consideration was removed from the historic district, Hurley Hospital, for the purpose of blight removal and public safety, would remove all 8 blighted structures promptly.
When asked if Hurley is considering any other possible development plans for their blighted houses, Mr. McGuirk stated that there are no plans to rehabilitate or even secure from further deterioration these properties. He stated that the properties were available to any developer willing to take on the responsibility but Hurley itself would not.

**Atwood Stadium**

The committee met with John McGarry, The Atwood Stadium Director, and he believes that the redevelopment of the Atwood Stadium area would be best served if the area was removed from the historic district. Two very deteriorated houses abut the stadium property and Atwood would like to work with the Genesee County Land Bank, which owns one of the houses and can acquire the other quickly, to get the houses removed and the lots cleared of overgrowth and accumulated debris, including an old trailer. This particular area overlooks the Atwood Stadium parking lot.

**CTHNA**

The committee met with Leanne Barkus and Mike Freeman, members of the Board of Directors of the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association. They were adamant in their opposition to the moving of the boundary and shrinking the current historic district. They cited years of attempting to work with Hurley on preserving the historic structures they own. Ms. Barkus pointed out that on many occasion that the Flint Historic District Committee asked the City Attorney, Flint’s Building Department and the Department of Community and Economic Development to enforce the Historic District Ordinances and force Hurley to secure the houses to, at least, the point that no further deterioration would occur and that the 9 houses (one has since succumbed to arson) could eventually be rehabilitated. The City of Flint failed to act in any way to support the Historic
District Committee or the neighborhood in preserving these important and historically significant houses.

Ms. Barkus and Mr. Freeman were adamant that the area would suffer greatly if the boundary were moved. When asked if this was the opinion of a majority of the members of the neighborhood association, they said they thought yes. Of the other members that we interviewed over time, none opposed the moving of the boundary. Phillip Barnhart, Nancy Sinclair, a past member of Flint’s Historic District Committee and its chair for several years and Ken Van Wagner, the owner of the Good Beans Café on Grand Traverse, all agreed that the best course of action was to move the boundary so quick action could be taken to reduce the blight and crime.

**The Flint Public Arts Project**

Steven Zacks, the Director of the Flint Public Arts Project, came before the committee to encourage the moving of the historic district boundary. Mr. Zacks and his collection of artists and architects have taken possession of an long abandoned and condemned funeral home on University Ave. and are creating the Spencer Art House in the home. The repurposing of this funeral home would best be served if the artist and architects did not have to comply with strict historic preservation requirements. Mr. Zacks pointed out that the exterior of the building had been extensively altered when the house was converted to a commercial property back in the 1950’s. It had received further alterations when Mr. Spencer moved his funeral home and crematory services to the site in the mid 60’s. The vision of the Spencer Art House is to create a space for resident artists to create and show their work and historic guidelines are often in conflict with the vision of the program.

**Kettering University**
The Boundary committee also met with Tom Ayers, the Chief Financial Officer of Kettering University. Kettering has taken possession of Atwood Stadium from the cash strapped City of Flint and it has assured the community that Atwood would remain a viable asset for the community and that the University was committed to its preservation. Mr. Ayers also talked about Kettering’s commitment to help clean up and redevelop the University corridor. They have applied for a Byrne Criminal Justice Grant from the U.S Department of Justice to work on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) along this central corridor. The University is also interested in clearing the hill overlooking the Atwood Parking lot. Two houses sit on this hill and both are in very poor shape. Although the HDC may allow for the removal of these houses, Kettering believes that moving the boundary over to Grand Traverse would best serve the blight reduction and crime prevention efforts the University is doing in the Atwood/University Ave area.

Therefore, it is the conclusion of the majority of the committee -- with the strong objection of Ms. Heather Burnash that:

• The City of Flint should evaluate if historic preservation is in the cities interest and if so, support and enforce the historic district ordinances

• The Carriage Town Historic District’s western boundary be moved easterly from Begole and Patrick Streets to Grand Traverse.