

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Royal Oak
**HISTORIC DISTRICT
COMMISSION**

The City of Royal Oak Municipal Code Chapter 82-20 states that the Historic District Commission shall submit an annual report of its activities to the City Commission each April. The following report prepared by the commission recaps the activities of the Royal Oak Historic District Commission for 2024.

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION BACKGROUND

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) established State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) to preserve places that matter and support, coordinate, and promote preservation efforts throughout each state. The Act assigned responsibility for setting professional historic preservation standards to The Secretary of The Interior, to be administered by The National Park Service (NPS). In response to the NHPA of 1966, Michigan's Public Act 169 was passed in 1970, and provided for both the establishment of historic districts as well as cities' establishment of Historic District Commissions. On September 11, 1995, the Royal Oak City Commission approved Article II of the City Ordinance. This amendment formally called for the creation of the City of Royal Oak Historic District Commission (HDC).

The purpose and duties of the HDC are manifold. It carries out historic preservation efforts in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior, NPS, and SHPO standards. The HDC is especially concerned with safeguarding Royal Oak's heritage as it pertains to elements of the city's history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. Additionally, the HDC is charged with fostering civic beauty, stabilizing and improving property values in each district and its surrounding area, strengthening the local economy, and promoting the use of historic districts for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the citizens of the City of Royal Oak and the State of Michigan.

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The HDC convenes quarterly by virtue of the City Ordinance. However, it often meets more frequently, in order to review requests made by petitioners to construct, add, alter, repair, move, excavate, or demolish resources in a historic district. All such petitions must be brought to the HDC for approval in the form of a certificate of appropriateness (COA).

2024 HDC MEETING DATES

February 15, 2024

April 18, 2024

September 12, 2024

October 17, 2024

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION COMPOSITION

Royal Oak's Historic District Commission is comprised of seven members who are appointed by the City Commission, each serving three-year, staggered terms. Each member has professional or personal expertise and/or interest in historic preservation.

2024 HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEMBERS

Patrick Sharrak, Chair

Sean Dunlop, Vice-Chair

***Paul Bastian**, Secretary

Danielle Cadaret

***Dazzmin Eid**

Theresa Scherwitz

Carol Schwanger (Staff Liaison)

*Denotes new membership in 2024

There was one vacancy on the HDC throughout 2024, and the position of Treasurer remained open through the 2024 year.

CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS & APPLICATION STATUS

In 2024, the Royal Oak Historic District Commission took under consideration or issued a decision for the following Historic Districts:

HILZINGER BLOCK BUILDING HISTORIC DISTRICT **108 South Main Street**

Two Private Law Firms, Farris F. Haddad Law and Rudoi Law, requested to put new signs on the front and rear façade of the building. Farris F. Haddad Law was installing a new sign on the front façade. It required minimal drilling and only in mortar. Both firms requested a sign for the rear façade, and this would only be replacing the inserts in existing sign frames. Both Certificates of Appropriateness were approved by the HDC. More information can be found in the appendix section.



CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS & APPLICATION STATUS

ROYAL OAK SAVINGS BANK BUILDING BLOCK HISTORIC DISTRICT

117 West Fourth Street

Rehla Premium Arabic Coffee, a new small business, submitted plans for a new façade sign to the city's building division, which was forwarded to the HDC's attention in late October. The HDC application was not completed or submitted and while the plans met building code requirements, the Certificate of Appropriateness remained unresolved as HDC members worked with the vendor applicant and the business owner. It is anticipated this will be completed in the first quarter of 2025.



CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS & APPLICATION STATUS

ORSON STARR HOUSE MUSEUM HISTORIC DISTRICT 3213 North Main Street

Members of the Royal Oak Historical Commission (HC) are seeking to restore the side porch of the Orson Starr House, a City Owned Public Museum. A side porch was originally on the home, and research has shown two different renditions. The HC are looking to restore the porch to match the architecture and style that is original to the home. The challenge will be meeting current building codes and ADA requirements. After input from the HDC during the 2023 meeting year, a rendering for the side porch was developed. However, to move forward, this project requires the HC to hire an architect to complete professional plans, determine project pricing, and to submit the plans to the city's building department for compliance and approval. The project will then return to the HDC for approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness.

In the late summer and fall 2024, heavy rains caused water to leak into the interior of the Museum. Though emergency repairs have been done, the roof will require total replacement in 2025. The HDC discussed the use of durable composite materials that replicate cedar in order to preserve the original aesthetic of the structure while utilizing longer lasting materials. The HDC will be apprised as the project progresses, since it will need to approve the plans.



INITIATIVES: VINSETTA BRIDGES TASK FORCE

On a winding neighborhood street between 12 Mile Road and Woodward Avenue lie four historic bridges in need of repair. These are the Vinsetta Bridges, built in 1915-1916 as a feature of the Vinsetta Park Subdivision. Originally, the bridges spanned what was the Red Run, a naturally flowing creek, to create ambience and serenity in this iconic neighborhood. Five bridges were built, using the Ford Model T as a guide for their width. One of the original five bridges has disappeared; the remaining four all employed traditional building methods of the time and are made of concrete.

In March of 2024, the Vinsetta Bridges were named Royal Oak's fifteenth Historic District by the Royal Oak City Commission, subsequent to extensive study by the Royal Oak Historic District Study Commission (HDSC).

The Vinsetta Bridges Task Force was formed in April 2024, comprised of three members each from the HDSC and HDC. The purpose was to study the bridges in more depth and find ways to preserve their use to the community. The task force worked with structural engineers from SME and other agencies to conduct surveys, research construction methods, and analyze the deterioration of the bridges. This further investigation confirmed what was suspected, that the bridges have fallen into varying states of disrepair. Deterioration was predominantly caused by natural wear and tear, but also from improper maintenance and strikes from modern vehicles.

Of particular note is that the southernmost bridge, at Mayfield Drive, has suffered major damage. It will require significant reconstruction, and may require nearly complete replacement. Fortunately, the other bridges are still salvageable if action is taken quickly. The Task Force is focusing its efforts first on the Mayfield Bridge, and to that end, had the Royal Oak Department of Public Services close the bridge to vehicular traffic in November 2024 in order to prevent further damage. The Task Force is researching public grant funding and other means to raise the capital required to repair and restore the bridges.



LOOKING FORWARD

There are a number of goals that the Royal Oak Historic District Commission would like to achieve in 2025. First, the HDC intends to create standards and guidelines for signage within the City's commercial historical districts. Second, commission members will seek historic educational opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding of historic preservation. Lastly, commission members will be encouraged to attend other municipalities' Historic Commission meetings during the year, to better understand how other communities address matters of historic import.



“A city without old buildings is like a man without a memory.”

— Graeme Shankland, Architect and Planner

APPENDIX

LOOKING BACK AT 2024

February 15, 2024

The Commission kicked off the year by welcoming new members Dazzmin Dabish and Paul Bastian, and electing officers for 2024. Chair Sharrak emphasized the importance of member education and outreach, introducing a proposed “Why Preserve” campaign to improve public understanding of the preservation process. Updates were shared on several COA projects, including window replacements and porch restorations. The meeting also covered the upcoming first reading of the Vinsetta Bridges Historic District ordinance and new efforts to improve inter-agency collaboration and digital meeting tools.

April 18, 2024

The Commission approved minutes from the February meeting and formalized participation in the newly established Vinsetta Bridges Historic District Task Force. Members volunteered to serve on the task force, which aims to evaluate and support the proposed district designation. The Orson Starr House Museum’s side porch project was briefly revisited, with updates to come at a future meeting. No new COA applications were reviewed.

September 12, 2024

A request for new signage at 108 S. Main Street was tabled pending additional installation details, while a separate reface request for existing signs at the same site was approved. The Commission also discussed replacing the aging roof of the Orson Starr House Museum, considering historically appropriate but cost-effective alternatives. An update was provided on the work of the Vinsetta Bridges Task Force. The meeting concluded with preparation for the next round of COA reviews.

October 17, 2024

The Commission approved the revised signage proposal for Farris F. Haddad Law at the Hilzinger Block Building and tabled a new request for Rehla Coffee House pending submission of a completed Project Review Request. Members discussed the importance of preserving architectural details in signage design and proposed exploring fixed sign mount systems for future applicants. A presentation from Chronicle Heritage provided an update on the citywide Historic Context Report. The Commission also expressed interest in supporting the Royal Oak Historical Society’s planned 100th birthday celebration for homes built in 1925.

APPENDIX

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS: HILZINGER BLOCK BUILDING HISTORIC DISTRICT

Overview:

The Hilzinger Block Building was constructed in 1925 and consists of a two-story building with three storefronts. The façade facing Main Street remains in original condition with red brick in a stretcher bond pattern. The use of brick in soldier and stack bond frames the original window openings. Limestone banding and decorative moldings further accentuate the openings and divide the façade into panels. A limestone cornice tops the building and brick in a stack bond terminates the ends in what suggests vertical pillars.

The Historic District Study Committee designated the Hilzinger Block Building as an Historic District in 2004. In their designation, the committee noted the contribution the building had to the history of Royal Oak. William Hilzinger owned the land and developed the first electric power plant in the area before the Hilzinger Block Building was constructed. The basement of the Hilzinger Block Building incorporates a section of the former powerhouse. The building accommodated many businesses in the early years of Royal Oak, including a hardware store and restaurants.

Certificate of Appropriateness:

On September 12, 2024, the Royal Oak Historic District Commission reviewed the application to reface two existing signs on the building. One of the signs was on the east facing Main Street and the second sign faced the alley to the west. On October 17th, 2024, the HDC reviewed the application to add a new sign on the east façade towards Main Street. The sign mounting details were reviewed and considered to be reversible and therefore in compliance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for rehabilitation of historic buildings. The applications were approved, and a certificate of appropriateness issued.

