

Subject: Adding Historic Districts to Other Character Areas section of the Comprehensive Plan
Attachments: Other Character Areas_ Historic Districts.pdf

From: Jeff Crockett
Sent: Tuesday, April 15, 2025 7:46 AM
To: Planning <Planning@a2gov.org>
Cc: Peter Osler; Steve Hudolin; Christine Crockett; Julie Ritter; Lars Bjorn; Tyler, Norm (DGT); Susan Wineberg; David Kennedy; Kimberly Hudolin; Ilene R. Tyler; Eleanor Crown; Ryan Pantaleo; betsy williams; Christine Brummer; Tom Stulberg; Bev Willis; Ellen Ramsburgh; Harrison, Cynthia <CHarrison@a2gov.org>; Briggs, Erica <EBriggs@a2gov.org>; Grace Shackman <gmshackman@comcast.net>; Berauer, Linda (PAC) <lberauer@umich.edu>; Patrick McCauley <patrickmccauley1977@gmail.com>; Patricia Kay Austin <pkweaustin@comcast.net>; Janet Kreger <kregerj1981@att.net>; Melissa Milton-Pung; Frances Wright; Tom Ewing; John Ellison; Mitchell, Rita (GMail); Frank Wilhelme; Hank Barry; John Godfrey; Don Duquette; Lisa Jevens; Laura Strowe
Subject: Adding Historic Districts to Other Character Areas section of the Comprehensive Plan

Dear Members of the Planning Commission,

In 1970, Michigan passed the Local Historic Districts Act, PA 169, which safeguards a community's heritage by allowing local governments to adopt an ordinance containing design review guidelines based on national standards. Since the early 1980s, Ann Arbor has created 15 historic districts (see <https://www.a2gov.org/planning/historic-preservation/historic-district-maps/>), which have provided significant benefits for the Ann Arbor community and have become an integral part of our culture. These benefits are displayed in the Ann Arbor Smarttours (<https://aadl.org/a2st>). If you haven't already done so, please check out these tours and forward this link to your networks.

The Old Fourth Ward Historic District, created in 1983, is one of these districts. To learn more about our district, please check out Ryan Stanton's 2024 article: <https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2024/07/two-centuries-later-ann-arbors-oldest-neighborhood-retains-its-charms.html>. Since 1985, the Old Fourth Ward Historic District Association has supported historic preservation efforts across Ann Arbor, but we have also supported downtown livability by reaching out to students, U of M's Beyond the Diag Program, and the Intercooperative Council.

Unfortunately, we have learned that historic districts have not been included in the Other Character Areas section of the Comprehensive Plan. They need to be. According to local historic preservation author Norm Tyler, historic districts attract tourists, educate the public on Ann Arbor's heritage, provide work for local tradespeople, attract talent and investment, and raise property values.

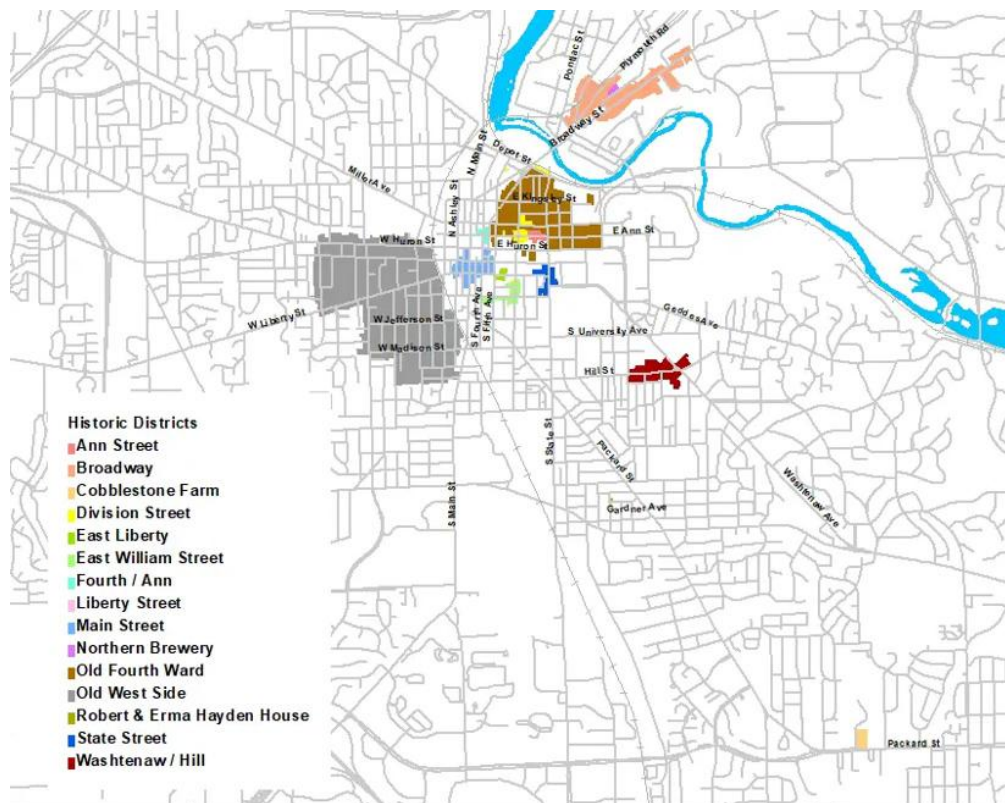
Since the district names and map are available on the city's website, it would be fairly easy to transfer this information to a Historic District page in the Other Character Areas section of the Comprehensive Plan. The attached document represents suggested wording for the Historic District Section. Thanks for your consideration.

Jeff Crockett
Communications Officer
Old Fourth Ward Association

Other Character Areas: Historic Districts

In 1970, the state of Michigan passed the Local Historic Districts Act, PA 169, which safeguards a community's heritage by allowing local governments to adopt an ordinance that contains design review guidelines based on national standards. Historic Districts have played an important role in preserving Ann Arbor's cultural and architectural legacy since the early 1980s. The fifteen Ann Arbor historic districts include Ann Street, Broadway, Cobblestone Farm, Division Street, East Liberty, East William, Fourth/Ann, Liberty Street, Main Street, Northern Brewery, Old Fourth Ward, Old West Side, Robert & Erma Hayden House, State Street, and Washtenaw/Hill. Recently, historic district associations played a key role in planning projects and events for Ann Arbor's 2024 Bicentennial celebration.

It is well recognized that historic districts attract tourists, educate the public on Ann Arbor's heritage, provide work for local tradespeople, attract talent and investment, and raise property values. We expect historic districts to continue their many contributions well into Ann Arbor's third century. A2 Smart Tours (<https://aadl.org/a2st>) provide a convenient way to see and learn about Ann Arbor's rich architectural and cultural past.



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ANN ARBOR

Two centuries later, Ann Arbor's oldest neighborhood retains its charms

Updated: Jul. 29, 2024, 6:39 p.m. | Published: Jul. 28, 2024, 10:00 a.m.





Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward historic neighborhood (Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News)



By [Ryan Stanton](#) | ryanstanton@mlive.com

ANN ARBOR, MI — Julie Ritter says when she and her husband arrived in Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward neighborhood in 1973, it wasn't without incident.

The house they bought on Catherine Street was condemned and they had to pull plywood off the back to get inside where squatters had been living.

That prompted someone to call police, who responded and drew their guns, thinking it was a break-in.

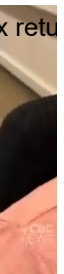
"That was our first day in the house," Ritter said.

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They were in their 20s and crashed with friends at night while spending their days working to make their humble abode livable.

"WAP got his contractor's license through working on this," she said, referring to her husband, WAP John.

Over 50 years later, Ritter, 72, still considers it an endless hobby taking care of a house built over a century ago.



But that's a price she and others are willing to pay for the perks of living in the historic district on the north edge of downtown — a short walk to movie theaters, restaurants, the Kerrytown business district, the Farmers Market, the Huron River and more.

"It's all right there — magic," said Ilene Tyler, another longtime Old Fourth Ward resident.

As Ann Arbor turns 200, the town's oldest residential neighborhood still has its charms, neighbors say, counting walkability, tree-lined streets and beautiful, old houses and churches among them. Some of Ann Arbor's last-remaining brick streets also can be found in the neighborhood.

Old Fourth Ward neighbors and guests at the Ann Arbor neighborhood's annual spring potluck on Division Street on June 10, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

"We have houses dating from the 1830s to the mid-20th century," said Chris Crockett, president of the Old Fourth Ward Association and the Ann Arbor Historical Foundation.

"There are so many architectural styles that are expressed here ... and it tells the story of the settling of Ann Arbor and all the people who came here," she said.

Crockett, 77, said part of the reason she and her husband Jeff chose to buy their 1891 Queen Anne home on Kingsley Street in 1980 was so she could walk to work. She was a librarian at Community High School from 1974 to 2008.

The neighborhood developed in the 19th century with businesses, churches, schools and residences in close proximity because walking was how people got around, she said, and that's part of what still makes it special.

"I love that I live here," she said, noting many of the buildings still standing date back to the 1800s.

The former Misses Clark's Seminary for Young Ladies, now an apartment building, at 505 N. Division St. in Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward Historic District on June 10, 2024. Built in 1865, the brick building was the sixth and final location of Ann Arbor's famous girls school founded in 1839 by Mary Clark with sisters Chloe and Roby. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

The Old Fourth Ward Association, which started in the 1980s around the time the neighborhood became a historic district, was presented with a Community Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network in May for its contributions to historic preservation and efforts to build community.

"It was a 40th-year celebration," said Jeff Crockett, one of the founders of the association.

Local historian Susan Wineberg, who has lived in the neighborhood for over five decades, served on the committee that made the case for creating an Old Fourth Ward Historic District, issuing a report in 1982 declaring it a special place containing some of Ann Arbor's finest old homes and churches. The district was established in 1983, expanding upon other smaller historic districts established in the 1970s.

A map of Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward Historic District on the north edge of downtown. City of Ann Arbor

When town founders John Allen and Elisha Rumsey platted the original village in 1824, they divided the land so Allen had all the real estate north of Huron Street and Rumsey had all that to the south, the 1982 report stated, noting the historic district would include part of the original village plat.

Large bur oak trees in the neighborhood are believed to be hundreds of years old, standing there when the town founders arrived.

Allen and Rumsey named the new village and Ann Street, which runs through the neighborhood, after their wives, the 1982 report states.

"The 'Arbor' is thought to describe the large grove of oaks that surrounded the present site of St. Andrew's Church," it states. "It was here, on what was long known as the 'Grove property,' that the first Fourth of July celebration in the new village was held in 1825."

One of the cool things about the Old Fourth Ward is it still has a number of old bur oak trees that were around prior to Ann Arbor's settlement 200 years ago, local historian Patrick McCauley said on a walking tour May 25, 2024. "When John Allen and Elisha Walker Rumsey came here in 1824, basically the rise that they founded Ann Arbor on, this hill here that we're on, was covered with these beautiful, huge oak trees and many of the early settlers described it as being like a park," McCauley said, saying there were massive trees with grass and wildflowers underneath, and Native Americans grew crops such as corn, squash and pumpkins in areas they would periodically burn out between the big trees. "The Potawatomi and the Native Americans that had lived here for 10,000-plus years revered the oak trees, they had a spiritual connection to them. They also harvested the acorns, that was part of their diet." (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

As part of Ann Arbor's bicentennial celebration in May, local historian Patrick McCauley took residents on a walking tour of the Old Fourth Ward, telling the stories behind many of the houses, churches and other buildings like Zingerman's Deli.

He noted St. Andrew's Episcopal Church and St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church, both still standing, have deep roots going back to Ann Arbor's early history. Both had a presence in the neighborhood by the 1830s.

In the town's early history, the neighborhood was basically the place to live for well-to-do Ann Arborites, McCauley said, noting a lot of prominent citizens owned homes there, including people who came from New England and New York. From the city's first charter in 1851 until 1955, it was Ann Arbor's Fourth Ward.

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St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on Division Street in Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward Historic District on July 27, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

A number of houses were built as rooming houses going back to the 1850s when University of Michigan President Henry Tappan basically shut down campus dorms to create more classroom space, pushing students into nearby neighborhoods, McCauley said.

Various immigrant groups also moved into the neighborhood over time. As it aged and became more of an industrial part of town, eventually it wasn't where wealthy families wanted to live anymore and they relocated to Burns Park, McCauley said.

Many Black families also moved into the area around Kerrytown, some as early as before the Civil War, some escaping slavery into Canada and then coming back, McCauley said. Many were gradually displaced later in the 1900s due to gentrification and other factors.

"It's a double-edged sword," McCauley said of the reinvestment the area has seen with old homes being fixed up. "People get priced out of the neighborhood, but this neighborhood is now nicer than it's ever been in its whole history probably."

Local historian Patrick McCauley leads a tour of Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward historic neighborhood on Saturday, May 25, 2024.
Rebecca Villagracia | MLive.com

It's also dominated by UM students. Fewer than 5% of the homes are owner-occupied now, Chris Crockett said.

"We have almost 100% turnover in the neighborhood every year," she said. "There aren't that many owner-occupants right now. When we moved here, there were more."

More houses might be owner-occupied if not for real estate investors outbidding other people, neighbors say, noting one investor in particular has been voraciously acquiring houses, gutting them and turning them into modern student rentals.

While some preservationists have been concerned to see original fireplaces, staircases and moulding torn out, they give the investor credit for nicely restoring the historic exteriors.

"He takes the siding off and paints them in three colors, so the houses look better than they've ever looked," Wineberg said.

She sees UM as a bigger threat to the neighborhood, as historic status doesn't protect a house from demolition if the university wants to buy it and tear it down to make way for a campus expansion, as it has done in some cases.

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Chris Crockett, president of the Old Fourth Ward Association, shows with the Ann Arbor neighborhood association's Community Award from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network at the neighborhood's annual spring potluck on Division Street on June 10, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

Homeowners who've been lucky enough to buy into the neighborhood have done their part to preserve and restore their houses. The Crocketts see themselves as caretakers of historic legacies they've learned about through visits from descendants of families that owned their house before, including someone from the O'Hara family who told of their ancestors coming to Ann Arbor from Ireland in the 1830s.

While spending decades restoring their house, the Crocketts also have filled it with antique furniture.

"I just wish that there were more younger people who were into historic preservation," said Jeff Crockett, 77. "I don't understand the IKEA look, because that furniture doesn't last very long."

Jeff and Chris Crockett's 1891 Queen Anne house on Kingsley Street in Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward Historic District on July 27, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

Ilene Tyler and her husband Norm live in a Greek Revival house on Division Street that dates back to the 1830s and '40s. Built in three phases, it's one of Ann Arbor's most iconic houses with four two-story columns in front.

"It's really been a joy," Tyler, 76, said of their 22 years in the house. "We felt like we fell into it at just the right time of our lives to complete the restoration of the exterior and maintain all the interesting integrity of the interior."

Norm and Ilene Tyler's Greek Revival house on Division Street in Ann Arbor's Old Fourth Ward historic neighborhood on June 10, 2024. Known as the Wilson-Wahr house, some consider it the most iconic of Ann Arbor's historic houses, with different pieces of it dating back to the 1830s and '40s and a rear wing added in the 1860s. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

The Tylers researched how the Greek Revival style came here, finding local carpenters would use pattern books and the one that inspired the columns on their house traces back to the 1750s. Two designers living in England went to Greece and drew what they saw standing, she said, and nearly a century later their Ann Arbor house was born from that.

Wineberg, 78, has lived in the neighborhood since 1969 — first in an 1866 rental house on Ann Street across from city hall. She stayed there until 1988 before she and her husband Lars Bjorn moved into the house they now own farther east on Ann.

Since she first arrived as a grad student, the neighborhood has always been mostly grad students, Wineberg said, saying it's a great neighborhood, even if very transient.

"We stay young being around all the students," she said.

Old Fourth Ward residents Lars Bjorn and Susan Wineberg at the Ann Arbor neighborhood's annual spring potluck on Division Street on June 10, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

Bjorn said he loves walking to Kerrytown just about every day to shop or grab a cup of coffee.

“Walkability is the thing for me,” said the Sweden native and retired sociology professor who celebrated his 80th birthday at the Kerrytown Concert House in June.

Wineberg said she used to walk to the Farmers Market every Saturday when she was an anthropology graduate student and some of her fellow students would drop by her place for coffee. That grew into a weekly Saturday brunch, which she’s still hosting 50 years later, now monthly.

The neighborhood for many years also hosted a [big spring potluck billed as a downtown neighbors party.](#) which attracted many of Ann Arbor’s most prominent citizens and officials who would gather on an evening in June in the adjoining yards of the Tyler and Detter residences off Division.

Since the pandemic, it has become a smaller gathering of neighbors and guests in Kim and Steve Hudolin’s front yard farther up Division. Close to 40 people came together for this year’s potluck on June 10, socializing and indulging in an array of eats and treats, including pineapple upside-down cake and walnut brownies.

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Old Fourth Ward neighbors and guests at the Ann Arbor neighborhood's annual spring potluck on Division Street on June 10, 2024. (Ryan Stanton | MLive.com) Ryan Stanton | The Ann Arbor News

"It was great. We had more people than last year," Kim Hudolin said. "We're kind of building back up after COVID."

The Hudolins, both 64, are some of the newer homeowners in the neighborhood, having arrived seven years ago from Northville, though they met at UM in college.

"I like the eclectic mix of people that live here," Kim Hudolin said, noting they're surrounded by mainly grad students and they're good neighbors. "We've liked getting to know them."

'An Ann Arbor original.' Local historian Ray Detter remembered for big spirit

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