

The Preservationist

The Member Newsletter of the Elkhart Lake Historic Race Circuits Preservation Society
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Favorable Determination on Definition of Historic Property

The contributing elements of a historic property are defined in the documentation prepared at the time the property is nominated for inclusion in the National Historic Register. Plans and projects that affect these “contributing elements” are subject to historic preservation laws.

The Sheboygan County Highway Department has argued that any project that does not change the centerline or grade of the Historic Circuit roads is not subject to these laws. In other words, the only “contributing elements” are the centerline and grade. Everything else including widening of roads, installation of curbs and grading of banks is not subject to the legal requirements for historic preservation.

HRC has disputed this position and appealed to the Historical Society for clarification and final determination of what constitutes the “contributing elements” of the Historic Race Circuits. Initially the Historical Society was unclear on the elements but HRC Directors reviewed the nomination documents and felt strongly that the entire right-of-way was included as contributing elements.

Under pressure from HRC and after a review of the National Register document and a visit to the Circuits, the Historical Society concluded that the historic property is correctly defined as “all portions of the race circuit within the highway right-of-way” confirming HRC’s contention. In a letter to Highway Commissioner, Greg Schnell, dated May 19th, the Society advised the Highway Department of their findings and placing the Department on formal notice of its violation of Historic Preservation statutes. While this is viewed as a major step forward for our preservation efforts, it is now nearly a month later and there has been no official response from the Highway Department to the Historical Society.

Preservation Plan Requested by Historical Society

The Wisconsin Historical Society has proposed that Sheboygan County contract with an architectural historian to prepare a “Preservation and Maintenance Master Plan” for the historic race circuits as part of an appropriate after-the-fact mitigation plan for the Highway Departments unauthorized and illegal grading of the banks in the Hamill’s Hollow portion of the Historic Circuits. The document would then be used for planning and carrying out future work taking place within the National Register boundaries of the historic property (within the right-of-way). HRC supports the requirement for development of such a plan and sees it as critical to the illumination of future disputes and required maintenance of the Historic Circuits.

NMTPP Projects Approved Despite Adverse Effect

In January 2008, The Joint Resource Committee for the Non Motorized Transportation Pilot Project approved two projects that would have adverse effect on CTH AJ south of the Village of Elkhart Lake and CTH J north of the village. The Wisconsin Historical Society has contacted Mary Ebling, NMTPP Project Manager for the NMVPP regarding these projects and the adverse effect on the Historic Circuits. She has acknowledged that the previously approved projects will need to be amended to comply with historic preservation standards and is also aware of the need for a Preservation and Maintenance Master Plan. Ms. Ebling has a background in architectural historical preservation (she was formerly with the firm of Mead and Hunt, leaders in the field) and she appears to be sensitive to preservation issues. She has expressed willingness to do whatever it takes to insure compliance with historic preservation laws.