



NEXT STEPS: A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2016-2021

Strategic planning is the process of determining what an organization intends to accomplish in the coming years to fulfill its mission and how it will direct its resources to accomplishing these goals.¹ The Board of a nonprofit has a duty to engage in sound planning to define a vision for the organization and best position it to meet its goals, for the benefit of its constituents.²

At its November, 2015 meeting, the Board of Directors of the Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society ("SDHS") appointed a working group to develop a strategic plan to identify what should be the key priorities of the organization over the next 3-5 years. This exercise is particularly timely now that the SDHS has hired its first Executive Director. This is our report.

Executive Summary

We have identified six priorities, with suggested action items for each, to help secure the continued success of the SDHS. We also noted a number of additional actions the Board should consider.

¹ B. Barry, *Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organizations* 5 (rev.ed. 1997).

² *Michigan Nonprofit Management Manual* 16 (5th ed. 2010)

The priorities are:

1. Secure the Financial Footing of the SDHS on a Long-term Basis
2. Strengthen the Committee Structure
3. Implement Consistent Procedures for our Collections and Improve their Accessibility to Members and the Public
4. Create and Fund a Maintenance Plan for Our Facilities
5. Better Market the SDHS to the Community
6. Develop Future Saugatuck-Douglas Area Historians

Note that we did not include among our list of priorities areas that are essential to the success of the SDHS but which are functioning well at this time, such as programming, exhibit development, and outreach to the schools.

We ask the Board to approve these recommendations and this report, with any modifications, then set timetables and assign responsibility for each key action item. We also strongly recommend that, on a quarterly or more frequent basis, the Board reserve time on its agenda for a report from the Executive Director on progress towards completion of each item.

Methodology

The Board appointed Bill Hess and Richard Donovan (Board members) and Nathan Nietering (Executive Director) as the initial members of the working group. Those three invited Sally Winthers (former Board member) and Wendy Colsen (member) to join the group for a more diverse perspective.

Our ad hoc committee then undertook the following steps:

- The group first reviewed SDHS strategic planning materials from 2004 and 2009-10, as well as literature on strategic planning for non-profits and plans published by comparable non-profits.
- Beginning in January 2016, we met almost weekly through April.
- We identified ten key areas of the organization, then proceeded to conduct a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of each area.
- We consulted with SDHS members that have specific experience in certain of the areas we examined (Jim Schmiechen, Christina Lewis, Steve Hutchins, Kristen Nietering).
- At the same time, we designed and conducted the first-ever survey of the membership to gain a better understanding of its views on various issues.
- We contacted, but did not use the services of, a museum consultant.
- We had extensive discussions to reach agreement on what should be the priorities for the SDHS over the next five years.
- We reviewed a draft of our report with several former Presidents and Board members of SDHS.
- In addition to our report, we will make a presentation to the Board about our recommendations.

Mission Statement

Having a shared understanding of an organization's mission or purpose is a critical part of strategic planning. The mission is another way of stating what the leaders of the organization hope to accomplish in the long run.

We found several statements of the SDHS mission in its various publications and website, but propose the following as a more effective statement of our current goals:

The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society preserves local history and inspires learning to inform and improve our community.

Discussion of Priorities and Action Items

In this section we review each of our recommended priorities, summarize why we think it should be a priority, and propose key action items to address the priority.

1. Secure the Financial Footing of the SDHS on a Long-term Basis

Of course the SDHS needs adequate funds to fulfill its mission. The Board recently decided to create a permanent Development Committee to focus on ways to improve our revenue stream and fund maintenance and improvements. We need to recruit experienced members to that committee as soon as possible, and have the Board work with them to develop realistic plans for fundraising. The Membership Coordinator that we are recruiting should be a member of this committee.

Among other things, this Committee should consider how to obtain more grants, ways to attract the support of area businesses, corporate sponsorships, planned giving, our current membership structure and giving levels, merchandising as a fundraising source, funding for maintenance and capital

improvements, the strategy of our Annual Appeal, and the possibility of starting an endowment fund.

Action Items:

- A. Recruit a Development Committee by July 1, 2016.
- B. That committee to develop and present to the Board, no later than its September meeting, a comprehensive development plan that addresses all forms of funding for the organization.
- C. Committee to update (based on Board's estimates of financial needs), and Board to approve, the development plan on an annual basis.

2. Strengthen the Committee Structure

The work of the SDHS is done by volunteers from among its membership. The Board has a legal duty to oversee that work.

As the Board has recognized, the published list of its committees is outdated, so the Board is in the process of revising it. Oversight of the work done by committees has been difficult due to the informal nature of the organization that has evolved. It is often hard to determine who is in charge of certain tasks or projects, because the names of committee chairs are not published to the membership. The lack of regular reporting to the Board has led to a failure to accomplish objectives in some cases.

In order to most efficiently coordinate and perform the work of the SDHS, we are convinced that it is essential to have a robust committee in each of a number of areas, with clear leadership of each committee. We also believe that the Board, along with the Executive Director, need to become more active in overseeing the goals and progress of each committee.

Action Items:

- A. By July 1, 2016 review and publish a list of the active standing committees approved by the Board (as compared to ad hoc committees and temporary working groups)
- B. By July 1, appoint and publish the name of the chair of each committee and a general description of the responsibilities of each committee
- C. By October 1, 2016 the Executive Director to present to the Board an initial report from each committee to include a list of its members, list of any key outside relationships, contacts or vendors, description and calendar of key tasks, and location of key files and information. Beginning with 3Q16, require a written and in-person report to the Board by each committee on at least an annual basis, following a template to be developed by the Executive Director
- D. Require each committee to submit to the Executive Director, as part of the budget process, an itemization of any requested expenses for the coming year
- E. The Board to reevaluate the list of committees each year, as well as the performance, membership, and needs of each committee.

3. Implement Consistent Procedures for our Collections, and Improve their Accessibility to Members and the Public

Our collections—documents, photos and graphics, art, and objects—make up a vital part of our mission to preserve the history of our area. The Board has recognized the need to rationalize our procedures for acquiring, storing, and accessing our collections. However, the Collections Management Policy approved in October 2014 does not adequately address how best to organize and use our collections. In any event, little has been done to implement the policies and procedures that were approved.

In addition, we believe that it is important that we work towards making as much of our collections as possible better accessible to our members and the public. This requires first determining what we own, by cataloging everything

in a consistent manner on an appropriate platform, such as the *PastPerfect* program (for which we already have a license). Then our goal should be to make everything accessible via our website in a user-friendly manner over the next few years, so that we are the go-to source for local history on the major digital media (e.g., Google).

We conclude that outside help is necessary in order to accomplish this goal in a timely and efficient manner, and to be sure that we take advantage of the most appropriate technology and procedures. We expect that grant money is available for this purpose.

Action Items:

- A. By July 1, 2016 the Board to appoint members and a Chair of the Collections Committee
- B. By September 1, 2016 the Executive Director to coordinate with the Collections Committee to implement procedures and policies for accepting all new items and preserving the collections, as set forth in the Collections Management Policy. This should include an evaluation of (1) whether the collections are adequately protected from fire and other threats, and are properly insured, and (2) whether all related digital files are backed up and otherwise protected.
- C. By year-end 2016, secure grant or other funding, then recruit a Collections Manager for a fixed term to work closely with the Collections Committee, to (1) complete an accurate assessment of the existing collections and (2) develop a plan to catalog all collections methodically on a common platform by the end of 2017, with the goal of making all catalogs web searchable.
- D. Collections Committee to evaluate and improve as necessary our efforts to identify and obtain historically significant items in the possession of private citizens.
- E. Executive Director to report to the Board monthly on the progress of Action Item C, and Collections Committee to report semi-annually on the implementation of the plan.

- F. Executive Director and Committee Chair to report to the Board in advance on the need for and possibility of extending the initial term of the Collections Manager, depending on progress and funding.

4. Create and Fund a Maintenance Plan for Our Facilities

We are fortunate to have two significant buildings, but they are old and in need of regular maintenance to preserve their value and usefulness. Under the terms of the lease with the City for the Pump House, SDHS is legally obligated to maintain the building and premises. We do not have funds set aside to pay for such maintenance, let alone any unanticipated repairs that are not covered by insurance.

Action Items:

- A. Appoint a small committee or individual with responsibility for the ongoing maintenance of these facilities.
- B. With help from a contractor and after conducting a condition assessment, create by August 1, 2016 a checklist of regular and long-term maintenance items for the OSH and Museum, such assessment to include consideration of the accessibility of our facilities to all and adequacy of fire and security systems to protect our collections
- C. Estimate the annual cost of each maintenance item
- D. Work with the Development Committee to create, by November 1, 2016 a plan to fund these maintenance items on an ongoing basis
- E. The Facilities Committee or designated individual to report to the Board at least annually on the maintenance plans, and the Development Committee to recommend necessary funding.

5. Better Market the SDHS to the Community

Many of our volunteers and this Committee believe that many full-time and seasonal residents of our community who are not SDHS members do not

have an accurate understanding of the mission of the SDHS or the benefits of membership. Among other things, we are often confused with the Historic District Commission. We conclude that doing a better job of "getting the word out" is likely to result in increased membership and more successful fundraising. There likely are members and non-members in the community that have experience in marketing and public relations who would be willing to assist.

Action Items:

- A. By July 1, 2016 recruit a Marketing committee or working group with relevant experience
- B. Commission the group to propose by August 1, 2016 a marketing plan that will clarify the mission of the SDHS and raise our awareness among the SW Michigan community
- C. Group to consult with the Membership Coordinator (a member of the Development Committee) to develop ASAP materials to explain to prospective members why they should join the SDHS, and any other suggestions for attracting new members
- D. Group to recommend to the Board whether to change the "doing business as" name of the SDHS to the "Museum and History Center" or some other name, possibly as part of a rebranding to give the SDHS a fresher, more vibrant image.
- E. Group to evaluate whether we need to improve and make uniform the exterior signage at our facilities
- F. Board to approve the plan (with any modifications) and take steps to implement it
- G. Board to monitor the content and results of the marketing plan on a yearly basis

6. Develop Future Saugatuck-Douglas Area Historians

The mission of the SDHS centers around the history of our area. So one of the most important roles in the organization is that of historian, people who have a passion for our history, develop knowledge of that history, and enjoy sharing it in different ways. We have been fortunate that this role has been filled by a number of talented people over the years. Eventually each of us will transition out of our roles for the SDHS, but we believe that it is particularly important that the knowledge and sources developed by our current historians be transferred to those who will follow.

Action Items:

- A. Executive Director and 1-2 Board members to confer with our current historians to determine how the organization may assist them to preserve the knowledge and sources they have developed over the years (e.g., helping to organize their relevant files and record their sources and contacts). ED to report to the Board at its August meeting.
- B. Board to discuss ways to encourage more members to become involved in projects relating to our history.
- C. Board to monitor this situation at least on an annual basis, among other things to anticipate a change in status of any of the key players.

Other Suggested Action Items

During our examination of the various areas of operation of the SDHS, we identified a number of other worthwhile ideas. We offer them here for the consideration of the Board and the relevant committees, in no particular order:

- 1. Re-imagine the use and interior design of the Old Schoolhouse to most effectively meet our mission and drive more traffic onto the site (already underway)
- 2. Complete the documentation of key policies and procedures

3. Better utilize the power of voice, video, and data technology both internally and in our public exhibits and presentations; create a technology plan and replacement schedule; make sure that our valuable digital files are secure and backed up off-site; create simple instructions for use of our various devices
4. Identify and recruit more diverse Board members with backgrounds and interests that correlate to our needs.
5. Better recognize our volunteers.
6. Resume the publication of books consistent with our mission
7. Reach out to area realtors to connect us with new residents and visitors, possibly by having the realtor pay for the first year's membership in SDHS at a reduced bulk rate.
8. Explore the creation of Saugatuck and Douglas walking tour apps to give the history of the communities while directing the listener around the downtown areas. The app could be downloaded for a modest fee. (Such an app for Douglas is in the beta stage.)
9. Complete the Gay History Project and publicize the work through appropriate means.
10. Refresh the design of our website and newsletter.
11. Ask the City to install 1-hour parking signs by the spaces in front of the Museum.
12. Partner with the Garden Club to maintain our gardens. Re-imagine the Back-in-Time garden in light of the new condo building to better tie it into our mission.
13. Identify older residents that should be interviewed for our oral history archive and conduct interviews, including the SDHS' own history.
14. Devote more attention to integrating new members into the SDHS
15. Use as interns high school students looking for community service projects.
16. Consider recruiting one or more volunteers as a part-time office manager to free the Executive Director's time for more substantive work.

17. Consider creating a space (CVB building?) where visitors can watch a shortened version of the *Hometown Stories* video (an hour is too long).
18. Create a committee or working group to assist with outreach to the schools
19. Develop a new Board member orientation checklist and make policies, procedures and other key documents more accessible to Board members.

For the benefit of future planners and any other interested parties, we will file with this report a copy of the 10 SWOT analyses that we created as part of our work.

May 9, 2016

Bill Hess, Chair

Wendy Colsen

Richard Donovan

Nathan Nietering

Sally Winthers

May 15, 2016 As adopted by the Board with minor textual changes