

Fuerst Family Farmstead

Novi, Michigan

April 30, 2007

Steve Stier

Report on the general condition and historic value of the barns on the farmstead

The group of buildings that make up the Fuerst Family Farmstead is a unique, valuable and irreplaceable historical and economic resource for the City of Novi. All effort should be made to maintain, use and interpret the farmstead so that present and future residents can have some first hand experience of genuine local history.

Although the original farmstead was established much earlier, these buildings were built during the first quarter of the twentieth century. They clearly illustrate an important and pivotal era in the evolution of agricultural practices in southwest Michigan. These buildings were designed and constructed at the very end of animal powered farming, at a time of increasing commercial production, and when the number of farms in Michigan had reached their highest. The stalls in the horse barn most probably housed the last generation of draft animals to provide power on the farm. The twenty milking stanchions in the cow barn indicate that milk was sold to a local dairy or creamery. Each barn has an enclosed granary and each has a center drive through bay and hay track equipment.

The large horse barn, dairy barn, machine shed and other out buildings are in good structural condition. It is obvious, however, that they have suffered from the lack of maintenance over a long period of time. It is imperative that the City fulfill its responsibility and begin a scheduled maintenance program for these

buildings. It is a tribute to their substantial construction that they have survived the neglect and lack of stewardship.

The buildings are being used by several different city departments, and school groups. The size and location of these buildings make them extremely valuable for storage and sheltered group activities. A lack of meaningful management has severely diminished the effectiveness of the resource. It would be logical and effective to assign responsibility for management of the buildings to an individual or a specific city department. The responsible entity must also be required to maintain the buildings in an historically appropriate manner.

(Based on a site visit, April, 2007.)

Steve Stier is a Michigan licensed builder specializing in historic preservation, traditional construction methods and materials, and has been a consultant on barns and other buildings since 1992. He teaches timber-frame construction at Tillers International (Kalamazoo, MI) leading workshops resulting in new but traditionally designed and constructed timber-framed structures. Stier has extensive experience in restoration and renovation of many types of historic structures along with specialized study and experience in repairing, restoring, and moving traditional barns. He has a masters degree in historic preservation from Eastern Michigan University (2000) and a masters degree in industrial arts education from Western Michigan University (1974). Steve has a Research Associate appointment with the Traditional Arts Program at the Michigan State University Museum. He is a founding member of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network, a board member of the Michigan Historic Preservation Network and serves on its Historic Resources Council and its Outreach and Education Committee. In Novi, Stier has twice consulted on the condition of the Fuerst barns and the moving of the barn at Island Lake that was eventually relocated to Maybury State Park in Northville.

Kathleen M. Mutch, August, 2007