

5

INTEGRATING HISTORIC PRESERVATION INTO PLANNING

INTRODUCTION

The City of Ames affects historic preservation through its authority to manage urban growth and to manage city-owned historic property.

The simplest way to coordinate historic preservation with zoning, land use, and growth management is to designate local historic districts and local landmarks as official zoning districts. The State of Iowa has enabled cities, counties, and land-use districts the power to make such designations on private- and publicly-owned property, and the City of Ames has adopted a process for the creation and administration of these designated properties. These regulations are contained in Chapter 31 of the Ames Municipal Code. (See Appendix 2.)

As the titleholder of historic properties, the City of Ames also affects historic preservation through its management of these resources. These resources include, for example, the Ames High School (NRHP), Bandshell Park Historic District, (NRHP), Ames Municipal Cemetery, Prairie Ark (a possible local landmark), and certain parklands including Emma McCarthy Lee Memorial Park and city boulevards, as in College Heights. The management of these and other properties influences, to a greater or lesser extent, what occurs to adjacent property.

This chapter of the Report recommends future action in Ames to integrate historic preservation fully into community planning and improvement. These recommendations are divided into the following sections:

Ames Mayor and City Council
Ames Historic Preservation Commission
Ames Planning and Zoning Commission
Municipal Code
Ames Land Use Policy Plan
Neighborhoods and General Public

The first five sections discuss how local government can improve Ames and its quality of life through historic preservation. The remaining section outlines how other entities in the community can employ historic preservation to improve Ames.

AMES MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

This Report recommends that the Ames City Council act upon the following tasks:

- Promote vigorously the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*.
- Integrate the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* into the City's LUPP by action of the City Council to make explicit that the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* is a tool to implement Goal No. 10 of the LUPP.
- Fund the Ames Historic Preservation Commission initiatives to assist in achieving the goals of the Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan. This obligation by the City of Ames to fund the commission's initiatives will increase that body's ability to fulfill its mission as stated in Chapter 31 of the Municipal Code. During the 2009-2010 fiscal year, the City approved expenditures of less than \$10,000 for the commission's work.
- Maintain open communication channels whereby City Departments notify the HPC of plans and/or impending actions that might affect historic resources.
- Continue the Neighborhood Intern position within the City of Ames to coordinate neighborhood association activities.
- Sponsor an annual Neighborhood Summit, a gathering of property owners and other interested parties to promote the stabilization and improvement of neighborhoods.
- Develop and adopt a more defined structure for neighborhood participation in city affairs to strengthen historic preservation at the grassroots and promote broad participation in local government. Historic preservation frequently provides a useful tool to stabilize and improve these residential areas.
- Encourage active neighborhood associations by providing incentives for neighborhood improvements.
- * Broaden the power of the HPC from its current authority "to periodically review the Zoning Ordinance and to recommend to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council any amendments appropriate for the protection and continued use of *landmarks or property and structures within historic districts*" (Municipal code 31-3 [*italics*, ed.]) so that the HPC has the authority to review and recommend amendments effecting property deemed National Register or local district/landmark eligible in other sections of the community. The current code language is narrow and restricts the HPC from areas of legitimate concern.
- Consider the skills of an historian, architectural historian, or archaeologist when appointing members to the Planning and Zoning Commission to avail that body of those insights.
- Integrate the Section 106 process into planning, when federal monies are involved in projects, as required by the Federal Code.
- Designate Bandshell Park a local historic district. This city-owned property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but is not a designated local historic district. The latter designation would provide additional protection for the park and require the HPC to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for any major alteration to it.
- Direct Staff to facilitate the revision of Chapter 31 of the Municipal Code.
- Update completely this comprehensive historic preservation plan in ten years time.

AMES HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION

As the primary public forum for historic preservation in Ames, the HPC should review, as needed, the various municipal planning overlay zones in effect in the city. The “Historical Preservation Overlay—O.H.” is one of nine such zones. (See Chapter 2.) This review will keep the commission abreast of regulations in the city as applied to historic preservation and stimulate thought concerning how additional overlays might benefit historic preservation in the community.

To this end, the commission needs to determine priorities for the coming year and refer them to the City Council for approval. At the end of each year, the commission should evaluate its accomplishments, remembering that the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* looks to a 10-year horizon for implementation.

This Report recommends that the Ames Historic Preservation Commission act upon the following tasks:

Procedures

- Promote vigorously the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*. As the chief local government agent for historic preservation in Ames and enabled by the State Historical Society of Iowa and the City of Ames to do so, the Ames Historic Preservation Commission has as its first and foremost charge “to promote the educational, cultural, and economic welfare of the public of the City” by preserving significant historical property in Ames. (Municipal Code, Sec. 31.1)
- Develop and adopt criteria to select and prioritize historic preservation surveys and National Register nomination projects, using the criteria as outlined in Appendix 6 of this Report as a point of beginning. At present, the Ames Historic Preservation Commission lacks a formal procedure to select and prioritize such projects.
- * Update the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* at least once every ten years.
- Address other procedural issues as they emerge.

Survey and Registration

- Survey potential historic districts as they met the National Register’s 50-year threshold.
- Remember that properties *representative* of common historical patterns and themes can possess significance without visually seeming to be significant. Significance need not be unique or rare for National Register eligibility.
- Pursue the nomination of the College Heights Historic District to the National Register, as stated in the City’s application to the State Historical Society of Iowa, which funded its intensive survey, and as recommended by the intensive survey itself. (Page 2009)
- Pursue the nomination of the Ames Main Street Historic District to the National Register, as recommended in an intensive survey of it. (Page 1992)
- Sponsor an intensive survey of the South Campus Area Neighborhood (SCAN), excluding the already surveyed College Heights neighborhood. Such a survey would determine the geographic area appropriate for nomination of the South Campus Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places, as discussed in a recent reconnaissance survey. (Page 2007) Such a listing would provide a useful tool for the preservation of SCAN, which is threatened by deferred maintenance and the pressures of off-campus student housing.

- Sponsor an intensive survey of Campustown, as recommended in a reconnaissance survey of it. (Page 2007) An intensive survey would provide a building-by-building analysis of the area's resources, evaluate their historical value, and establish a planning tool for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the area.
- Sponsor an intensive survey of the Oak-Wood-Forest neighborhood. Such a survey would determine the geographic area appropriate for nomination of the Oak-Wood-Forest Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places, as discussed in a recent reconnaissance survey. (Page 2007) This listing would provide a useful tool to increase neighborhood pride and signal the need to maintain the area's historic character. An intensive survey's study area should include both sides of Franklin Avenue between Oakland and Woodland Streets. The houses facing this city block share some of the architectural characteristics of the broader district; and, upon further research, might fit justifiably with its boundaries. Upon the recommendation of the intensive survey to proceed, prepare a National Register nomination of the area as an historic district. The outstanding integrity of this area should facilitate National Register listing.
- * Prepare a brief list of registered/designated historic districts in Ames and the community's potential historic districts as identified in this plan. Distribute this quick reference to members of the preservation commission to broaden their horizons and challenge their action.
- * Ask each member of the HPC to choose a potential historic district, as outlined in Chapter 4 of this Report, to conduct a windshield survey of it, prepare a media presentation concerning its historical/architectural significance, and present, at staggered intervals throughout the year, the results of these surveys at televised commission meetings. This project will develop the analytical skills of commission members and help educate the public in areas of critical concern.
- Make application to designate Bandshell Park a local historic district. This city-owned property is listed on the National Register of Historic Places but is not a designated local historic district. The latter designation would provide additional protection for the park and require the HPC to issue a Certificate of Appropriateness for any major alteration to it.
- Adopt a policy to prioritize and select historic preservation survey and registration projects in the community. The HPC presently lacks a policy. The Steering Committee responsible for the direction of this *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan* noted this as a problem and developed draft guidelines to remedy this deficiency. Appendix 5 of this document recommends certain guidelines. The HPC should review these guidelines and adopt as policy the result of its review.
- Apply for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding to support historic preservation projects in Ames. The City of Ames is already a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) entitlement community. CDBG monies are frequently employed in qualified areas for such projects across the nation. Typically in Iowa, however, departments responsible for CDBG funding are frightened off when asked to spend CDBG funds on historic properties, but this use of money is perfectly acceptable, according to the State Historical Society of Iowa. Many of the biggest cities in Iowa use CDBG money for historic preservation projects.

Regulations

- Discuss the pros and cons of establishing a facade easement ordinance or applying the Single-Family Conservation District ("O-SFC") overlay to areas of the City not yet covered by it.
- Work with city staff to revise Chapter 31 of the Municipal Code.
- Establish a role for the HPC in the Downtown Facade Improvement Program.
- Monitor the Inspection Division's enforcement of rental maintenance to ensure that historic properties are not adversely affected by neglect.
- Cooperate with efforts to create a minimum maintenance ordinance for private property in Ames.

- * Study the creation and/or application of other zoning overlay districts in Ames to protect historic resources, such as a demolition delay overlay applicable to historic buildings within identified potential historic districts. Study the Southeast Entryway Gateway Overlay District (“O-GSE”) as a possible model.

Community Education

- * Educate the community about the value of mid-20th century properties as worthy of survey, nomination, and preservation. As a city whose growth boomed following World War II, Ames possesses hundreds of resources dating from this period of time and worthy of preservation consideration.
- Conduct a public forum for developers and property owners with historic buildings, focusing on the federal and state historic preservation tax credits available for qualified historic property rehabilitation. The federal tax credit equals 20% of the projects allowable costs. The state tax credit equals 25% of allowable costs. Projects can qualify for both tax credit programs.
- Promote historic preservation through neighborhood organizations. As an outreach program, contact the leaders of neighborhood associations with historic preservation potential, inform them of historic preservation planning in place for their neighborhoods, and offer the commission’s support and assistance for preservation-related activities.
- * Work in concert with the City Council to sponsor an annual Neighborhood Summit, a gathering of property owners and other interested parties to promote the stabilization and improvement of neighborhoods in Ames.
- Conduct an intensive survey of the Ames Municipal Cemetery to determine its potential as an historic district. If found eligible, nominate it to the National Register of Historic Places and/or designate it a local historic district. These actions would identify and evaluate the historic and nonhistoric elements of the property and assist in the property’s future management.
- Continue to conduct the HPC’s annual historic preservation awards program as an excellent way to recognize good preservation in the community and educate the public. Generate as much publicity for the program as possible using all local media sources.
- Inform and remind all sectors of the community that Campustown is likely eligible as a National Register historic district and that this entails obligations if federal money is involved in its rehabilitation or redevelopment, including transportation-related projects. Section 106 procedures might apply.
- Create design guidelines to evaluate historic landscaping designated as a local historic district or a local landmark. A number of designed historic landscapes in Ames are likely eligible for such designation, but the HPC presently lacks criteria to evaluate proposed treatment of them.
- Educate the public that the National Register listing of an individual property or an historic district restricts private property owners in no way from what they can or cannot do to their property. Call attention, at the same time, to the improvements in the Old Town Historic District as a result of its historic preservation zoning overlay as a locally designated historic district with design restrictions.

Tourism

- Study and evaluate how other communities and states across the nation have used the Lincoln Highway as a tool to promote tourism. Visit the website of the Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor in Pennsylvania www.LHHC.org for one example.

AMES PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

This Report recommends that the Ames Planning and Zoning Commission act upon the following tasks:

- Promote vigorously the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the University Impacted Areas zoning overlay and study possible improvements to it.
- Consider the feasibility and utility of adopting a facade easement ordinance in identified historic areas threatened with potentially unsympathetic redevelopment.
- * Study the creation and/or application of other zoning overlay districts in Ames to protect historic resources, such as a demolition delay overlay applicable to historic buildings within identified potential historic districts.
- * Amend the Municipal Code to require a formal P&Z review of proposed local historic district and local landmark zoning overlays.

NEIGHBORHOODS AND GENERAL PUBLIC

Neighborhoods and residential property owners comprise the largest land use area in Ames and their health constitutes a primary obligation of the City of Ames. Some of these neighborhoods have formed associations to work for their improvement. Some of these associations are well organized and others are loosely organized. Other neighborhoods could benefit from organization but have not taken such action. Many of these neighborhoods possess historical significance.

This Report recommends that Ames neighborhoods act upon the following tasks:

- * Organize, if not already formed, a neighborhood association to promote residential improvement.
- * Explore the potentials offered by historic preservation to attract membership, foster neighborhood pride, stabilize property values, promote the maintenance of property, stimulate research of neighborhood history, and work for infrastructure improvements.
- Complete Iowa Site Inventory Forms. The title-holders of historic properties or those concerned about the preservation of these properties should complete this form and submit it to the State Historical Society of Iowa and the City of Ames. Blank forms and instructions are available on-line. Documentation then will be on hand if a preservation threat arises. Too often, the historical significance of a property is noted after planning for site redevelopment is complete or implementation has begun, compounding challenges to preservation. Visit the following site to learn more:
www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/statewide-inventory.
- * Study local historical/architectural surveys previously completed and evaluate their recommendations as applicable.
- * Discuss neighborhood potentials with the Ames Historic Preservation Commission and its staff.