

**MINUTES
CITY OF AMES
HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION**

Date: February 10th, 2025	Scott Huffman	2026
	Melissa Goodwin	2026
Call to Order: 6:01 PM	Robert Ewald	2026
Place: Council Chambers	Michael Murphy	2025
	William Walker	2027
Adjournment: PM	Dévon Lewis	2027
	Kate Gregory	2027

[*Absent]

CALL TO ORDER: Scott Huffman, Chairperson, called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

MOTION: (Ewald/Murphy) to approve the agenda for the meeting of February 10, 2025.

MOTION PASSED: (7-0)

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF January 13, 2025:

MOTION: (Huffman/Gregory) to approve the Minutes of the meeting of January 13, 2025, with corrections (Page 4, Sharon Worth's last name)

MOTION PASSED: (7-0)

PUBLIC FORUM:

CONSIDER A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS FOR AN ALTERATION TO THE CHIMNEY ON THE EXTERIOR OF THE STRUCTURE AT 809 BURNETT AVENUE IN THE OLD TOWN DISTRICT

Ray Anderson, Planner for the City of Ames, and Staff Liaison to the Commission, gave an overview of the application for 809 Burnett Avenue. The property owners would like to remove

the exterior portion of the chimney, and the portion in the attic, to increase the available living space. The project is categorized as an alteration since a portion of the chimney will remain within the home. Staff reviewed the proposed alteration and determined they could not approve it according to the Design Guidelines for Chimneys in Chapter 31. The applicant chose to utilize the option of having the Commission review their application, since staff could not administratively approve the request for a Certificate of Appropriateness. Mr. Anderson noted that the Commission must follow the same standards in Chapter 31.

Mr. Anderson stated the section of the Code that applies to this application for alteration is found under the Design Guidelines for Alteration, Section 31.13 (2).

Section 31.13 Design Guidelines for Alterations

(2) Chimneys.

(a) Existing brick or stone chimneys shall be retained whenever possible.

There are other sections of the Code that would apply to the request. The Zoning district does not have any provisions for chimneys, but the single-family conservation overlay district does have provisions regarding chimneys. Mr. Anderson read aloud section 31.12 (2) of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Section 31.12. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

(2) The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

Planning staff believes the request should be denied and recommends the Commission select Alternative Two.

Dévon Lewis, Commission Member, asked if staff determined if it would be possible to remove the chimney on the inside and leave the outside portion to maintain the appearance.

Michael Murphy, Commission Member, commented a framed section could be installed on the top of the house with brick veneer to mimic the look of a chimney without the weight a brick one would have. In many old houses the chimneys were in the middle of the house due to the location of the boilers. The original chimney could be maintained but it would be extensive and time consuming with risk of water leaks.

Mr. Anderson clarified to the Commission that the current proposal is the item they are voting on, and they have three options: to approve it, deny it, or send it back to the staff for further details. Ms. Lewis inquired whether a framed chimney, as described by Mr. Murphy, had been implemented previously. Mr. Anderson replied that he had not seen such a design in the Old Town District.

Kate Gregory, Commission Member, inquired about the possibility of applying for a variance. Mr. Anderson stated that the applicant would not meet the necessary criteria for a variance, and that only Chapter 29, Zoning, allows for variances, not Chapter 31, Historic Preservation.

Mr. Huffman asked if the applicant could submit a new Certificate of Appropriateness application with a different proposal if the current request is denied. Mr. Anderson confirmed that this would be possible.

William Walker, Commission Member, questioned the classification of the chimney as a defining feature of Queen Anne homes. He noted that many houses from the same period did not have visible chimneys and wondered if it is considered a defining or supplementary feature.

Mr. Huffman acknowledged Mr. Walker's question and clarified that the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Queen Anne homes do not explicitly mention chimneys. He then asked Mr. Anderson about how applications like this have been interpreted in the past when a feature is original to the house but not specifically listed in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards

Mr. Anderson explained each architectural style has its own Design Criteria in the Code, which does not specifically address chimneys. In this case, it matters since the chimney is an original, historic feature and part of the historic fabric of the house.

Robert Ewald, Commission Member, expressed skepticism that passersby would notice the absence of a chimney on a home. He inquired whether all Queen Anne houses in the Old Town District have chimneys. Mr. Anderson replied that he lacked this specific information, as chimneys were not documented in the district's survey.

Erik Romsdahl, the applicant, mentioned in his application another property located two houses south of his own. This property is situated at the corner of Burnett Avenue and 8th Street. It shares a similar architectural style but lacks a chimney. In contrast, the adjacent house, located on a corner lot, features a larger and more ornate chimney, making it more noticeable from the street.

Mr. Romsdahl presented a letter from Zach Shearer of Shearer Construction to the Commission, detailing the challenges of removing only the interior portion of the chimney while bracing it. The letter highlighted several key points:

1. The weight of the chimney on the attic is extremely dangerous due to the chimney's current condition and the house's framing.
2. The only possible solution would require a complex system of welded metal beams, which would:
 - Be intricate and expensive to fabricate
 - Add more weight to the first-floor exterior walls
 - Be considered unfeasible due to its elaborate nature and high cost
3. Even if this method were implemented, the attic would still bear the weight of approximately one ton of bricks.

These factors collectively suggest that partial removal of the chimney while maintaining its structural integrity is not a viable option for this particular house. The contractor also noted in his letter he would not be able to sleep at night if he were to perform the aforementioned work.

Mr. Walker asked Mr. Romsdahl if the two homes he mentioned were originally built in the condition he described. Mr. Romsdahl replied based on viewing the structure of the homes it appeared so but could not be certain. Mr. Walker asked if the chimney at 809 Burnett had been altered before. Mr. Romsdahl said he was not aware of any alterations being done to the chimney.

Mr. Ewald asked if Mr. Romsdahl if he had investigated constructing a chimney façade using thin brick veneer. Mr. Romsdahl replied he had not.

Mr. Walker asked Mr. Romsdahl if a smaller, artificial chimney could be installed. Mr. Romsdahl replied it would depend on various factors, such as if the artificial chimney would have to replicate exactly the original. Mr. From a water hazard perspective, sealing it off and removing it seems to be the most effective solution. Mr. Walker asked Mr. Anderson if a time period appropriate but smaller artificial chimney would be allowable.

Mr. Anderson stated he was unsure and would have to investigate the matter further.

Ms. Lewis inquired about the similarity of chimneys in other Queen Anne houses in the neighborhood. Mr. Romsdahl replied that the neighbor's chimney is both taller and more ornate, positioned farther back, which allows for more usable attic space. Additionally, this neighboring house is larger. In contrast, the house directly across from theirs lacks a chimney but is nearly identical in design. No information was available to indicate if the home had a chimney in years past.

Mr. Huffman emphasized that while construction techniques exist to replicate historical features—methods often employed in commercial projects—the National Park Service, for example, typically mandates the preservation of original historic materials when they remain intact. He also highlighted the significant challenge of constructing around the existing chimney, noting that if the chimney is classified as a historic fabric element according to code, its preservation would be required. Mr. Huffman then revisited the three proposed motion options for addressing the issue.

Ms. Gregory expressed her sympathy for the request but stated that she could not find any provision in the code that would allow the Commission to approve it or use its discretion in this matter.

Mr. Huffman asked Mr. Anderson to speak to whether an applicant could appeal to the Commission if their application was denied by Planning staff. Mr. Anderson said that would only be the case if it was an alteration. Ms. Gregory noted that Chapter 31 lists three specific instances where an alteration can be approved, and she believed that this request did not meet any of those criteria. Ms. Gregory inquired whether the Commission possesses the authority to approve the application and sought clarification on the source of that authority.

Mr. Anderson responded the Commission must follow the regulations and the Design Guidelines and is not aware of any provisions in the Code that would allow for approval.

Ms. Lewis asked if it was correct the Design Guidelines for Queen Anne style homes does not address chimneys as an integral part of that style of house design. Mr. Ewald confirmed that was correct. Mr. Huffman added that chimneys were not specifically mentioned in the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. Ms. Goodwin commented the Tudor style is the only one that specifically mentions chimneys.

Ms. Lewis referenced section 31.10 (2A) of the code pertaining to the Certificate of Appropriateness.

Section 31.10. Certificate of Appropriateness.

(2) Alteration. An alteration is any act or process that changes one or more of the exterior features of a structure, such as windows, porches, siding, and other features identified under the Design Guidelines that do not increase the amount of gross floor area. A Certificate of Appropriateness for an alteration shall be permitted in the following instances.

(a) An architectural feature has deteriorated to the point that it must be replaced.

Ms. Lewis asked Mr. Romsdahl if he had any additional information about the Questioned regarding the safety of the chimney and its current condition. Apart from this project, would it be under discussion for removal due to deterioration.

Mr. Romsdahl stated that the visible portion of the chimney had been recently tuckpointed and a waterproof coating applied. However, he noted that the flue and liner would need to be replaced, and a cap should be installed to prevent bird entry. Additionally, he inquired whether the chimney would need to be replaced if it were damaged in a weather event.

Ms. Lewis said her interpretation of the Code was it may not have to be replaced if it was damaged or had deteriorated. Ms. Lewis also inquired if Mr. Romsdahl had acquired information regarding the structural integrity. Mr. Romsdahl stated beyond what he had presented tonight, he did not and explained the chimney runs all the way to the floor and is integral to the layout of the house. Mr. Romsdahl is concerned the exterior portion of the chimney would be damaged and he would be unable to maintain it properly.

Ms. Goodwin pointed out section 31.10 (4) pertaining to the Certificate of Appropriateness.

Section 31.10. Certificate of Appropriateness.

(4) Consideration of an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness shall apply the Design Guidelines, which shall pertain to all historic preservation districts and historic landmarks; and the Design Criteria, which shall apply only to the particular historic district or historic landmark for which they are enacted. A new principal structure shall be representative of one of the architectural styles approved in the district. The design for the new principal structure must meet all the design criteria listed for the architectural style selected. Architectural features not specifically listed in the design criteria may be proposed by the applicant. Those features should be incorporated in a manner appropriate with the architectural style.

In each instance, the Commission may grant exemptions to the requirements for an alteration if it determines that the cost of replication is prohibitive

Ms. Goodwin explained item four states the Commission may grant approval if cost is an issue.

Mr. Anderson clarified the Design guidelines state existing stone or brick chimneys should be retained whenever possible. If the Commission determines it is not possible to retain it, then they could approve it. Mr. Anderson did not foresee a scenario in which that could take place.

Ms. Gregory inquired about a hypothetical scenario where an owner removed the interior brick portion of a chimney without proper authorization, compromising the roof's structural integrity and necessitating the removal of the exterior chimney. Mr. Anderson clarified that such a situation would require obtaining a building permit beforehand. However, he emphasized that a building permit for this type of unauthorized and potentially dangerous renovation would not be approved.

Ms. Lewis raised concerns about the potential costs associated with a weather event like a tornado. Mr. Walker added that homeowners would inevitably face expenses if their property was hit by a tornado.

Mr. Ewald noted that if the Commission denies the Certificate of Appropriateness, it does not bar the applicant from reapplying at a later time with a new proposal. Additionally, the Commission should consider the precedent they would establish if they were to approve the application.

Ms. Gregory suggested that if they examine Chapter 31, there might be certain aspects they could consider amending to allow for more flexibility. She proposed the possibility of approving specific situations on a limited basis, rather than maintaining a blanket prohibition. This approach would involve reviewing Chapter 31 to identify areas where exceptions or limited approvals could be beneficial.

Ms. Devon has great empathy and sympathy for Mr. Romsdahl's situation.

MOTION: (Lewis/Ewald) Deny approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for an alteration to the existing brick chimney that includes removal of the exterior portion of the chimney on the structure located at 809 Burnett Avenue in the Old Town Historic District.

MOTION PASSED: (6-0) Abstained: Murphy

CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION'S LETTER SENT TO THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL REGARDING A ZONING TEXT AMENDMENT

Mr. Huffman recapped briefly what was said at the last meeting. Ms. Gregory asked if a reply to the Commission's second letter had been received. Mr. Huffman stated no communication had been received.

Mr. Huffman expressed his readiness to move forward but is open to other Commission Members thoughts.

Ms. Lewis agreed with Mr. Huffman.

COMMISSION COMMENTS: CONSIDER PLACING AN ITEM ON THE MARCH 10, 2025, AGENDA TO REVIEW THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE MUNICIPAL CODE

Mr. Huffman stated for the Commission to place items on an agenda, the request must be submitted to Planning staff at least two weeks prior to the meeting date.

Ms. Gregory expressed confusion about the current situation, referring to a previous discussion and vote that took place last month. She highlighted the following points:

- The Commission had agreed to revisit the topic this month.
- They had decided that someone would gather information about developing definitive Commission rules and procedures in the interim.
- The plan was to formally request supplemental documentation and context from the City to inform the Commission's discussion.
- These points were part of the motion that was passed.

Ms. Gregory noted that there was no additional information or documentation provided as expected. She questioned what had happened to the other aspects of the motion that were not addressed.

Mr. Anderson asked Ms. Gregory what type of additional information she is looking for.

If the Commission approves an item for discussion at the next meeting and it's recorded in the Minutes, it should be addressed at that meeting. If there's uncertainty about what additional information is needed, that should be clarified before the next meeting. I expected this topic to be discussed tonight, with the necessary information provided in advance. If staff was unsure about what information would be helpful, they could have asked the Commission Chair or a Commission Member for guidance. Since no additional information was provided, I suggest we postpone this discussion to next month's meeting. This will allow time for staff to gather the required information to help us define the Commission's roles and procedures. The Commission's roles are outlined in two sections of Chapter 29 and one section of Chapter 31 of our governing documents. Reviewing these sections would be a good starting point for our discussion.

Mr. Anderson inquired if what Ms. Gregory said pertained to the Zoning Text Amendment discussed recently. Ms. Gregory stated it did not.

Ms. Gregory made the following recommendations to Mr. Huffman:

- Postpone the decision on the matter until the next meeting.
- Task the staff with gathering additional information to develop clearer definitions of the Commission's roles and procedures.

- o Formally request supplemental documentation from city contacts to inform the Commission's decision.

These steps aim to ensure the Commission has comprehensive information before making a decision on the matter at hand.

Ms. Goodwin inquired about the supplemental information referenced in two instances within chapter 29 and once in chapter 31, along with their corresponding sections. She also questioned whether additional information beyond these specific references was required. Ms. Gregory expanded on this by asking if it would be possible to examine how other cities are handling similar matters.

David Carter, 709 Douglas, suggested the Commission obtain information from The Secretary of the Interior and obtain a copy of agreement between the City of Ames and the State. The State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) might provide training for the Commission members.

Mr. Walker commented the Commission could reach out to the SHPO to see if they could speak with them.

MOTION: (Gregory/Lewis) Postpone a decision on this matter until the next monthly meeting to have the staff gather additional information regarding developing a definition of the Commission roles and firmly request supplemental documentation and context from the City to inform the Commission discussion.

MOTION PASSED: (7-0)

Ms. Gregory informed the group that she and her neighbors are collaborating with a museum to organize a city event focusing on historic resources. Their plan is to create an event similar to one held in Chicago, which would involve selecting several buildings in the downtown area, gathering information about each one, and allowing people to visit these locations on specific dates to learn more about their history.

Mr. Huffman expressed his support for the idea, stating that it aligns well with their work plan.

Ms. Lewis inquired about potential ways for the Commission to participate in this initiative, to which Ms. Gregory agreed to provide more information.

Mr. Walker mentioned that Des Moines has hosted similar events, specifically referencing their mid-century modern home tours

STAFF COMMENTS

No comments

MOTION TO ADJOURN:

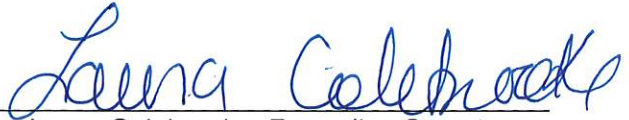
MOTION: (Murphy/Gregory) to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION PASSED: (7-0)

The meeting adjourned at 7:07PM.



Michael Murphy, Vice-Chair
Historic Preservation Commission



Laura Colebrooke, Recording Secretary
Department of Planning & Housing