

### Building Code Options

The City Council has adopted the 1997 Uniform Code for Building Conservation, the 2000 International Building Code, and the 2003 Dubuque Historic Building Code. The adoption of three separate building codes gives owners, contractors, architects and the Building Services staff alternatives when dealing with existing buildings. It also reduces the barrier (real and/or perceived) of codes when property owners are contemplating renovation of their downtown buildings. The HPC supports the use of these codes.

### Preservation-Related Planning

The City of Dubuque prides itself on our comprehensive planning, and historic preservation is included in the planning process.

- ♦ Long-range goals for historic preservation are set forth in the City's 1995 *Comprehensive Plan* and 2002 Plan update.
- ♦ In 2002, the City Council adopted the *Port of Dubuque Master Plan*. The Port of Dubuque is home to several National Register properties and the *America's River* project. The Plan provides for a dense urban development pattern reflective of Downtown Dubuque, and supports a riverfront revitalization effort that includes cultural and heritage tourism as well as design standards that reflect Dubuque's historic downtown architecture.
- ♦ The City Council recognized the importance of the historic, architectural and cultural resources of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods with the adoption of the *Downtown Dubuque Master Plan* in 2004. The Plan evaluates current conditions, catalyst opportunities, and barriers to investment for Downtown's historic features. It also describes priority actions for protecting and encouraging redevelopment of historic resources in Downtown.

### Preserve America Communities Status

The City of Dubuque was recognized in 2004 by the White House as demonstrating commitment to preserving America's heritage while ensuring a future filled with opportunities for learning and enjoyment. The Preserve America Communities status recognizes the City of Dubuque's exceptional efforts to use cultural and natural resources to promote tourism, revitalize the community, create jobs, and educate the public. Dubuque is the first city in Iowa to receive this Federal designation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The City of Dubuque, Iowa is a tremendous example of "leading edge" preservation efforts that can be accomplished through leveraging funds and forming partnerships. The City of Dubuque's array of historic preservation regulations and incentives are not found in many communities. Dubuque's programs can serve as a model for historic preservation commissions from across the country, and are especially relevant for small to medium-sized cities.



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## Dubuque's Commitment To Historic Preservation

### *Shot Tower*



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### **INTRODUCTION**

The City of Dubuque has a strong historic preservation ethic, a historic preservation ordinance, a conservation district ordinance and a variety of preservation incentives supported by an active Historic Preservation Commission. As Iowa's oldest city, Dubuque has been continually in the forefront of historic preservation in State of Iowa – principally for successful new preservation incentives. We believe that Dubuque has one of the best preservation programs in Iowa, with a growing array of preservation tools available to help finance rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic structures.

### **HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMITMENT**

The City of Dubuque's commitment to historic preservation began in the mid 1970's as the community reacted to the wholesale clearance of downtown blocks through urban renewal programs.

#### Initial Efforts

In 1976, the Dubuque Architectural Survey was completed and demolition districts were established as precursors to historic districts. The City Council adopted a Historic Preservation Ordinance in 1977. The City Council established the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) in 1979 to assist in the review, retention and promotion of historically significant properties and districts in the city of Dubuque. The City designated local historic districts and landmarks from 1979 to 1984 based on the 1976 Survey.

#### Historic Districts

There are 615 structures located in five locally designated historic districts administered by the HPC. All of these districts – Cathedral, Jackson Park, Langworthy, West 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Old Main – are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### Local Landmarks

The City of Dubuque has designated 8 local landmarks for the HPC to administer: City Hall, Dubuque County Courthouse, Old Dubuque County Jail, *William M. Black* steamboat, Shot Tower, Mathias Ham House, Julien Dubuque Monument and Four Mounds Estate. All of these are on the National Register. In addition, the Old Jail and the *William M. Black* are National Historic Landmarks. The City is in the process of nominating the Shot Tower as a National Historic Landmark.

#### National Register Inventory

The city limits of Dubuque encompass many of Dubuque County's nationally recognized cultural resources, including 1 of the 4 archeological districts, all 6 historic districts, and 36 of the 46 structures individually listed on the National Register. Two of the County's 3 National Historic Landmarks are in Dubuque. The City of Dubuque has been adding to its National Register inventory in the last few years, principally through historic tax credit projects in the central business district.

#### Demolition/Conservation Districts

When first established in 1976, the demolition districts had a discretionary 90-day review by the City Council for all demolition permit applications in these districts. They encompassed neighborhoods where the 1976 Architectural Survey indicated there may be a collection of historically and architecturally significant structures.

When several landmark commercial structures in the Downtown were threatened with demolition in 2001, the City Council asked the HPC to assist in completely revamping the regulations for demolition districts. In 2001, the City Council expanded the boundaries of the demolition districts to include the Downtown, established economic review criteria, and made the HPC an advisory review body for demolition permit applications in the demolition districts.

In August of 2004, the City Council renamed the demolition districts to *conservation* districts, and revised the economic review criteria based on recommendations of the HPC and the Community Development Advisory Commission.

The HPC now has review responsibilities for demolition requests in the 8 conservation districts that protect 958 structures in the downtown and surrounding older neighborhoods. The conservation districts encompass areas of historically and architecturally significant structures.

#### Façade Grants

The Façade Grant Program is available for front and rear façade renovations in the Old Main Subarea of the Greater Downtown Urban Renewal District, which encompasses the Old Main Historic District. The grants are used to eliminate inappropriate additions or alterations, to repair facades to their historic appearance, to rehabilitate the façade to improve the overall appearance, and to install landscaping or screening. The HPC reviews and approves these grants.



Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Depot

### Certified Local Government

The City of Dubuque participates in the Certified Local Government (CLG) program of the State Historic Preservation Office. The main benefit of being a CLG is that the City is able to conduct federally-mandated Section 106 reviews locally, as opposed to sending each project to the State Historic Preservation Office. If projects had to be sent to the State, the amount of paperwork would increase significantly, as would the review time.

As a CLG, the City also is eligible for grants to conduct a variety of historic preservation activities. These have included development of design guidelines and the phased Historical/Architectural Survey/Evaluation of the community.

### Historical/Architectural Surveys/Evaluations

The Dubuque City Council has committed matching funds for State grants to survey and evaluate the historical and architectural significance of 4,728 structures in the historic districts and conservation districts.

Dubuque's many architectural themes and historic contexts are recorded in the 1999 Comprehensive Survey and the 2000 Community Assessment of historical contexts and supporting architectural themes funded in part by Certified Local Government Grants from the State Historical Society of Iowa. This multiple property document is the foundation for phased historical and architectural surveys and evaluations of Dubuque's older residential and commercial neighborhoods.



Completed in 2000, Phase I of Dubuque's Historical/Architectural Survey/Evaluation encompassed 993 structures in the Couler Valley area. Phase II examined 2,092 structures in the Eagle Point area in 2001. Phase III involved 647 structures

in and around the central business district, including the Old Main Historic District, in 2002-2003. Completed in June of 2004, Phase IV evaluated 544 structures in the Jackson Park, Cathedral, West 11th Street, and Langworthy Historic Districts. It included nominating the West 11th Street and Langworthy Historic Districts to the National Register. From 2004-2005, Phase V will evaluate 452 structures in the remaining areas of the conservation districts not previously surveyed.

### Responding to Challenges

In the 1990's, historic preservation faced a number of challenges in Dubuque. As a result, the City Council determined that a renewed focus on historic preservation was needed. In 1999, City Council members directed the HPC to review and update the Historic Preservation Ordinance, and to identify solutions to the problems and deficiencies with the existing ordinance that had been the cause of these conflicts.



### Preservation Partnerships

The City of Dubuque also prides itself on our community partnerships, and historic preservation is no exception. The HPC has found good community support and a strong funding commitment from the City Council and our partners at the

local, regional and state levels for a growing list of preservation tools and incentives.

The HPC created a Preservation Task Force in the Spring of 2000 to develop partnerships, gather public input and present recommendations to the City Council. The Task Force included HPC members, historic district property owners, contractors who work on historic properties, and representatives from the Dubuque Area Board of Realtors, Dubuque County Historical Society, and Dubuque Main Street Ltd. The Task Force received staff support from the City's Community and Economic Development, Legal, and Planning Services Departments.

The Task Force gathered public input and developed partnerships to help the City uphold its commitment to its historic sites through focus group meetings, surveys, a public forum, and input from the State Historic Preservation Office. The Task Force identified perceptions and problems surrounding historic preservation, and developed recommendations for Historic Preservation Ordinance revisions and preservation incentives.

### Historic Preservation Ordinance amendments

The City Council amended the Historic Preservation Ordinance in 2001 to address problems and issues that had been causing conflicts in the 1990's.

- Established *Design Review Guidelines* for the 5 historic districts as a user-friendly resource to reduce the "red tape" that property owners and contractors encounter when making exterior improvements to historic properties. In 2002, the HPC distributed *Architectural, Streetscape and Landscape Design Review Guidelines for the Historic Districts* and provided Design Review Training to local property owners, public officials, design professionals, historic preservation commissioners and staff from around the state of Iowa.
- Added a *Preservation Alternatives* step to the design review process, between the step for a Certificate of Appropriateness and the step for a Certificate of Economic Hardship. The Preservation Alternatives step requires a property owner to attempt to obtain financial incentives and restoration alternatives sufficient for the owner to earn a reasonable economic return.
- Designated the HPC as an *advisory review body for public works projects* within historic districts or at landmarks that are visible from the public way. In 2003, the City Council extended the HPC's advisory design review to downtown banners.
- Prohibited *Demolition by Neglect*, to require owners of historic property keep their real estate in good repair and to control neglect before it gets to the point where the property owner requests changing or replacing the structure's original materials or demolishing the structure. The intent is to stop a small

problem before it becomes a large problem, and to offer information and assistance to property owners on preventative maintenance with historically appropriate methods and materials.

### Historic Preservation Incentives

In addition to these regulatory changes, the City Council initiated historic preservation incentives for rehabilitation of historic properties that bridge the gap that owners of historic properties face due to their income, the cost of historic preservation, or both.

- Changed the *Historic Preservation Homeowner Grant Program* for low to moderate income households, by increasing the grant amount from \$2,000 to \$5,000 for exterior rehabilitation, and removing the required match.

- Creation of a *Historic Preservation Revolving Loan Fund* to provide low interest loans to property owners at any income level in the four residential historic districts. The program provides loans of up to \$25,000 at 3% for 10 years per structure for exterior rehabilitation. It is modeled after the City's Downtown Rehabilitation Loan Program, which includes the primarily commercial Old Main Historic District..



- Creation of a *Historic District Public Improvement Program* to provide incentives for public place and streetscape improvements in each historic district on an annual rotating basis, with improvements based on a comprehensive urban design plan for each of the 5 historic districts. The program is funded at \$100,000 per year with a 25% match requirement, and is available to neighborhood groups and neighborhood associations.

- Expansion of the existing *Urban Revitalization Program* to include all historic districts. This program offers a 10-year property tax exemption for interior and exterior improvements that increase the tax assessment and in turn the property taxes, for residential properties in older neighborhoods.

- Partnership with *the Dubuque Area Board of Realtors* to provide information for potential purchasers of property within a historic district about historic preservation regulations and incentives, and to include information that the property is in a historic district on the purchase agreement form, the abstract and the deed.

Since these Historic Preservation Ordinance amendments and historic preservation incentives were implemented, the HPC has not been challenged by appeals to the City Council.

The work of the HPC and the Preservation Task Force helped create a positive image for historic preservation efforts, and spurred other local initiatives in support of historic preservation.

### Lead-Based Paint Abatement

In the late 1990's, the City's Housing Services Department had launched a major lead-based paint abatement program for the City's substantial pre-1940 housing stock. Conflicts emerged between the federal housing program guidelines for lead-based paint abatement and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

In 2001-2002, the HPC, Durrant Architects and the Planning Services Department, with assistance from the State Historic Preservation Office, developed Architectural Design Guidelines with input from Housing Services and Building Services staff that accommodated the goals of both federal programs. Design review training also was offered to staff in these City departments.

### Neighborhood Grants

Through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, the City provides financial assistance to low and moderate income households. The City offers a Neighborhood Infrastructure Program and Neighborhood Grants to neighborhood associations and neighborhood groups in CDBG target areas, where a majority of households are low and moderate income.

These programs compliment the Historic District Public Improvement Program. Since 2002, these CDBG programs have been made available as the local match or overall funding source for streetscape improvements submitted by neighborhood organizations for the Historic District Public Improvement Program.

### Historic Property Tax Rebate Program

In 2002, the City Council established the Historic Property Tax Rebate Program to encourage property owners to preserve, rehabilitate, restore, and reconstruct historic properties in the City's Downtown Urban Renewal District. The program rebates property taxes on the new taxable valuation for 8 years. The HPC reviews the applications and provide recommendations to the City Council.

