

# CITY OF OTTUMWA

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN



SEPTEMBER 9, 2024

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City of Ottumwa and The Lakota Group team wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions to and support of this plan:

## **City Council**

Rick Johnson, *Mayor*  
Cyan Bossou, *Councilmember*  
Cara Galloway, *Councilmember*  
Doug McAntire, *Councilmember*  
Keith Caviness, *Councilmember*  
Bill Hoffman, Jr., *Councilmember*

## **Historic Preservation Commission**

Molly Myers Naumann, *Chair*  
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and Chair*

## **Staff**

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112 N Market Street

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# WHY A HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN?

Historic preservation, which celebrates built heritage, is really about the future: How can the city manage change and growth while retaining the best of its past? This plan establishes goals and strategies for navigating change while leveraging the cultural and economic value of Ottumwa's historic resources.

By recognizing the value of historic buildings, sites, and traditions, the city can create a bridge between the past and the future. These initiatives not only preserve architectural treasures but also contribute to community identity, economic development, and sustainable urban planning.

## This plan has several purposes:

- It documents the state of historic preservation in Ottumwa today;
- It will help to guide preservation decisions in the future;
- It recommends a combination of potential incentives and regulations to foster historic preservation;
- It seeks to imbue a historic preservation ethic among city leaders and among the Ottumwa community.

**This plan is an attempt to be accountable to the generations that come after us by asking, "What does Ottumwa want its past to look like in the future?"**

Canteen Lunch,  
112 2nd Street.



## THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION MOVEMENT

The origins of the historic preservation movement in the US can be traced to two mobilizing events which were separated by more than 100 years: The first was the restoration of a deteriorated Mount Vernon, George Washington's home in Alexandria, Virginia, in 1853. The second event, often considered the modern genesis of the movement, was the 1963 demolition of the spectacular Penn Station in New York City, which caused widespread outrage. The National Historic Preservation Act was passed by Congress in 1966.

For many years, even after Penn Station's demolition, preservationists were animated by a site's association with famous people (often a narrow slice of America) and grand civic and residential architecture.



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Protesters against the demolition of Pennsylvania Station, 1962; Courtesy of David Hirsch

The movement has greatly expanded since the times of Mount Vernon and Penn Station. For example, beginning in the late 1970s, the National Trust for Historic Preservation led an effort to preserve and revitalize historic Main Streets, which were threatened at the time by the development of shopping malls. Main Street Ottumwa is a participant in that continued movement. And preservation has expanded to include areas – or “districts” – beyond individual buildings, as well as vernacular commercial and residential architecture, intangible culture, and underrepresented communities. All of these are driven by larger goals to retain physical connections to the past that tell our collective stories – stories of the nation and stories of communities.

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E 300 Block of Main Street, circa 1900. Creative Commons



## HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN OTTUMWA

The Our Ottumwa 2040 Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2020 and amended in 2022, recommends the City undertake a historic preservation plan, a logical next step after investing the time and resources to designate seven National Register districts in the city. Further preservation planning impetus came after the demolition of the Wesley United Methodist Church in January 2022. This plan fulfills the Comprehensive Plan recommendation and sets Ottumwa on a course to integrate preservation fully into its future.

In recommending new preservation initiatives, this plan also documents Ottumwa's built heritage, which includes buildings (residential, commercial, and civic architecture) and structures (such as the Wabash Bridge). Ottumwa's history and its architecture have been researched and documented in at least six books authored by local experts, as well in National Register nominations for districts and individual buildings. These provide an unusually rich written legacy for a small city.

In recent decades, the preservation movement has expanded to include intangible heritage, like cultural history (which may or may not be associated with existing buildings or structures), and historic businesses. Long overdue, the movement has become particularly cognizant of recognizing the history of underrepresented cultures and communities and their associated buildings and structures.

What gets preserved through a historic preservation plan? Certainly not everything old must be saved. Instead, preservation is a way of managing community change and development to retain the things that are most important, which may include specific buildings, neighborhoods, or, simply the preservation of a neighborhood's scale. The movement today acknowledges that each generation views its community's history through its own lens, identifying those elements of the city that reflect an important part of the past.

The historic preservation movement has also grown to overlap with the sustainability movement, recognizing the importance of reusing materials and the embodied energy that is stored in any existing building.



As a practical matter, historic preservation and the National Register of Historic Places typically use a 50-year demarcation when considering whether a building or structure may have historical significance. That means, as of the writing of this plan, buildings and structures from 1974 or earlier might qualify for listing on the National Register. Occasionally, buildings less than 50 years old may qualify for listing in the National Register if they are considered outstanding architectural examples of their period or of particular importance because of their association with people or events.

When considering individual buildings or structures of any period, preservation practice focuses on the best examples of their time. For areas like neighborhoods, preservation considers the place and its context as a representation of the historical record.

Ottumwa Historic Hydro-Electric Plant, 1930-1931.

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## **ADDITIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION BENEFITS**

### **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP.**

Historic preservation and, particularly, the adaptive reuse of buildings, is an ultimate form of recycling. While some new buildings are designed for energy efficiency, the reuse of an existing building makes use of the energy embodied in its materials and in its construction. Reuse of existing buildings also keeps the waste of demolished buildings out of landfills. Old buildings can be made more efficient (e.g., through added insulation or upgraded mechanical systems), and the evolution of technologies and aesthetic standards are recognizing the importance of integrating energy-saving elements and alternative energy sources into building rehabilitations.

### **REDUCED SPRAWL.**

Historic buildings tend to be located in denser, walkable places – the places in most communities where the first settlements were located. In this way, historic preservation strengthens existing compact development, reducing sprawl and the need to drive to new developments in less dense environments.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.**

The Main Street movement is one example where economic development and historic preservation go hand-in-hand. By adapting downtowns to the continually changing commercial needs, buildings are preserved as a function of their economic utility.

### **HOME VALUES.**

In residential neighborhoods, research has shown that homes in National Register districts retain or increase in value faster than home values in non-historic neighborhoods. [1]

### **HERITAGE TOURISM.**

Heritage tourism is a form of travel that involves engaging with the tangible and intangible history of a region. It allows visitors to connect with the past through activities, experiences, and purchases that represent the stories and people associated with the locations they visit. This can include visiting historic sites, participating in cultural events, and experiencing local traditions. Heritage tourism benefits visitors through the experiences they have and value, and it improves the quality of life for local residents by creating jobs and business opportunities.

[1] According to studies of historic residential districts by Place Economics in Indianapolis, IN, Nashville, TN, and other cities.

# A HISTORIC PRESERVATION VISION FOR OTTUMWA

IN OTTUMWA, HISTORIC BUILDINGS,  
STRUCTURES, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
WILL BE CELEBRATED AND SAFEGUARDED  
AS REFLECTIONS OF THE STORIES AND  
VALUES OF THE CITY'S PAST.

F.W. Simmons  
House, 332 E Fifth  
1899-1900

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## THROUGH THOUGHTFUL ENGAGEMENT AND STEWARDSHIP, WE WILL:

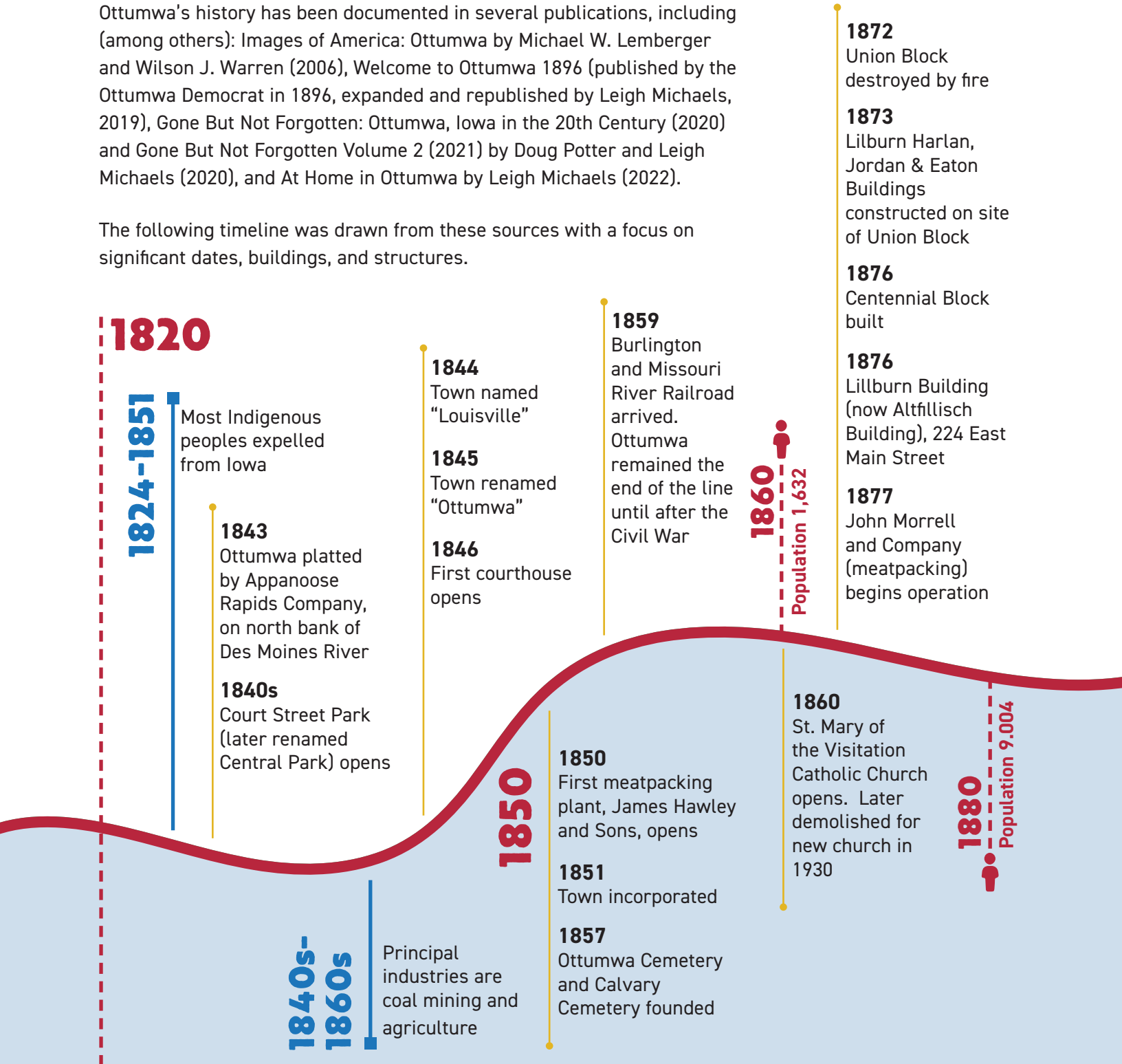
- 1** Promote inclusivity to tell the breadth of Ottumwa's history.
- 2** Leverage the benefits of preservation for economic vitality.
- 3** Educate Ottumwans and visitors about the city's past.
- 4** Recognize that preservation is dynamic and includes the adaptive reuse of buildings and the incorporation of sustainable technologies and practices.
- 5** Balance progress and preservation, using preservation as a frame when considering future development.



# OTTUMWA'S HISTORY

Ottumwa's history has been documented in several publications, including (among others): *Images of America: Ottumwa* by Michael W. Lemberger and Wilson J. Warren (2006), *Welcome to Ottumwa 1896* (published by the Ottumwa Democrat in 1896, expanded and republished by Leigh Michaels, 2019), *Gone But Not Forgotten: Ottumwa, Iowa in the 20th Century* (2020) and *Gone But Not Forgotten Volume 2* (2021) by Doug Potter and Leigh Michaels (2020), and *At Home in Ottumwa* by Leigh Michaels (2022).

The following timeline was drawn from these sources with a focus on significant dates, buildings, and structures.



**1880**

Ottumwa Jewish Cemetery founded

**1883**

Second Adams School built on site of present-day Ottumwa High School

**1883**

Leighton Block & adjacent Garner Block (later known as Benson Block) constructed

**1892**

The flood of 1892

**1893**

Third and present-day Wapello County Courthouse opens

**1899**

Marshall "Major" Taylor, a Black professional cyclist, wins an integrated event at the Ottumwa Velodrome. [later demolished]

**1900**

Dain Manufacturing Company (later John Deere) begins operations



Wapello County Courthouse, 1900s.  
Courtesy of Michael W Lemberger & Wilson J Warren.

**1900**

Population 18,197

**1901**

Ottumwa Public Library (an Andrew Carnegie library) opens

**1903**

Flood of 1903, most damaging since city's founding

**1906**

Granite Horse Trough installed [later moved to Ballingall Park]

**1912**

Federal Building opens at Court & Fourth Streets, now Ottumwa City Hall

**1915**

First National Bank opens at 131 E. Main Street; designed by H.H. Stoddard of Chicago

**1917**

Hotel Ottumwa opens at 107 E. Second Street

**1921**

Egyptian Revival Ottumwa Courier Building by architects Clausen & Krause opens at 213 E Second Street

**1921**

Wapello Club, designed by architect George M Kerns opens at 225 E Second Street

**1921**

YMCA, designed by architect Bruno Jannsen of Pittsburgh, PA, opens at 231 E Second Street

**1886**

South Ottumwa (originally Pickwick) annexed by Ottumwa

**1889**

Electric streetcar begins service

**1891**

Ottumwa Opera House opens [later partially demolished]

**1930**  
Population 28,075

**1929**

Lester Jay Funeral Home opens at 220 North Court

**1930**

St. Mary's Catholic Church completed

**1930**

Benson Building, 214 E Second, built in the English Cottage style. Destroyed by fire c. 2018

**1930**

New St Mary of the Visitation Catholic Church, by architect I.C. Krajewski, begins construction



Ottumwa Theater on Armistice Day, 1944. Courtesy of Doug Potter & Leigh Michaels

**1923**

Ottumwa High School opens

**1924**

The Benson Block partially reconstructed after fire

**1925**

Young Women's Christian Association opens at 133 W. Second Street

**1926**

St. Joseph Hospital opens at 312 E. Alta Vista Avenue and 317 Vanness Avenue [later demolished]

**1927**

George A Morrell residence constructed at 217 E Fifth, designed by architects Kraetsch and Kraetsch

**1936**

Jefferson Street Viaduct completed

**1936**

Canteen Lunch in the Alley, estab. 1927, moves to 112 E. Second Street (current location)

**1942**

Ottumwa Theater designed by architectural firm Wetherell & Harrison rises from the ashes of earlier theater on the site.

**1942**

Naval Air Station Ottumwa established (later decommissioned)

**1947**

Flood of 1947

**1950**

**1950**

Wapello Courthouse tower removed because of safety concerns

**1950**

Union Depot remodeled to its current Mid-Century style

**1950s**

Des Moines River straightening and levee construction increase Ottumwa's flood protection.

**1950s**

Relocation of US Highways 34 & 63 causes destruction of late 19th century neighborhoods on north side of river

**1945-1960** New residential developments spring up on the edges of city to meet the needs of returning veterans



East Main Street, 1966.. Courtesy of Doug Potter & Leigh Michaels

**1951**  
Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Depot remodeled into Modern style, with limestone exterior designed by Chicago Architectural firm Holabird, Root & Burgee

**1957**  
Ottumwa Municipal Airport opens after Naval Air Station closes

**1960s**  
Relocation of the Federal highways creates opportunity for development of Ottumwa Park

**1970s**  
Urban Renewal. Entire blocks of central business district demolished

**1970s**  
Downtown Pedestrian Mall constructed [later demolished]

**1990**  
Population 24,488

**2006**  
Ottumwa is designated an Iowa Main Street Community and first board of directors is formed.

**2019**  
B'nai Jacob Synagogue (1915) gifted to American Gothic Performing Arts Festival as Ottumwa's Temple of Creative Arts.

**2019**  
Jay Funeral Home (NRHP) at 220 N Court is purchased for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse

**1970s-1980s**

Downtown vacancies increase in response to mall and shopping center development trends

**1973**  
John Morell & Co. Meatpacking plant closes.

**1990**  
City Council passes Historic Preservation Ordinance and appoints first Historic Preservation Commission.

**2024**  
Population 25,359

**2015-  
PRESENT**

Main Street Ottumwa receives grants for Façade Improvements, Upper Story Housing, and new Street Design for Main Street



Iowa National Bank,  
219 East Main Street

# STATE OF PRESERVATION IN OTTUMWA

As a small city, Ottumwa has an extraordinary collection of residential, commercial, and civic architecture. Ottumwa is also unusual in how it has actively engaged historic preservation by successfully nominating seven districts and 19 individual buildings to the National Register to date. While not protected by local ordinance, these honorary listings acknowledge the enduring quality of Ottumwa's architecture and raise public awareness about the importance of preserving buildings and putting them into productive use. Listing in the National Register, or being a contributing resource in a district) also confers eligibility for state and federal historic rehabilitation tax credits, if other program criteria are met.

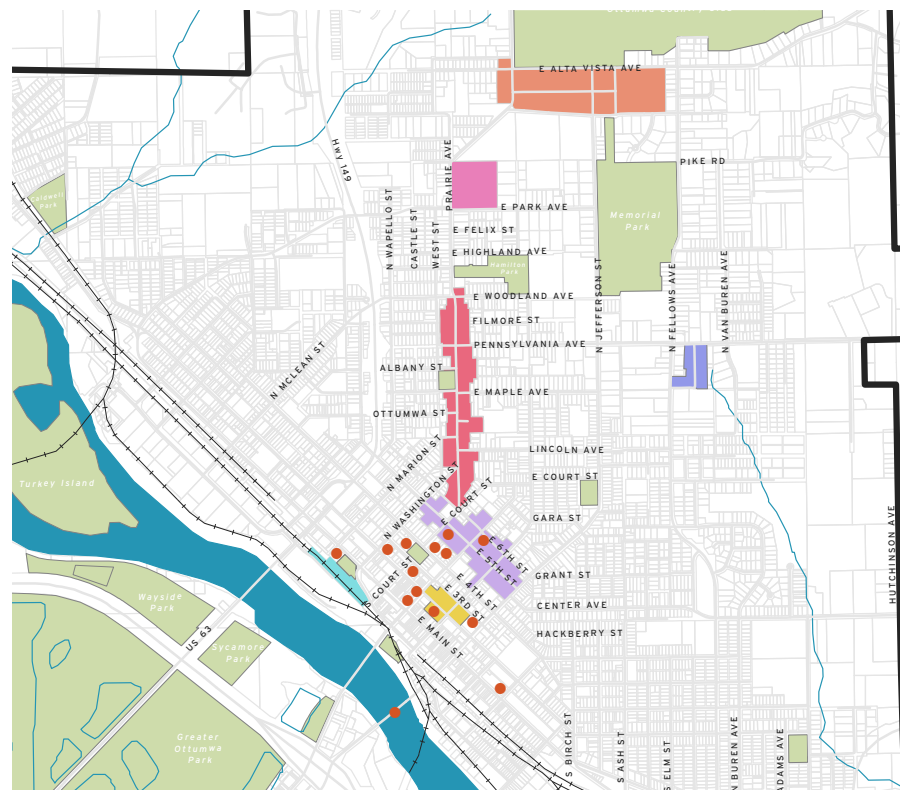
## NATIONAL REGISTER DISTRICTS

There are seven National Register Districts in Ottumwa. These districts are recognized for their historical or architectural significance and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. St. Joseph's Hospital, the anchor of an eighth National Register District, was demolished.

**LEGEND**

Historic Districts

- North Fellows NRHD
- Historic Railroad NRHD
- Vogel Place NRHD
- Ottumwa Cemetery NRHD
- Court Hill NRHD
- Fifth Street Bluff NRHD
- Greater Second Street NRHD
- Individually Listed Structures







## 1. Fifth Street Bluff Historic District

Ottumwa's earliest development occurred on the flat area on the north side of the Des Moines River. As the town grew and business owners prospered, new homes were built "on the bluff". Fifth Street offered a view of the young town and the river valley. From the 1850s through the 1920s, the area was considered highly desirable. Beautiful architect-designed residences were built along Fifth Street. In the decades followed, some families replaced their original houses with more "modern" ones, also architect-designed. The 67 historic resources range from a simple vernacular "I-house" to spectacular Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Tudor Revival. Contributing resources also include stone retaining walls, brick street, and limestone curbs.

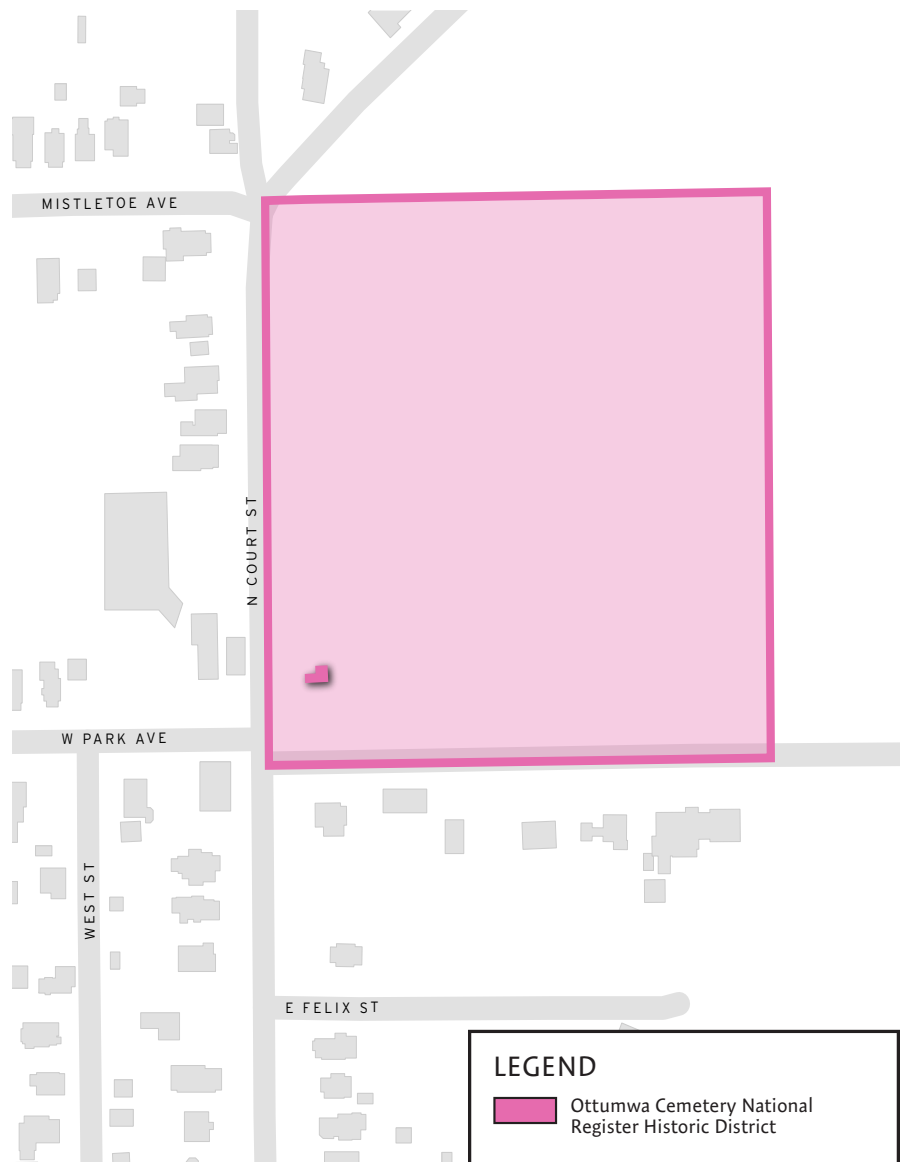




Edgerly Gateway,  
Ottumwa Cemetery

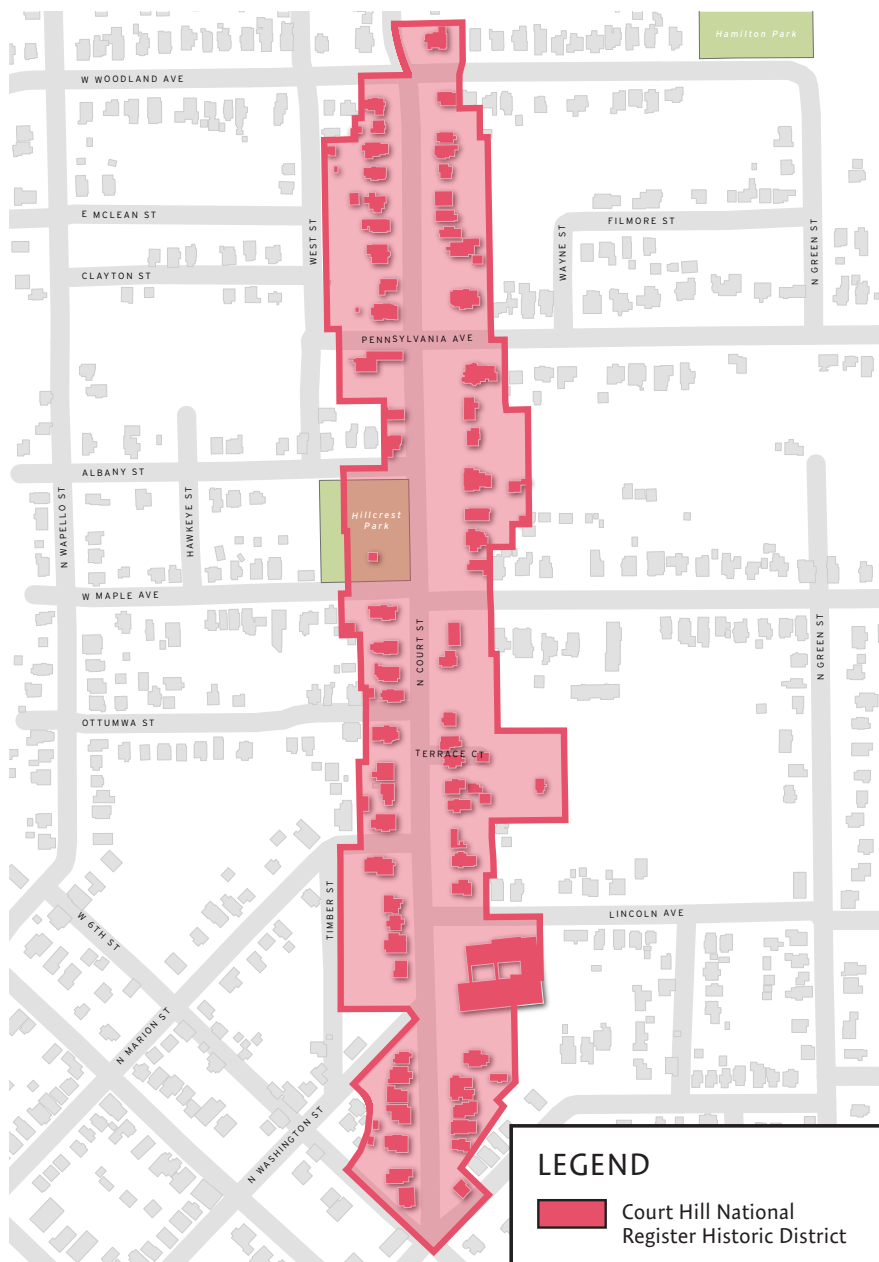
## 2. Ottumwa Cemetery Historic District

Ottumwa Cemetery opened in 1857 to replace a small graveyard at East Court and Market Streets. The historic district consists of the original ten acres along Court Street and contains four historic resources: The High Victorian red brick receiving vault from the 1880s, the wrought iron fence along Court Street from the same period, and two early 20th century resources designed by architect George M Kern: the Edgerly Gateway (1905) and the Office/Chapel (1906). The cemetery contains the graves of Civil War veterans and family plots of many of Ottumwa's most influential citizens.



### 3. Court Hill Historic District

Court Street has been the northern gateway to Ottumwa since territorial days. Wider than most streets, it was logical that many fine residences would be built along it. From the 1880s until the 1920s, houses in the most popular late 19th styles were built on Court Street for Ottumwa's prominent citizens. Many homes were architect-designed. The 84 resources in this district include High Victorian Italianate, Queen Anne, and Neo- Classical.





Ottumwa Courier, 213  
Second Street East

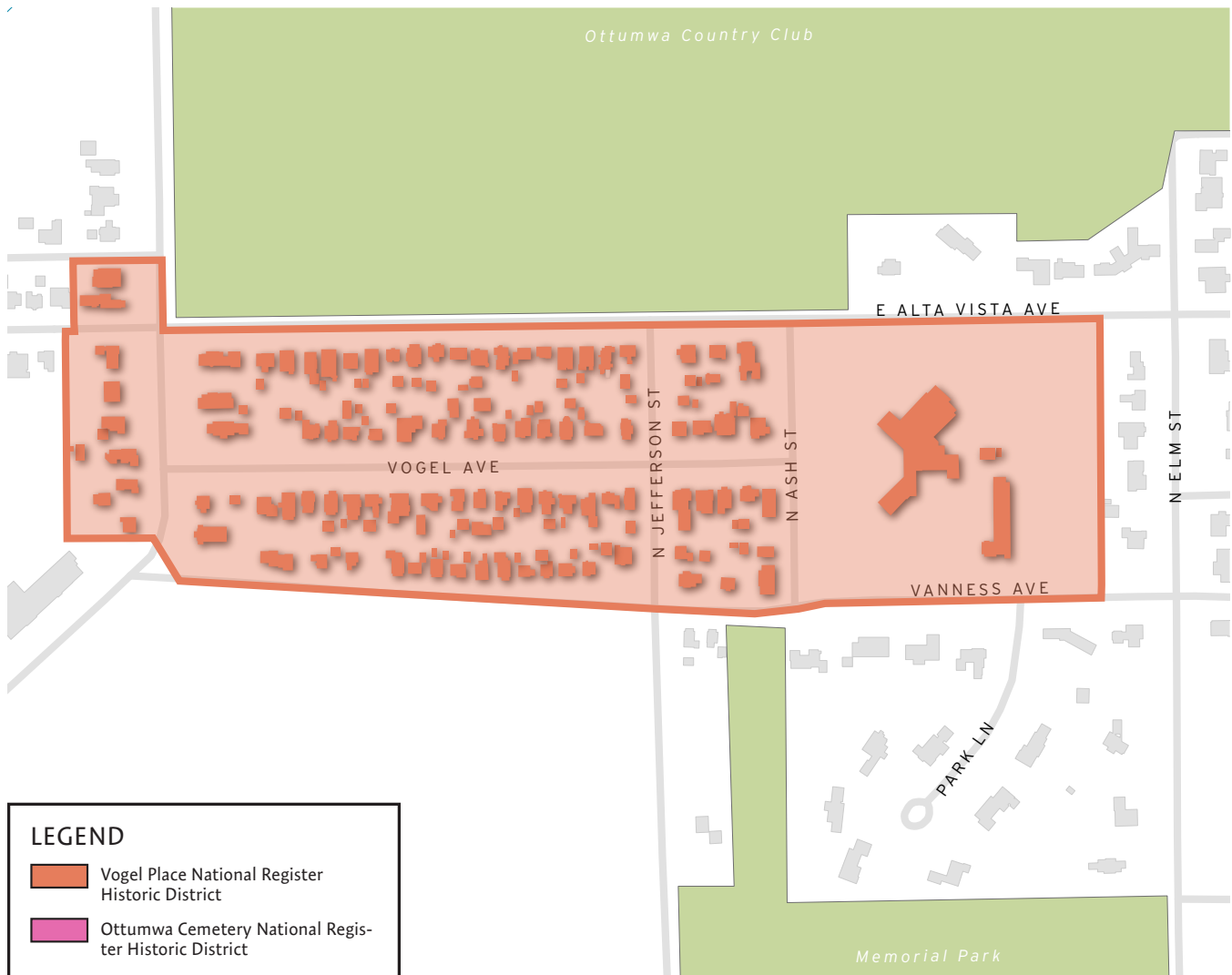
#### 4. Greater Second Street Historic District

The 200 block, and part of the 300 block of East Second Street differ from the rest of the Central Business District, where attached, 22-foot storefronts are most common. These blocks developed from 1900 to 1930 and include eight (two non-extant) free-standing, architect-designed buildings. Of the four other contributing buildings in the district, at least two were architect-designed. The 12 resources in the district include office buildings, fraternal lodges, recreational facilities, homes, auto dealerships, utility companies, a newspaper plant. Their styles include elaborate Neo-Classical with full terra cotta façade, simple brick Neo-Classical, English Cottage, and Egyptian Revival.



## 5. Vogel Place Historic District

Vogel Place Historic District was the first streetcar and automobile suburb in Ottumwa. Between 1908 and circa 1935, this neighborhood developed at the end of the streetcar line, Alta Vista Ave. It was also the first neighborhood in Ottumwa to include garages and driveways. Although there are a handful of large residences at the Court Street end, most of the houses were constructed for middle class business owners. The 158 resources in Vogel Place illustrate residential styles popular in the first quarter of the 20th century: Colonial, Tudor, and Mission Revival, as well as Four Square, Craftsman, and Bungalow styles. Vogel Ave is one of the few extant brick streets in Ottumwa and it is counted as one of the resources.





North Fellows Avenue.

## 6. North Fellows Historic District

This neighborhood of 28 residences (24 on Fellows and four around the corner on Elm Street, plus garages) illustrates residential development post-World War II. These single-story brick houses were constructed, beginning in 1944, to meet the needs of returning veterans and their growing families. They met Federal Housing Administration criteria and many were sold before they were completed. Garages were not included.



## 7. Railroad Historic District

Railroads played an important role in Ottumwa's development beginning in 1859 with the arrival of the Burlington & Missouri River Railroad (also known as CB&Q and Burlington Northern). At one time, five railroads passed through Ottumwa, and the city was a division point on the CB&Q. There were depots for passenger and freight for each line, and two roundhouses. Railroad jobs were an important part of Ottumwa's economy. The ten resources in this district represent the importance of railroads in Ottumwa's history.



Burlington Depot, 210  
West Main Street.

## 8. St. Joseph Hospital Historic District (demolished)

Originally St Joseph Hospital was the eastern end of the Vogel Place Historic District. A historic district nomination was prepared for developers of the ten acres that included the hospital and nurses' residence, plus ancillary buildings. In 2019 the entire complex was demolished.



St. Joseph Hospital Post Card.  
Source: Wikimedia Commons



St. Joseph Hospital. Source:  
Ottumwa Courier.



# NATIONAL REGISTER-LISTED BUILDINGS

- ① Agassiz School (608 E Williams St)
- ② Benson Block (109-112 N Market St)
- ③ B'nai Jacob Synagogue (529 E Main St)
- ④ Burlington Depot (210 W Main St)
- ⑤ First National Bank (131 E Main St)
- ⑥ Foster/Bell House (205 E 5th St)
- ⑦ Hofmann Building (101 S Market St)
- ⑧ Hotel Ottumwa (107 E 2nd St)
- ⑨ Jay Funeral Home (220 N Court St)
- ⑩ Jefferson Street Viaduct
- ⑪ J.W. Garner Building (222-224 E 2nd St)
- ⑫ Ottumwa Public Library (129 N Court St)
- ⑬ Ottumwa Young Women's Christian Association (133 W 2nd St)
- ⑭ U.S. Post Office (Court and 4th Streets)
- ⑮ Wapello County Courthouse (Court Street)
- Administration Building (Terminal Avenue) - Not Shown





## FOCUS GROUPS

10



## PEOPLE ENGAGED

70+

## FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

For the plan to reflect the community's priorities and values, the Planning Team conducted a series of public engagement initiatives. These included:

- Focus Groups and Interviews
- Community Open House and Workshop
- Community Survey

With organizing assistance from City staff, the Planning Team conducted 10 meetings with Ottumwa stakeholders. The groups and interviews included:

- City staff
- Mayor
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Tourism and Economic Development
- Main Street Ottumwa
- Ottumwa Arts Council
- Nonprofit housing developer
- Iowa Heartland History Connection
- City commissions
- Ottumwa Board of Cemetery Trustees

The narrative that follows summarizes the strengths, assets, preservation accomplishments, and barriers to preservation that emerged during focus groups and interviews, along with additional research conducted by the planning team.

## Historic Preservation Commission

The Historic Preservation Commission, established in 1990, serves an advisory role to City Council. Beyond its core mission, the Commission has taken on public advocacy work and preservation-related events. It receives staff support from the City's Historic Preservation Planner/ Director of Community Development as well as a small budget allocation. Some accomplishments of the Commission include:

- Support for the National Register nominations of six districts and more than a dozen individual buildings
- Installation of markers for historic districts
- Tours of Ottumwa Cemetery
- Educational workshops on historic preservation tax credits
- Five-year tax abatement on rehabilitations of contributing or designated buildings

The Commission has also faced challenges, including operational obstacles like unfilled commissioner seats. There are likely at least a couple of reasons for vacancies: In recent years it has become harder for cities to fill unpaid positions on commissions and boards, partly because of the public scrutiny entailed in serving on any commission. According to interviewees, recent internal discord on the HPC may be a deterrent to serving.



## Historic Districts

Ottumwa is far ahead of most communities its size in having nominated seven districts and 19 buildings or structures to the National Register. These honorary listings have brought deserved attention to Ottumwa's historic resources. At the same time, because National Register listings are honorary, the resources are not protected from most private development activities. More working-class neighborhoods of the city, such as South Ottumwa, have not been nominated to the National Register, but interviewees believe some of these areas could be eligible.

The brick streets in several historic districts are treasured by many for the character they add to the public space. The roads are punishing to vehicles and present maintenance challenges for the City. For abutting residents who wish to maintain or reinstall their brick streets, the City offers the option to pay the incremental difference between brick restoration and a concrete or asphalt reconstruction. City planners and engineers have explored grant opportunities and cost share approaches, but funding remains elusive.

Brick roads in the  
Vogel Place Historic District

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## Main Street and Downtown

Downtown falls under the aegis of Main Street Ottumwa, a preservation-based economic development organization. Main Street Ottumwa is widely respected in the community. It has incentivized about 50 downtown façade improvements over the last 10 years, catalyzed downtown streetscape improvements, helped to establish the Temple of Creative Arts, among many other initiatives.

Main Street Ottumwa has also partnered with the City to champion an impressive set of downtown revitalization incentives, including:

- Façade Improvement Grant: 25% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Roof Replacement Assistance: 50% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Interest Buy-Down: Up to 7.25% interest on a five-year loan up to \$7,500
- Commercial Paint Program: 50% of cost, up to \$1,000
- White Box Program: 50% of cost, up to \$10,000
- Restaurant Equipment Program: Up to \$25,000 for permanent restaurant equipment

The roof replacement and façade grants are used frequently and they have had significant impacts downtown. Other grant programs have seen moderate uptake, which may be due to owners' lack of capital, low demand for downtown commercial space, or other reasons. The application process itself is simple and straightforward.

Larger downtown buildings, like the Ottumwa Theatre and historic churches, are challenging candidates for adaptive reuse because of their purpose-built design and size. The Legacy Foundation is working on residential conversions of the Ottumwa and Capitol Theatres. Another downtown landmark, the Hotel Ottumwa, is expected to be renovated to apartments and is expected to use Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits and Iowa Historic Preservation Tax Credits as part of the financing stack.

Downtown's anchor civic buildings remain in active use. The Ottumwa Community School District has continued to make investments in the historic Ottumwa High School, another downtown anchor.



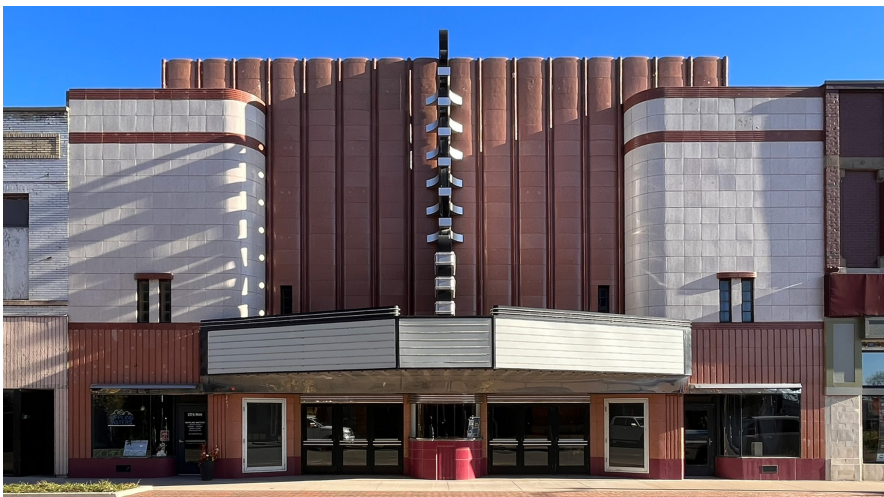
The High School is expected to remain in active use. City Hall, the former Federal Building, is currently being renovated and City offices will return there as soon as renovations are completed. The Wapello County Courthouse is undergoing a window restoration project. Both the Courthouse and the Ottumwa Public Library are considering expansion options as they are squeezed for space.

Commercial buildings downtown are subject to many of the same pressures affecting retailing and downtowns nationwide. As online shopping has expanded, the demand for traditional storefronts has decreased. (The same is true for shopping centers, big-box stores, and malls.) For historic retail spaces, experiential commercial uses (e.g., dining, entertainment, arts) have become increasingly important.



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Ottumwa High School,  
501 East 2nd Street



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The Ottumwa Capitol Theater,  
231 East Main Street

## Housing

With support from the Legacy Foundation, the City completed the Ottumwa Housing Plan in 2022. Partners involved in the plan worked together to form Mission 500, a coalition of policymakers, nonprofits, developers, bankers, and other advocates working together on the primary goal of building 500 new housing units by 2030. One of these partners is Rippling Waters. Established with a seed investment from the Legacy Foundation, Rippling Waters is a nonprofit housing developer working on new infill construction and housing rehabilitation.

The Legacy Foundation's West End Ignited program has also prioritized stimulating home improvements on West Second Street by offering a \$25,000 grant for exterior improvements with a minimal (\$250) contribution from the homeowner.

Among the challenges facing Ottumwa's residential architecture is the grand scale of some of the homes. While a visitor might consider these houses a bargain by the standards of a larger city, the houses are also expensive to maintain. At the same time, generational and lifestyle shifts many families have fewer children and prefer smaller properties. Some of the large homes in Ottumwa have been converted to multi-family use, and some homes are now vacant because of soft demand.

The City has adopted a five-year tax abatement for historic rehabilitation. This will help the value proposition for homeowners seeking to make improvements, but additional incentives or other creative solutions may be needed. Execution of the tax abatement program will depend on the City's adoption of design guidelines, and standards for reviewing proposed improvements.



174 Vogel Avenue



111 Vogel Avenue



## Funding for Historic Preservation

In addition to the downtown grant programs, the city is unusual in having a community foundation, The Legacy Foundation, which is large for a city of Ottumwa's size. The Foundation's funding areas are broadly written and include priorities that can be interpreted to include historic preservation and housing rehabilitation. Founded in 2010, The Legacy Foundation supports a broad range of endeavors in the areas of economic prosperity, quality of life, education, and housing. Its work directly related to preservation has included an ongoing effort to find new uses for the Ottumwa and Capitol Theatres downtown.

## COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

As part of the engagement process, a community workshop held in March 2024 attracted about 60 people who came to learn about the plan and express their wishes and priorities for historic preservation in Ottumwa.

In an exercise that asked which historic resources are most threatened, attendees ranked eight preservation priorities, from highest to lowest, with the greatest concern expressed for downtown's commercial buildings:

1. Main Street Commercial Buildings
2. Public Parks, Public Spaces, and Cemeteries
3. Public Buildings
4. Religious Buildings
5. Factories and Industrial Properties
6. Traditional Housing
7. Historic Schools
8. Historic Resources at Risk Due to Climate Change



Attendees were also asked to rank 10 potential strategies and actions for advancing historic preservation. The top two strategies were virtually tied in the voting tallies, expressing a strong attachment to Ottumwa's brick streets, and the importance of funding for housing rehabilitation. It is also notable that workshop attendees ranked new historic resource surveys or National Register nominations as the lowest priority.

1. Establish funding for a preservation and rehabilitation program that maintains Ottumwa's historic brick streets and streetscapes.
2. Establish financial and technical assistance programs for the rehabilitation of deteriorated and vacant residential properties.
3. Prepare a toolkit or manual on property maintenance and preservation methods for owners of historic homes.
4. Enhance existing incentives and financing programs and create new ones for rehabilitating and adapting downtown historic buildings to new uses.
5. Promote heritage tourism.
6. Help property owners and the general public understand the benefits of historic preservation.
7. Enhance municipal staff capacities to support and advance preservation activities in Ottumwa.
8. Provide preservation assistance to congregations and owners of religious buildings.
9. Promote the recognition and preservation of Ottumwa's heritage.
10. Conduct historic resource surveys and nominate new National Register landmarks and historic districts.

Using Post-It notes, participants could also share their thoughts on how Ottumwa can move historic preservation forward. The 24 comments received reflected the following themes, in order of frequency mentioned:

## Historic Districts

- Repair brick streets to preserve the historic character of Ottumwa.
- Establish a design review process and design guidelines for historic districts.
- Survey South Ottumwa district(s) for National Register nomination.
- Promote appropriate infill development in historic districts.



## Downtown

- Facilitate Downtown business recruitment.
- Seek out funding for white elephant buildings.

## Homeowner Assistance

- Provide grants to maintain historic residences.
- Educate homeowners about grants.
- Provide funds to revert homes to single-family use.
- Create educational materials for first-time homeowners and immigrant residents.

## Signage

- Promote vintage signage in downtown.
- Create a new gateway sign on bridge.

## Miscellaneous suggestions:

- Improve civic pride.
- Organize more neighborhood events to build community.
- Provide relocation packets and incentives for white-collar remote workers.
- Celebrate Ottumwa's golf history.
- Promote the Lemberger photograph collection.
- Promote luthiers and violin making history.
- Promote more organizational collaboration.
- Adopt a new town mascot.



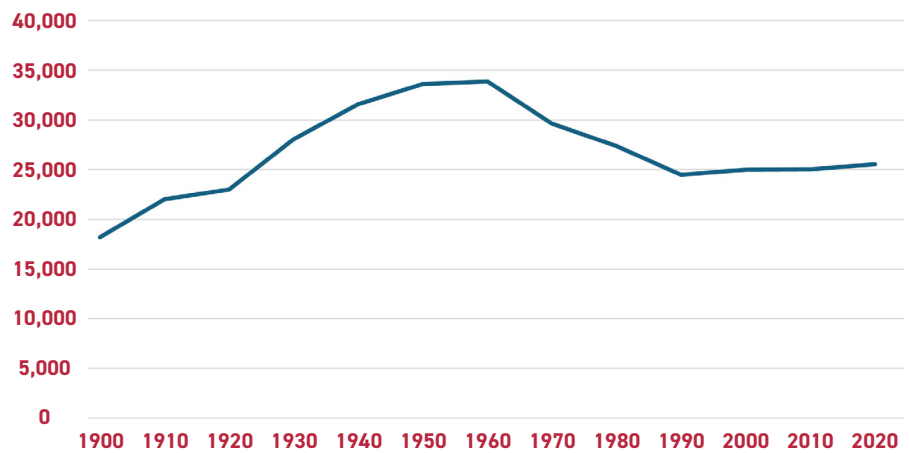


# DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

## POPULATION

Population changes affect historic preservation, as do lifestyle and generational changes. Fluctuation in the size of Ottumwa's population has been an important factor in relation to housing demand in the city. After population losses in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, Ottumwa has rebounded modestly to 25,529 in the 2020 Census. This is still 25% less than the city's high of 33,871 in 1960.

### Ottumwa Population



Source: US Census via Wikipedia



## HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Similarly, household income affects homeownership and the capacity of homeowners to maintain their houses. In focus groups, several stakeholders mentioned the relatively low income of households in Wapello County and Ottumwa. Census and American Community Survey data bears this out: The 2023 estimated median household income in Wapello County was \$52,830, and in Ottumwa it was \$49,209. For the State of Iowa, median household income was \$67,730.

Among the several residential historic districts, household income and homeownership rates vary. The Vogel Place district is most affluent with a median household income of \$81,327.

### Median Household Income by District

DISTRICT *	MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME
Court Hill	\$51,261
Fifth Street Bluff	\$40,239
Vogel Place	\$81,327
Ottumwa City	\$49,209

Source: ESRI, The Lakota Group

\* The Greater Second Street and North Fellows districts have insufficient data because of the small number of households.

The Vogel Place district has the highest income and the highest rate of owner occupancy, at 61%. This compares to 49% in the Court Hill district and 41% in Fifth Street Bluff.

Diversity in race and ethnicity among the historic districts is nuanced. Ottumwa has a diverse population for a small Iowa city. Among the city's historic districts, Court Hill and Fifth Street Bluff are more diverse than Vogel Place.

Among the nonwhite population, several national trends found in the Census and American Community Survey affect how race and ethnicity are reported. In recent years, a greater number of people of African,

Middle Eastern, and Hispanic origin self-identify as “Some Other Race”. This trend is understood as reflecting a distinction between the African immigrant experience and the history of Black Americans, and between the experiences of people of Hispanic and Middle Eastern cultures from the white American experience, which they see as quite different.

One way of looking at these differences is to sort the city's population and the populations of the historic districts into three groups, those who identify as white, non-white, and Hispanic origin.

### Resident Race by District

DISTRICT *	WHITE	NON-WHITE IDENTIFYING	HISPANIC ORIGIN (ANY RACE)
<b>Court Hill</b>	60%	40%	19%
<b>Fifth Street Bluff</b>	61%	40%	23%
<b>Vogel Place</b>	73%	27%	15%
<b>Ottumwa City</b>	71%	28%	16%

Source: ESRI, The Lakota Group

\* The Greater Second Street and North Fellows districts have insufficient data because of the small number of households.

The Vogel Place district is the district with the largest proportion of the population being white; it also very closely parallels the racial and ethnic makeup of the city overall.

The meatpacking industry brings diversity to Ottumwa's population, particularly among Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and African immigrants. However, many of these residents are in Ottumwa only temporarily. Assistance in settling them permanently in Ottumwa would, potentially, help the preservation cause by increasing both home occupancy and ownership.





## HOUSING AND PRESERVATION

Housing prices in Ottumwa are relatively affordable, though experience varies by household circumstances. Ottumwa's median home value of \$91,476 is low relative to the state's median value of \$194,756 (ESRI, 2024). According to the 2022 Ottumwa Housing Plan, Ottumwa has among the lowest housing costs in the state, on average \$20,000 lower than its peer cities.

"Affordability" is an expression of the relationship between local median incomes and housing costs: HUD defines a house-burdened household as spending more than 30% of income on housing costs (mortgage or rent, taxes, and utilities). In Ottumwa, an average household would spend 17% of median household income on mortgage payments for a median-valued Ottumwa home. However, certain market and household factors influence affordability: Many owner-occupied households likely benefit from the low interest rates that prevailed from roughly the 2010s to early 2022. As interest rates have risen, the supply of homes available for sale has been constrained because fewer people are willing to sell, and that has driven up home prices. Renters in Ottumwa are more likely to be cost-burdened, largely a function of their (typically) lower household income.

The *Housing Plan* notes that the city successfully attracted some younger workers in the early 2000s, but many of them did not stay in Ottumwa. One theory that could explain the retention challenge is that Ottumwa lacks housing options that younger workers seek. The development of downtown and upper-story housing, particularly in historic buildings, may be addressing this challenge. The combined effect of a city built for a larger population and a mismatch between housing supply and evolving consumer preferences has resulted in an over-supply of some older/historic housing stock.

Relative housing affordability notwithstanding, the maintenance and rehabilitation of older homes present special affordability challenges that are not linked to local markets. The costs of building materials do not vary considerably from place to place, and labor costs for trades and construction vary only slightly by market.

The post-pandemic trend of remote work can advantage Ottumwa in attracting knowledge workers who may be looking for a lower cost

lifestyle and whose salaries can more likely support the maintenance of historic homes. The New York Times has referred to this as “The ZIP Code Shift: Why Many Americans No Longer Live Where They Work” (NYT, March 4, 2024). According to a recent study referenced in the article, “The share of people who live 50 or more miles from where they work rose sevenfold during the pandemic, climbing to 5.5 percent in 2023 from 0.8 percent in 2019. These trends have proved resilient even as employees return to the office, according to the researchers.” In many fields, Millennials – mostly workers in their 30s and 40s – are leading this trend. Having grown up in the age of the Internet, they are accustomed to digital communication and relationships. As they now establish their own families, some are seeking less expensive housing and/or locations closer to parents, extended family, or other support.

1243 North Fellows Avenue

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# THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN

## MANAGING CHANGE

At its core, historic preservation – and a historic preservation plan – is a tool to manage change in the built environment so Ottumwa can recognize its past in the future. Historic preservation is already part of Ottumwa’s ethos. For a small city, the designation of seven National Register districts is unusual and impressive. Managing change allows the community to continue to develop in a way that values and respects the character and assets that define the place. It also enables the city to leverage its historic resources for tourism and economic development. The historic downtown and neighborhoods of Ottumwa, in many respects, create the economic value of the real estate by making the city a desirable place to live and visit.



## MANAGING CHANGE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT HAPPENS THROUGH A SET OF INTERRELATED TOOLS. THESE INCLUDE:

- 1 Incentives:** Financial or policy-based benefits provided to encourage the conservation and rehabilitation of historic properties.
- 2 Advocacy:** Efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting and supporting the protection and preservation of historic sites and structures.
- 3 Education:** Programs and activities designed to inform and teach the public and stakeholders about the importance and methods of preserving historic sites.
- 4 Regulation:** Laws and policies enacted to govern the protection, maintenance, and alteration of historic properties and districts.

Advancing preservation in the city will continue to be the work of both the private sector and the public sector, working toward a common vision of Ottumwa's future.





# 1. NOMINATIONS AND LOCAL DISTRICTS

Ottumwa has demonstrated great commitment and success in its nominations of districts and buildings to the National Register. The establishment of local historic or conservation districts can leverage honorary National Register designations by providing more regulatory control. The differences between a local historic district and a local conservation district are typically the level of integrity of the neighborhood being designated and the level of control desired.

Historic districts and conservation districts are both designed to protect areas of historical significance, but they differ in the level and types of regulations they impose: Historic districts often aim to maintain the historical integrity of an area while conservation districts may allow for more modern development that is sympathetic to the historic character of the area. In both cases, community priorities and values often inform the writing of the ordinance.

**Local Historic Districts** are established by ordinance and create a legal framework that guides the maintenance, alteration, and demolition of local landmark buildings or contributing properties within a district. A local district ordinance may also establish standards for new and infill development, such as setbacks, massing, density, or design character. In Ottumwa, the municipal code permits local districts to be established as zoning overlays. The boundaries of such overlays may or may not exactly coincide with existing National Register districts, and none has been established to date. The actual protections offered to historic buildings would be specified in the overlay district when established. Protections typically include a design review process for exterior alterations, but ordinances may also specify routine maintenance requirements or guidelines, demolition delays, or regulatory incentives. Alterations or demolitions are reviewed by a designated body, such as the Historic Preservation Commission.

**Conservation districts** are generally more flexible than historic districts and may be appropriate for areas where the architectural integrity of the neighborhood has been compromised to the point where it might not be eligible for a National Register listing, or where the goal is to preserve overall character rather than individual buildings or features. As a lighter form of zoning overlay, a conservation district may be written to only review and regulate certain types of changes, such as demolitions and infill development, rather than all exterior alterations.

## **Initiative 1.1: Adopt and operationalize the “Historic District Overlay District” ordinance allowing for the establishment of new local districts.**

The Historic District Overlay District ordinance (Article XXVII of the Municipal Code) permits the establishment of local historic districts. As currently written, while it enables the creation of local districts, it does not provide standards for designation or a regulatory framework once a local district is established. The ordinance should be further developed to facilitate the creation of local districts. Expanding the ordinance will benefit from several preliminary public consultation steps:

- 1. Engage and consult the public.** Organize a series of public listening sessions where the preservation planner and HPC can provide information on how a local historic preservation overlay district would work.
- 2. Propose core elements of the ordinance.** Draft a revised ordinance to include a review process that provides a mechanism for managing exterior changes to contributing buildings. Provide public listening sessions for feedback.
- 3. Engage and consult the public again.** Provide the public the opportunity to comment on the draft ordinance before it is adopted by City Council.

## **Initiative 1.2: Expand the existing historic preservation ordinance to allow Conservation Overlay Districts.**

The option to establish conservation overlay districts can provide flexibility when considering whether and how to manage existing or future historic areas of the city. A conservation overlay may be more palatable in certain areas, or more appropriate in areas with less architectural integrity. Conservation districts are less restrictive than local historic districts and typically aim to preserve scale and character, rather than individual buildings.

## **Initiative 1.3: Draft design guidelines or standards.**

Design guidelines help building owners understand what changes are regulated and how to design sensitive and appropriate alterations. Guidelines should be richly illustrated and include architectural styles and examples found in Ottumwa's districts. They should also include a discussion of alternative and replacement materials, and the pros and cons of each. An outside consultant should be engaged to write the design guidelines.

## **Initiative 1.4: Consider a demolition delay ordinance for local historic districts and individually-listed buildings.**

We recommend the revised ordinance include a demolition delay provision to apply to contributing buildings within local districts. A demolition delay (typically 45 to 180 days) provides an opportunity for preservationists or interested developers to propose alternative solutions or find a sympathetic buyer for the building.

## **Initiative 1.5: Designate National Register districts as local Historic Preservation Overlay Districts.**

Given the honorary status of National Register districts, the additional designation as local districts will provide a level of local design control to preserve the character of these places. For practical reasons and to build broad support, the HPC and city council should consider one district at a time, starting with a district where general support already exists. Property owners in the district should be consulted through a community engagement process facilitated by city staff and the HPC.

Based on current ordinance, “The creation of an HD overlay district may be initiated by the planning and zoning commission, the city council, or by petition of the owner or owners of 51 percent of the property area within the proposed district.” (Article XXVII, Sec. 38-835 of Municipal Code)

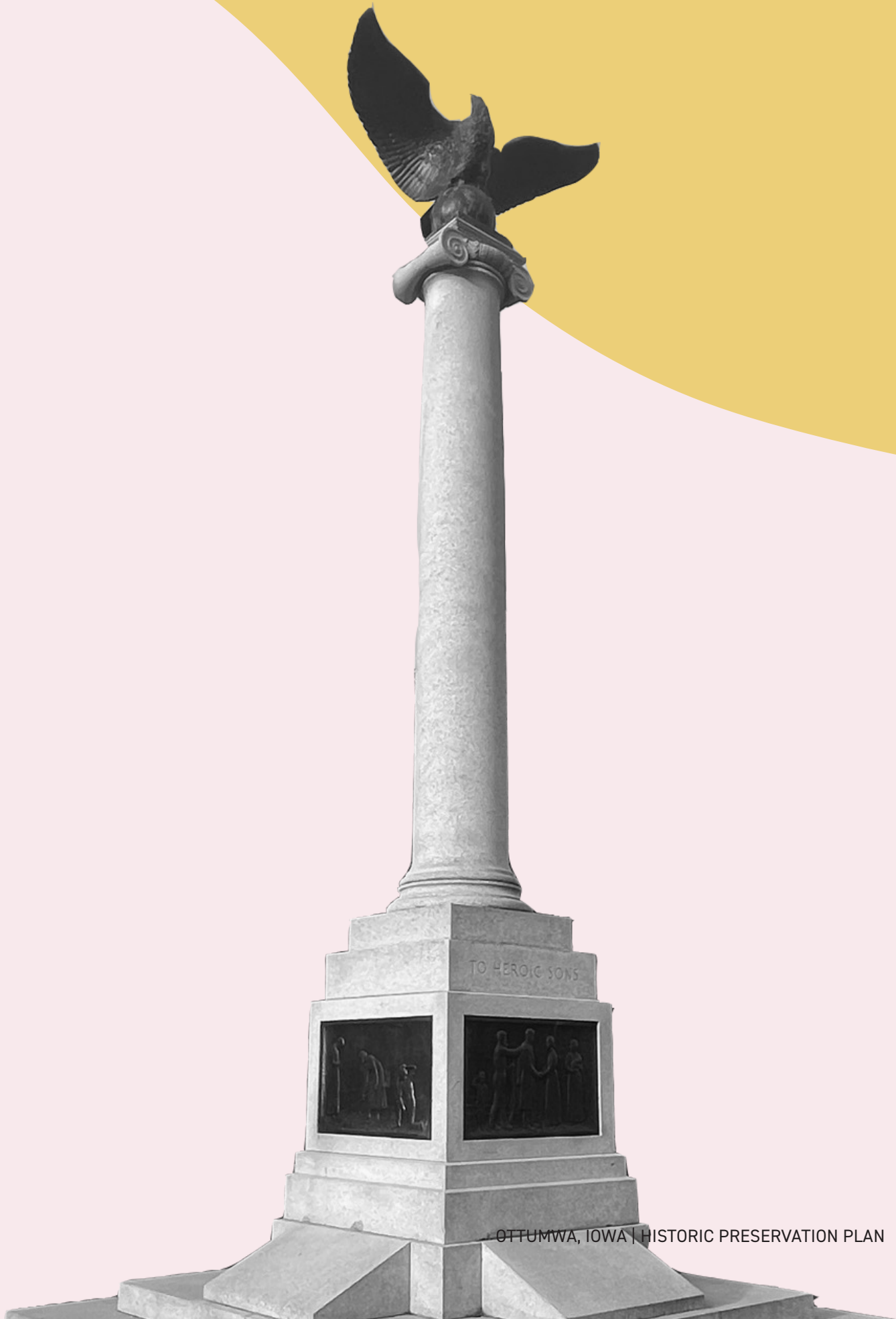
## **Initiative 1.6: Study potential for nominating South Ottumwa to the National Register.**

While the mansions of Vogel Place, Court Hill, and Fifth Street Bluff were among the first to be nominated to the National Register, the modest, workforce housing of South Ottumwa tells an equally important part of Ottumwa's story. The architecture of South Ottumwa is primarily vernacular, including bungalows, gable fronts, hipped-roof cubes, and folk Victorian. Developed primarily from the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century, many houses have been modified over the years through additions, the application of aluminum or vinyl siding, the enclosure or removal of porches, and other changes. The architecture of South Ottumwa tells the story of the generations of families who worked, and continue to work, at the nearby manufacturing and meatpacking facilities.

A survey will be needed to determine the recommended boundaries and contributing structures of a National Register district in South Ottumwa.

## **Initiative 1.7: Designate South Ottumwa as a local Conservation Overlay District.**

The scale and form of the neighborhood remains despite the evolution of the homes, making South Ottumwa a potentially appropriate candidate for a local conservation district, rather than a local historic district.





## 2. HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MANAGEMENT

The State of Iowa requires Certified Local Government cities to establish a Historic Preservation Commission. Ottumwa's HPC was established in 1990 and serves in an advisory role to city staff and council, with a specific role in recommending to City Council the designation of new National Register districts. The Commission has nominated eight districts and multiple individual buildings to the National Register. Commission members have also organized a series of educational programs and events that celebrate Ottumwa's architecture. Ottumwa's ordinance does not establish regulatory or other functions of the HPC beyond its consultative role.

### **Initiative 2.1: Separate preservation-related promotional activities from the HPC's regulatory responsibilities.**

The promotional activities of the HPC, such as educational programs and events, serve to elevate recognition of historic preservation in the city. However, events and programming can present compliance issues: In order to plan and execute events and other activities, commissioners typically need to collaborate. This collaboration in planning and execution depends on group work that then triggers open meetings laws.

One potential solution is for current and/or recent members of the HPC to reconstitute themselves as a nonprofit "friends of historic Ottumwa" group. This would be a better-suited platform for carrying out events and similar kinds of programming that raise awareness of historic preservation.

### **Initiative 2.2: Reconstitute the HPC in anticipation of managing a local historic district program.**

As the City revises the historic preservation overlay district ordinance (assuming it chooses to do so), this would be an appropriate time to reconstitute the HPC so it is ready to take on its new regulatory role. Administering the local historic district ordinance will benefit from a different skill set than the HPC has needed in the past: the Commission will need an understanding of the development process and should possess the pragmatic architectural and managerial skills to work with property owners to stimulate investment and achieve desired outcomes.



## 3. CATALYZING PRESERVATION

Ottumwa has actively invested in historic preservation and built the local movement for years. Examples include the nominations of six National Register districts, the downtown Main Street program for preservation-based economic development, the City's preservation and maintenance grant programs, and others. The following recommended initiatives are intended to build on past preservation work and address several current issues and anticipated decisions.

### **Initiative 3.1: Incentivize upper-story residential development.**

Downtown Ottumwa has seen new investment in its streetscapes, facades, and upper stories, much of it led by Main Street Ottumwa. Investments have included the conversion of upper-story commercial space to residential. Upper-story housing brings the benefits of generating an additional income stream for commercial properties, a 24-hour presence of people on the streets, and the attractiveness of these spaces to younger residents.

Developing additional upper-story housing continues to present special challenges, including a mismatch between the cost of conversion and market demand, and the difficulty of obtaining property insurance. The City offers an excellent set of incentive grants for other downtown development (e.g., facades, roofs, and vanilla box fit-outs). An additional incentive for upper-story residential would complement these tools. An additional grant program, if politically achievable, could be catalytic. There are also opportunities for non-cash incentives, such as adjustments to the building code to more easily allow conversions, and the newly adopted five-year tax abatement, once operationalized.

### **Initiative 3.2: Facilitate development of downtown short-term lodging.**

Demand for downtown living will take some time to grow. In the meantime, short-term rentals such as VRBO and Airbnb can provide alternative lodging options for both tourists and business travelers. Currently, there are few, if any, loft-style short-stay rentals in downtown, so it is difficult to gauge the market. But unique accommodations can generate their own market, attracting travelers passing through southeastern Iowa, those whose destination may be another city in the region, or people who are visiting for a family event.

### **Initiative 3.3: Incentivize rehabilitation and maintenance of workforce housing.**

The Legacy Foundation's funding initiative on West 2nd Street aims to support investment and maintenance of homes where low and moderate-income families live, and to improve the appearance of West 2nd Street as a gateway to the city. The program offers up to \$25,000 for exterior improvements with an extremely modest contribution from the homeowner of only \$250. At the same time, Rippling Waters is building new homes (primarily manufactured housing) and purchasing dilapidated homes for rehabilitation. These three initiatives will help to maintain the inventory of workforce housing and put back into service houses that have fallen into disrepair.

Expanding the exterior improvement grant beyond West 2nd Street would further incentivize and stabilize workforce housing. An expansion to South Ottumwa, for example, could require a higher match from the homeowner and could be qualified based on household income.

### **Initiative 3.4: Prioritize retaining the library downtown.**

The Ottumwa Public Library has outgrown its 1902 building and needs additional space, according to the library director. Past proposals have considered moving the library outside downtown and reusing the original Carnegie library as adjunct space for City or County offices. The consulting team believes, however, that expanding the library at its current location will more broadly benefit the city by continuing to attract library patrons into the downtown area.

There are additional concerns with moving the library: If the building were not reused for City or County offices, it would likely remain dormant, another large structure in a downtown that has more than several architecturally significant buildings with no viable proposals for reuse.

Among the challenges complicating expansion of the library building at its current location is handicapped accessibility. While this assignment did not study specific ADA compliance solutions, this may be a component of expansion that could be eligible for grants geared toward supporting accessibility.



### **Initiative 3.5: Study the feasibility of alternative life-safety solutions in historic downtown buildings.**

Certain life-safety code requirements, including the requirement for automatic fire suppression sprinklers in buildings over one story, have inhibited adaptive reuse projects downtown. The International Building Code, which Ottumwa follows, requires automatic fire suppression but allows for some performance-based alternatives in designated historic buildings. There may be options for increased fire-rated materials, expanded egress solutions, and increased fire alert systems as an alternative to sprinklers. There may also be a need to explore a subsidy specifically for retrofitting fire-suppression sprinklers in order to stimulate mixed-use redevelopment. The subsidy might only be needed to catalyze initial projects until market values can increase sufficiently to support the investment in future projects.

### **Initiative 3.6: Provide property insurance information for mixed-use downtown buildings.**

A significant barrier to rehabilitating downtown properties as mixed-use projects is the availability and cost of insurance. Many property insurers have abandoned this line of business, or they offer costly policies. The National Trust for Historic Preservation offers a program that addresses this missing sector of the market through National Trust Insurance Services and a partner agency, Maury, Donnelly & Parr, Inc. ([mdpins.com/ntis-programs/](http://mdpins.com/ntis-programs/)). Initially, the National Trust established this partnership to work with historic Main Streets and the offerings have since expanded. NTIS may be able to offer price-competitive policies that facilitate the rehabilitation of Ottumwa's downtown buildings for mixed-use commercial and residential.

### **Initiative 3.7: Choose to fund the reconstruction of brick streets or adopt a compromise solution.**

The several remaining historic brick streets came up repeatedly in focus group and interview conversations. In focus groups and interviews, Ottumwans talked about these streets whether or not they live on one. Cherished by many and tolerated by others, they are a visual record of the city's development and their current condition impacts people's daily mobility. City staff and elected leaders also recognize the high costs associated with rebuilding and maintaining these streets. Currently, the brick streets are approaching a nonfunctional state, with severe heaving and subsidence presenting obstacles to passenger cars.

The City has considered ripping out the brick streets and paving them with traditional asphalt, a solution more aligned with its budget for road maintenance. But the public has resisted and the brick streets remain in need of repair. Ottumwa has several strategy options for addressing the brick streets, each of them imperfect for reasons of cost or aesthetics:

1. Phased full reconstruction. Different from their original design, reconstruction will involve excavating the streets, installing a new concrete base, and setting the bricks in a sand bedding. This is a very expensive project. The city could establish a schedule that amortizes the expense by reconstructing one block of brick streets every several years until all streets have been addressed. It could also pursue grant opportunities to subsidize the costs.
2. Reconstruction at intersections. To reduce costs while retaining a visual reference to the historic character, the city could restore the brick streets near intersections, reconstructing, for example, the first 50 feet of road.
3. Alternative materials. The streets could be repaved using stamped concrete or stamped asphalt, in a brick-paver pattern. Alternative materials will not look like the original brick, will be more expensive than asphalt, and may have a lifecycle shorter than brick reconstruction or traditional asphalt. But pragmatism may deem this solution worthy of consideration.





## 4. TELLING OTTUMWA'S STORIES

Historic preservation includes preserving the physical records of the past as well as the cultural heritage that the buildings represent. Telling the stories of the city's growth and development, of the people who built homes and businesses in the city, of cultures present and past, and of Ottumwa's commercial history helps to make historic preservation a living part of the city and its culture.

### **Initiative 4.1: Celebrate legacy businesses through official designations.**

Among the areas where the historic preservation movement has expanded in recent decades is the recognition of historic businesses, often called legacy businesses. Big cities like Los Angeles and Boston have established formal programs to recognize legacy businesses, providing training, marketing assistance, and, in some cases, financing and grants.

For a small city like Ottumwa, it is remarkable to have two businesses that have been around longer than many of Ottumwa's buildings: Canteen Lunch opened in 1927 and Grahams Dairy Freez in 1908. These are independent commercial icons that have become part of Ottumwa's identity. A legacy business initiative could recognize these "landmarks" with plaques, events, ribbon cuttings, and ongoing promotion.

A business need not be 100 years old to qualify. The Los Angeles Legacy Business Initiative recognizes businesses beginning after 20 years in operation.

### **Initiative 4.2: Establish and formalize historic neighborhood walking tours.**

Meet Ottumwa provides online information to tour Ottumwa Cemetery and Ottumwa's historic churches, but there are more neighborhoods to explore and stories to be told. Each of the National Register districts could be the subject of a walking tour, enriching the understanding of Ottumwa for both residents and visitors. Ideally, these walking tours would be offered in multiple formats, guided and self-guided, which would fit the preferences of different participants at different times:

- Docent-led live tours, offered on a rotating schedule through the year;
- Online maps and resources for self-guided tours;
- Podcast-based tours (or signed stops with on-demand audio narration accessed through a phone number)
- Printed tour booklets

These tours are opportunities to talk about Ottumwa's amazing residential and commercial architecture. They are also opportunities to tell Ottumwa's intangible history, from native peoples to merchants, from major floods to bygone industries.

The development of walking tours and the technology that supports them would be well-suited projects for a historic preservation friends group.

### **Initiative 4.3: Tell the many stories of Ottumwa's under-represented communities.**

Ottumwa's historic buildings embody the history of the city's residents. The Second Baptist Church is both a historic building and represents important stories of Ottumwa's Black community. The former B'nai Jacob Synagogue, now the Temple of Creative Arts, is listed on the National Register and represents Ottumwa's once thriving Jewish community. The buildings provide a springboard for narrating the stories of these historic Ottumwa communities, which can be represented in markers, walking tours, and oral histories.





## 5. AMPLIFYING PRESERVATION

Initiatives that amplify preservation are those that create public awareness of historic preservation and its social and economic impacts, and that help to inculcate a preservation ethos throughout the city so historic buildings and places are valued, protected, and restored.

### **Initiative 5.1: Offer historic preservation training programs.**

Members of the HPC have expressed interest in providing preservation training for homeowners, commercial property owners, and local officials. The combination of local expertise and SHPO resources could contribute meaningfully to Ottumwa's preservation initiatives. Topics might include:

- History of development and architecture in Ottumwa
- Window repair and weatherproofing
- Ottumwa preservation and maintenance grant programs
- Tax credit eligibility and use
- Historic district education

### **Initiative 5.2: Promote the use of existing city grant programs.**

In the experience of the Planning Team, Ottumwa has one of the most expansive and creative sets of financial incentives for preservation and adaptive use of any city its size – from grants for roofs to restaurant kitchens. While some of these grants are used regularly, others are rarely used.

In order to leverage these programs, consider:

- Finding new ways to promote awareness and understanding of how the grants work, e.g., through information sessions, social media, new printed materials, and one-on-one conversations;
- Conducting a focus group to understand the barriers or inhibitions that may exist to taking advantage of the grant programs;
- Consider publishing a cap on the number of grants available in any given year or grant period. Sometimes resource scarcity motivates potential applicants to act.

### **Initiative 5.3: Publicize the Iowa Historic Preservation Tax Credit.**

Iowa's Historic Preservation Tax Credit is unusual in that it can be used for commercial and residential property rehabilitation. (Most state historic preservation tax credit programs – and the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credit – are only available for income-producing properties.) The Iowa credit offers up to 25 percent of the qualified rehabilitation expenditures (QREs). Buildings must be:

- Listed on the National Register; or
- Determined by the staff at the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to be eligible for listing; or
- Contributing to the significance of a historic district listed on or eligible for listing on the National Register; or
- Designated as a local landmark by city or county ordinance.

For commercial buildings, QREs must equal at least 50% of the value of the building (excluding land) before rehabilitation or \$50,000, whichever is less. For non-commercial buildings, QREs must equal at least 25% of the assessed value of the building (excluding land) before rehabilitation or \$25,000, whichever is less. Rehabilitation must meet the federal Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The tax credit should see wider use in Ottumwa, particularly for residential rehabilitation. Its infrequent use may be the result of a lack of awareness of the program, or a lack of expertise in how to apply. Promotion and training by the City and the HPC could help broaden the use of the credit.





## 6. BENCHMARKING PRESERVATION

Historic preservation's economic impacts include increased property values, investment in homes and commercial buildings, job creation, heritage tourism, and other investments. Main Street Ottumwa, which tracks downtown investment, reports a cumulative impact of 74 new businesses, 285 new jobs, 271 building improvements, and over \$31 million in downtown private investment from 2006 to 2022.

At least three dozen economic impact studies in cities across the country have documented quantitative impacts of historic preservation on local communities. Most of these studies were commissioned by local governments or state agencies, and most were conducted by Place Economics, a Washington, DC-based consultancy specializing in this area of work [1].

The most pragmatic “do-it-yourself” approach to tracking historic preservation impacts is to focus on the designated National Register Historic Districts. Most of the housing stock in Ottumwa is more than 50 years old and is therefore “historic” in one meaning of the word, but it would be impractical to try to track all properties. The National Register Districts in aggregate account for less than 1% of the city's land area, but they contain the most significant buildings.

Tracking and quantifying the impacts of historic preservation may include any or all of the following:

- **Demographic changes.** Demographic characteristics for historic districts and the city are typically the most accessible data sources. Household income, household size, age of householder, race and ethnicity, and homeownership rates (discussed in the Demographics section of this report) are useful proxies in understanding how populations in designated historic districts compare to the population of the city.

[1] Main Street Iowa and the Iowa Economic Development Authority commissioned a study, *Getting Results: The Economic Impact of Main Street Iowa, 1986-2012*, by Place Economics, published in 2013 and available for download: <https://www.placeeconomics.com/resources/getting-results-the-economic-impact-of-main-street-iowa-1986-2012/>



- **Property values.** Changes in property values provide the most direct measure of historic preservation's economic returns. Sales prices or assessed values in historic districts can be compared to the city as a whole. The standardized approach compares square-foot values of buildings to understand rates of change in value across the city. When comparing square-foot values across different neighborhoods, it is appropriate to separate the value of the building from the value of the land, since historic homes and commercial buildings tend to sit on relatively smaller lots than newer development.
- **Building permits.** Building permits issued by the City provide a record of improvements to properties across the city. Tracking the dollar value of (non-demolition) permits issued in historic districts can be used to quantify investments in these properties and compared to the city as a whole.
- **Preservation incentive grants.** The City already tracks the use of preservation incentive grants in downtown (e.g., façade improvements, roof repair, and commercial paint). In addition, the City and the Legacy Foundation offer grants for home maintenance. Each grant awarded reflects a direct investment and a leveraged investment. Many of these residential investments are in historic buildings or districts.
- **Downtown development.** As noted above, Main Street Ottumwa regularly tracks investment in the downtown district, including business openings, new construction, building maintenance, adaptive use development, upper-story housing units created, and public improvements.
- **Job creation.** Main Street Ottumwa tracks jobs created by new businesses downtown. Residential improvements in historic districts may also result in job creation. These are typically measured using multipliers established by frameworks such as IMPLAN.



### **Initiative 6.1: Track demographic characteristics in historic districts.**

Continue tracking demographic characteristics of residential National Register Districts (as started in this report) using ESRI and shapefiles to pull hyper local data. Note that because the districts, even in aggregate, represent such a small area overall, and represent fractions of census tracts, the data can be subject to inconsistencies.

### **Initiative 6.2: Track property values in historic districts.**

Using Wapello County assessor's records and/or sales records from online resources such as Zillow, begin tracking home values per square foot in historic districts compared to the city overall. Because of the number of properties involved, it may be more practical to track sales going forward from the present, rather than establishing a retrospective database of property values. This could be an appropriate project for a summer intern, to relieve staff burden.

### **Initiative 6.3: Track building permits in historic districts.**

Using building department records, the City can begin tracking the value of improvements to buildings in historic districts compared to the city overall. This too may be a suitable project for an intern.

### **Initiative 6.4: Communicate preservation's impacts.**

Messaging of historic preservation's impacts will help to continue growing the movement in Ottumwa. As research demonstrates investment, increased property values, or other markers, the HPC and the Community Development department will want to share this information broadly with city and state elected officials and with the Ottumwa public at large.

### **Initiative 6.5: Consider commissioning a historic preservation economic impact study.**

At a future date, the City may consider commissioning a historic preservation economic impact study to provide more detailed analysis of preservation impacts, provided by an objective resource and document. Funding for such a study might be provided in part by the State Historic Preservation Office, the City, and/or the Legacy Foundation.



# IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

The following chart presents a recommended timeline for the implementation of initiatives identified in the Historic Preservation Plan. The matrix prioritizes each initiative and identifies a target time frame, estimated cost range, and potential implementation partners or funders. The table also includes metrics for successful implementation, such as adoption of ordinances or submission of nominations.

## PRIORITIES

High - Implement within the next 1-3 years.

Medium - Implement within 4-7 years.

Low - Implement in 8-10 years.

Ongoing - Implement annually.

## PRESERVATION PARTNER ABBREVIATIONS

Preservation Partner Abbreviations

CD - Community Development (City)

HPC - Historic Preservation Commission

OMS - Ottumwa Main Street

PW - Public Works (City)

LF - Legacy Foundation

SHPO - State Historic Preservation Office

HRDP - Historic Resource Development Program, State Historical Society of Iowa

FOHP - Friends of Ottumwa Historic Preservation (to be established/named)

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	PARTNERS / POTENTIAL FUNDING	METRICS	
<b>1. NOMINATIONS AND LOCAL DISTRICTS</b>						
1.1	Adopt and operationalize "Historic District Overlay District" ordinance	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		HPC	Adoption; designation of local districts
1.2	Expand the existing historic preservation ordinance to allow Conservation Overlay Districts	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		HPC	Adoption
1.3	Draft design guidelines or standards	HIGH	1-3 YEARS	\$25K TO \$40K	HPC; HRDP; SHPO	Adoption
1.4	Consider a demolition delay ordinance	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		HPC	Adoption; reduced demolitions
1.5	Designate NRHDs as local overlay districts	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		HPC	Designation
1.6	Study potential for nominating South Ottumwa to National Register	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS	\$25K TO \$40K	HPC; SHPO	Nomination submitted
1.7	Designate South Ottumwa as a local Conservation Overlay District	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS		HPC	Designation

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	PARTNERS / POTENTIAL FUNDING	METRICS	
<b>2. HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MANAGEMENT</b>						
2.1	Separate preservation-related promotional activities from the HPC's regulatory responsibilities	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		Establishment of Friends group	
2.2	Reconstitute the HPC in anticipation of managing a local historic district program	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		Reestablishment of HPC	
<b>3. CATALYZING PRESERVATION</b>						
3.1	Incentivize upper-story residential development	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS	\$100K to \$500K	OMS; LF; CD	
3.2	Facilitate development of downtown short-term lodging	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS		OMS; CD	Number of new short-term rental units
3.3	Incentivize rehabilitation and maintenance of workforce housing	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS		OMS; LF; CD	Number of homes improved
3.4	Prioritize retaining the library downtown	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		OPL	Library retained; expanded onsite

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	PARTNERS / POTENTIAL FUNDING	METRICS	
<b>3. CATALYZING PRESERVATION</b>						
3.5	Study the feasibility of alternative life-safety solutions in historic downtown buildings	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		OMS; CD	Adapted regulatory process
3.6	Provide property insurance information for mixed-use downtown buildings	HIGH	1-3 YEARS		OMS; CD	Improved insurance access, reduced premiums
3.7	Choose to fund the reconstruction of brick streets or adopt a compromise solution	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS	\$1+ MILLION	PW; NEIGH-BORS	Reconstructed streets
<b>4. TELLING OTTUMWA'S STORIES</b>						
4.1	Celebrate legacy businesses through official designations	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		OMS	Retained businesses; increased tourism
4.2	Establish and formalize historic neighborhood walking tours	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS	\$0 TO \$10K	FOHP; CD	Increased awareness; increased tourism
4.3	Tell the many stories of Ottumwa's under-represented communities	MEDIUM	4-6 YEARS		FOHP; CD	Increased awareness; increased tourism

INITIATIVE	PRIORITY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	PARTNERS / POTENTIAL FUNDING	METRICS	
<b>5. AMPLIFYING PRESERVATION</b>						
5.1	Offer historic preservation training programs	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS	\$0 TO \$10K	FOHP	Increased local preservation knowledge, skills
5.2	Promote the use of existing city grant programs	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		HPC; CD; FOHP	New projects stimulated; private investment leveraged
5.3	Publicize the Iowa Historic Preservation Tax Credit	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		HPC; CD; FOHP	New tax credit projects stimulated
<b>6. BENCHMARKING PRESERVATION</b>						
6.1	Track demographic characteristics in historic districts	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS		CD	Improved data on economic impacts
6.2	Track property values in historic districts	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS	\$0 TO \$5K	CD	Improved data on economic impacts
6.3	Track building permits in historic districts	MEDIUM	1-3 YEARS	\$0 TO \$5K	CD	Improved data on economic impacts
6.4	Communicate preservation's impacts	HIGH	ONGOING		HPC; CD	Increased awareness of preservation's value
6.5	Consider commissioning a historic preservation economic impact study	MEDIUM	7-10 YEARS	\$50K TO \$75K	HPC; HRDP; SHPO	Increased awareness of preservation's value



