

Appendix 7

COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUPS

To kick-off the *Ames Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan*, the City of Ames sponsored a series of community focus groups. The purpose of these groups, held on November 26, and November 27, 2007, was to gauge public opinion in Ames concerning historic preservation. The following tabulations report the results of these focus group sessions.

Positives

- 1) **General Benefits of Historic Preservation**
 - Sense of Community
 - Sense of community pride
 - Preserving parts of our history
 - Preserving past architecture and designs
 - Teaching our children about the past
 - Saves history for future
 - A sense of place
 - Preserves quality of life and character of cities
 - A sense of what has passed
 - A fabric for quality growth
 - Promotes neighborhood and city pride
 - Keep old buildings to give sense of history for community
 - Local heritage
 - Record who we are/ where we're from
 - Preserve history in more than a photo or book
 - Save structures that otherwise might be torn down
 - Allows us to know our past
 - Carry on tradition
 - Historic link to event or period

- 2) **Benefits of Preserving Historic Character**
 - Character of neighborhood
 - It sustains living historic reference points for generations to come
 - Show the character and unique qualities of a time period/era
 - Greater understanding of how we came to where we are
 - Keep neighborhoods from changing character
 - Maintain neighborhood character
 - A cultural story of the community
 - Saving of an architectural heritage
 - Contribute to a richer more experienced built environment
 - Maintain character of neighborhoods
 - Create a sense of place based on history

3) Why This Benefits Community

- Tourism factor
- Stimulates the local economy
- Promotes healthy economic development
- Increase property values
- Preserves affordable housing
- Higher property values
- Encourages core growth rather than sprawl
- Allows for informed decision making
- Improve property values
- Encourage sustainable land use practices
- Increased home value

4) Tools for Preservation

- Sweat equity
- Funding for preservation efforts
- Grant money
- Adaptive reuse opportunities
- Re-uses materials
- Takes advantage of existing infrastructure
- Retain structures

5) Counters Harmful Tendencies

- Controls development
- Stops brick rectangles being built in Old Town
- Stabilize neighborhoods
- Combats blight/maintains character of neighborhoods
- Keeps junk out of yards
- Reduce potential for air pollution
- Reduce road building through promotion of infill use

6) Builds Community Involvement

- Provides access to financial incentives for improvement
- Business properties on national registry
- Neighborhood recognition
- Regional significance
- Value maintenance
- Attract outside interest
- Interesting to live in
- Help to focus on importance of historical renovations
- Helps keep single-family neighborhood housing available in neighborhoods
- Promotes diversity in the housing stock
- Promotes aesthetics
- Maintain diversity of housing
- Provide community input into use of land resources and development
- Protect value of areas and property because review necessary for alterations
- Protect uniqueness of buildings
- Identify special properties

- Local district-Old Town-South Campus (in future)
- Saves resources-eco friendly
- Adds uniqueness to an area as different styles of architecture develop
- We are forgetful
- Helps us learn
- Variety to neighborhoods
- Manages cultural resources
- Promotes sustainable building
- Heightens our appreciation for people and things that created our environment
- Impacts feelings of pride
- Give character to a place
- Consistent interpretation of values
- Adds value to property and districts
- Its what makes us “us”
- Shows our growth
- Unique, not cookie cutter
- Creates a sense of place
- Keeps city more compact
- Makes city interesting
- Use of solid well-built structures
- Saves resources
- Creates a sense of place for citizens
- Pleasant living quarters
- Helps us place ourselves
- Eases our ability to connect to the past, ID our place in time
- Allows for alternatives to typical new construction
- Acts as a bridge between new and old
- Adds character to existing neighborhoods
- Inspires others to do the same
- Fosters sense of connectedness with places and people of the past
- Makes community unique and memorable
- Past, present, and future side by side
- Demonstration of growth in community
- Understanding of creativity of architects and builders of the past
- Sense of heritage

Negatives

1) **Financial Issues**

- Lack of fiscal support
- Maintenance expense
- Cost of renovation/maintenance can exceed resale value
- Additional costs
- Costs money
- Cost of improvements
- Cost, maintenance
- Raise costs of improvements
- Can lead to extra expense in owning properties
- Raise costs of living/buying in particular neighborhoods
- It takes money
- Could affect value
- Not supported by \$
- May result in greater costs for improvements/hard to meet criteria
- May be more costly
- Higher taxes
- Expensive rehab
- Cost, red tape, codes
- Costs to remodel, bring up to code
- May be viewed as expensive
- May reduce values of some properties
- Costly
- Limit tax base
- Cost money
- Result in unfunded mandates for maintenance
- Often more costly than building new
- May make development more costly and complicated

2) **Regulatory Issues**

- Building technology evolution: ADA, codes
- Regulatory implications- inhibitors
- It may propagate arbitrary, capricious, or wrong standards, rules, and regulations
- Takes away owners rights to do certain things in some instances
- Historic structures may not be up to code
- May be impractical to restore or meet new codes
- Have to fill out forms and get ok's for changes you want to make
- Perceived infringement of property right
- Accompanied by regulations
- Code compliance issues

3) **Conflicting Public Values**

- Cause dissention, communication = good
- Pit one group against another
- Lack of full understanding of the historic context of the proposed or most significant historic period
- Can be in the eye of the beholder
- Different ideas of what's valuable can cause conflict

- Older is not always better
- Some people don't like to keep old things
- Fear by homeowner of restrictions and loss of capital.
- Can lead to extra expense in owning properties
- Some think old should be gone to make way for new
- Defining what is historic
- Confusing old with historic
- Sources of controversy
- Increased divide between students and rest of community
- Some people think old buildings stand for old ideas
- Perceived hindrance to development
- Different ideas of what's valuable can cause conflict
- Less forward thinking
- Often controversial

4) Practical Physical Problems

- Buildings may not have modern amenities if not easily updated
- Homeowners must do repairs in certain ways
- Newer more efficient ways
- Adaptability
- Maintenance
- Time consuming
- Cost to remodel/replicate vs other sections of town
- Can be "harder"
- Can be slow
- Increased time/resources to perform needed improvements
- Limited use of certain materials
- Finding individuals skilled in the reuse of historic projects
- Newer more effective materials
- Knowing and securing appropriate or authentic materials
- Remodel review/specific materials
- Poor condition
- Old spaces may not meet current needs
- Buildings may be in disrepair
- Its work

5) Restricts Development

- Restrictions on property renovations
- Reduction in available property for "growth"
- Can impede progress for the future
- Certain improvements may be delayed
- Inhibit redevelopment
- Slow or prevent upgrading of properties
- Slow commercial development
- Development may be slowed
- Inhibit owner's plans or needs
- Potential barrier to development
- It can impede progressive design
- Restricting

- Stands in the way of new development
- Decrease availability of housing for lower income families
- Can make it more difficult to redevelop properties
- Can result in non-conforming uses
- Difficult to demolish a structure that hasn't been maintained but deemed historic
- Impedes progress at that location
- Difficult reuse
- Perceived hindrance to development
- Less forward thinking
- Focus on old rather than new
- Fewer options for greater development
- Limits options
- May stifle innovation
- May make development more costly and complicated
- Less room for new development in core where older structures may be more common.
- Takes away from neighborhood housing

6) Imponderables

- Can be "harder"
- Can be slow
- Reveals complications
- Prevents spending on bad things, doesn't force spending on good things
- Have not encountered any in my lifetime to date
- Original-Oak Park, IL