

## Historic District Fact Sheet

Prepared by City of Ames, Planning & Housing Department  
October 2022

### Benefits of Historic Preservation

Historic district designation can help stabilize a neighborhood, stimulate increased owner-occupancy by making it a more distinct and desirable place to live, and can encourage investment in the rehabilitation of buildings. These beneficial effects vary, depending on the area and the economy at the time, but overall, historic district designation has produced positive results in Ames.

### What Makes Something Historic?

To be considered eligible as a “historic” building, a building is typically at least 50 years of age – but not everything 50 years old is considered significant. There are other criteria to consider. The decision to protect historic places rests in the meaning they bring to our lives and the ways they define and mark our history. For example,

- A building may be historic because it was designed by a well-known architect or was the place where a significant event occurred (such as a battlefield).
- A building may also be historic because it signifies patterns of settlement and trade, incorporated local materials and methods in construction, or because it is typical of the time.

### What is a historic district?

- An area or neighborhood that has a concentration of historic resources, which retain their architectural integrity and represent an important aspect of the area’s history (periods of growth, historic architectural styles, etc.)
- There are two types of historic districts: Designation on the National Register of Historic Places and Local District designation (by the City Council). A district may be listed at either the National or Local level or both.
- There are many misconceptions about what it means to live in a historic district, and the benefits historic districts can provide are numerous.

### Misconceptions About Historic Districts

- The designation of property in either type of district does not raise the property tax on any particular property. (Property tax increases are based on property values and determined independently.)
- Neither type of historic district can restrict the use or sale of a property; that is predetermined through local zoning ordinances.

### What are the benefits of historic district designation?

#### National Register-

- A National Register of Historic Places listing identifies an area of the community that includes individual buildings, structures, sites, and objects that are historically, architecturally, or archaeologically significant. Its boundaries are tightly drawn to encompass only concentrated areas of significant properties and does not affect noncontributing elements.
- A listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) is honorary. Ames has three NRHP historic district listings: Ames Main Street Historic District; Bandshell Park Historic District; and Old Town Historic District. Additionally, there are seventeen individual building/property listings.

- Financial benefits- There are many local, state, and federal programs to assist qualifying rehabilitation projects. The website includes a listing of various programs. Foremost is the state tax credit for owners who rehabilitate residential buildings. Homes that obtain the state tax credit may also get local property taxes reduced for up to 4 years after a rehabilitation project is completed. (Please verify availability, as such programs are subject to change.)
- Listing on the National Register places no federal restrictions or requirements on a private property owner unless federal funds are used. Property owners retain all of their rights to alter, demolish, preserve, or sell their properties, within the framework of local laws or ordinances. However, if significant modifications are made that are incompatible with the historic character of the property or if it is demolished, the property may be delisted from the National Register.
- If a majority of property owners object, the district will not be listed but may be forwarded to the National Park Service for a Determination of Eligibility (DOE).

#### Local Historic District-

- A local historic district is an area established by the Ames City Council, which contains buildings and properties considered valuable for historical or architectural reasons. Ames currently has only one local historic district, the Old Town Historic District.
- Financial benefits- There are many local, state, and federal programs to assist qualifying rehabilitation projects. The website includes a listing of various programs. Foremost is the state tax credit for owners who rehabilitate residential buildings. Homes that obtain the state tax credit may also get local property taxes reduced for up to 4 years after a rehabilitation project is completed. (Please verify availability, as such programs are subject to change.)
- Establishment of a local historic district helps ensure that growth, development, and change take place in ways that respect the important architectural, historical, cultural, and environmental characteristics of the district.
- A local historic district receives legal protection from certain types of development considered to be inappropriate. The Historic Preservation Commission approves exterior changes to structures and issues Certificates of Appropriateness (COA) before a building or demolition permit is issued. The degree of protection depends on the details included in the local ordinance that is adopted to govern the district. (Not every district has to be the same.)
- The City of Ames does not charge to review Certificate of Appropriateness. For certain minor changes to buildings, homeowners can consult with the Department of Planning & Housing and receive approval. Major changes, new construction, and demolition, however, require homeowners to get approval from the Ames Historic Preservation Commission.
- Sites designated in a local historic district may be given more leniency in complying with certain building code requirements, such as the height of porch railings.
- A local nomination may only be proposed by an owner or owners of property within the area; the City Council will not established a local historic district, if the majority of property owners object.

#### **For more information on City of Ames historic preservation, go to:**

cityofames.org/government/departments-divisions-i-z/planning/historic-preservation, or contact:

[Ray.Anderson@cityofames.org](mailto:Ray.Anderson@cityofames.org)

(515) 239-5400

For more information from the State of Iowa on National Register of Historic Places, go to:

iowaculture.gov/history/preservation/national-register-historic-places, or contact:

[Allison.Archambo@iowa.gov](mailto:Allison.Archambo@iowa.gov)

State Historic Preservation Office

(515) 281-6826