COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PLAN
Cover:
Riverview Park, shown here circa 1920, is currently in the process of rebirth as Riverview Nature Island. Buildings are no longer extant, but the site remains a resource for Des Moines.

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Jeffrey Strobel

Plan Images:
The images used throughout this document range from early history to today. They illustrate a consistent optimism and a belief in an enduring future.

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Images associated with the role of Italian-Americans in the early history of Des Moines courtesy of the Italian-American Cultural Center and Pat Civitate.

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COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PLAN

An Element of Des Moines' Comprehensive Plan

Roll Call #1872  May 16, 1994

CITY OF DES MOINES
Community Development Department
Planning and Urban Design Division

with

The Advisory Committee for the Community Preservation Plan

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The purpose of the Community Preservation Plan is to build respect for the community's identity and physical design while promoting community growth.

The Plan is an attempt to educate and involve all citizens of Des Moines in decisions that involve the city's architectural and natural heritage.

The Des Moines Community Preservation Plan is a conceptual framework document dealing with the community's historic, architectural and natural resources. The goals and policies provide an outline of strategies and procedures on how to capitalize on the community's character and unique features.

The Community Preservation Plan, like any comprehensive plan, establishes future direction and guidelines. These directions, expressed through the goals, policies and future milestones, are not mandatory for any governmental or private entities within the community; but they should have far reaching effects and significance as they are considered when making decisions about preservation, development and other issues. Each policy contained in the plan will be subject to detailed analysis before citizen groups, business persons, and City Council. As a general policy, all actions that effect a specific property will involve the property owner. Goals and policies concerning preservation will not devalue a property or make it more difficult to develop.

The Community Preservation Plan is among many interests that have to be integrated and balanced to build the best community. A prioritization of the future milestones included in this plan is needed to determine what are the most urgent items, what steps can happen concurrently, and how different groups can become involved. Careful prioritization is also needed to ensure the tasks identified can be accomplished in a time frame consistent with city fiscal and staff resources and will receive the support and expertise of other public and private entities. Through this integrating process the plan's overall goal of retaining physical evidence of the city's past while providing clear signals that new development is welcome will be achieved.
The City of Des Moines' unique and rich history is manifested in the layout of the city as well as the architecture of its buildings. The natural environment, combined with the human-made environment, give Des Moines its “sense of place.”

At various points in its history, Des Moines has been titled, “A City of Homes,” “A City of Certainties,” “A Surprising Place,” and most recently, “The New Style American City.” Des Moines has always viewed itself as a growing, developing community. Until the past two decades, Des Moines has often looked forward without looking back. Isolated decisions to accommodate future growth may threaten the qualities that make Des Moines attractive to residents and businesses.

The emphasis of this plan is to promote community preservation and comprehensive decision making through education and information about those characteristics that are uniquely Des Moines. The plan’s success does not rely on achieving preservation through regulation or enforcement activities.

The scope of this plan extends beyond those districts or individual properties that have exceptional historic or architectural significance or may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The plan delineates efforts to preserve the quality and character of the city including all architectural eras and past periods of growth. Its strategies also address traditional residential and commercial areas that are typical of an earlier time or have consistent streetscapes. These traditional areas have strong community character for a variety of reasons including the presence of a particular housing style or because of the presence of unique streets, overall layouts, or landscape features.
CHAPTER 1  pp 8-13
Building a Constituency for Preservation

A constituency for preservation can be achieved by increasing public awareness of Des Moines' history, architecture and built environment.

Proposed strategies address:
- City Museum
- Economic Benefits
- Media Tools
- Correct Rehabilitation
- Neighborhood Groups
- Public Ownership
- Survey
- School System
- School Buildings

CHAPTER 2  pp 14-19
Tools and Resources for Preservation

Preserve our community's character by developing and enhancing policies and ordinances that help government protect historic buildings, structures, districts and traditional neighborhoods.

Proposed strategies address:
- Existing Efforts
- Building Stock
- Zoning
- Financial Support

CHAPTER 3  pp 20-23
Integrating Preservation into Planning

Preserve Des Moines' character by incorporating the preservation of historic and traditional neighborhoods into community goals and community decision making, and all aspects of planning.

Proposed strategies address:
- Community Values
- City Coordination
- Inventory and Data Base

Downtown Des Moines looking west, 1914
CHAPTER 4  pp 24-35

History of Preservation in Des Moines

This chapter includes listings of architecturally and historically important properties and events.

- Chronology of Important Events
- National Historic Landmarks
- Districts Listed on the National Register
  Map — Districts of Architectural and Historical Significance 26-27
- Structures/Buildings/Objects Listed on the National Register
- Multiple Property Documentation Forms
- Local Landmarks
- Local Historic Districts
- Districts Found Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- Areas with Potential for National Register Listing
- Traditional Neighborhoods
  Map — Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement 34-35

CHAPTER 5  pp 36-62

Historic Contexts

Historic contexts are used to determine the significance of local events and structures. Four contexts were explored as a part of the Community Preservation Plan:

- Development of the City: Reform and Renewal, 1907-1920
  Map — 1907-1920 Commercial and Institutional Buildings of Architectural and Historical Significance 40-41
  Map — Location of Architecturally Significant Bungalows 46-47
  Map — Des Moines' Development History 48-49
- Double Houses and Row Houses: Affordable Housing
  Map — Double Houses 52-53
- Ethnic Heritage: Before the Melting Pot
  Map — Ethnic Settlements 56-57
- Life With the Rivers

CHAPTER 6  pp 63-81

REFERENCE

Codes, Ordinances and Policies

This section serves as a reference manual and includes a compilation of city codes, ordinances and policies. The ordinances are reprinted from the Municipal Code of the City of Des Moines adopted 1991. All codes, policies and ordinances are subject to amendment by the City Council.

- Historic District Ordinance 64
- Landmarks Ordinance 67
- Abandoned Housing Ordinance 70
- City-Owned Historic Building Policy 71
- Historic Street Light Policy 72
- Programmatic Memorandum of Agreement 72
- Section 104(f) of the 1991 Uniform Building Code 75
- Residential Historic District Zoning Classification (R-HD) 76
- Certified Local Government Agreement 80
- Standard Specifications for Construction of Public Improvements 81
  Graphic - Brick Sidewalks
  Graphic - Street Excavation, Pavement Restoration