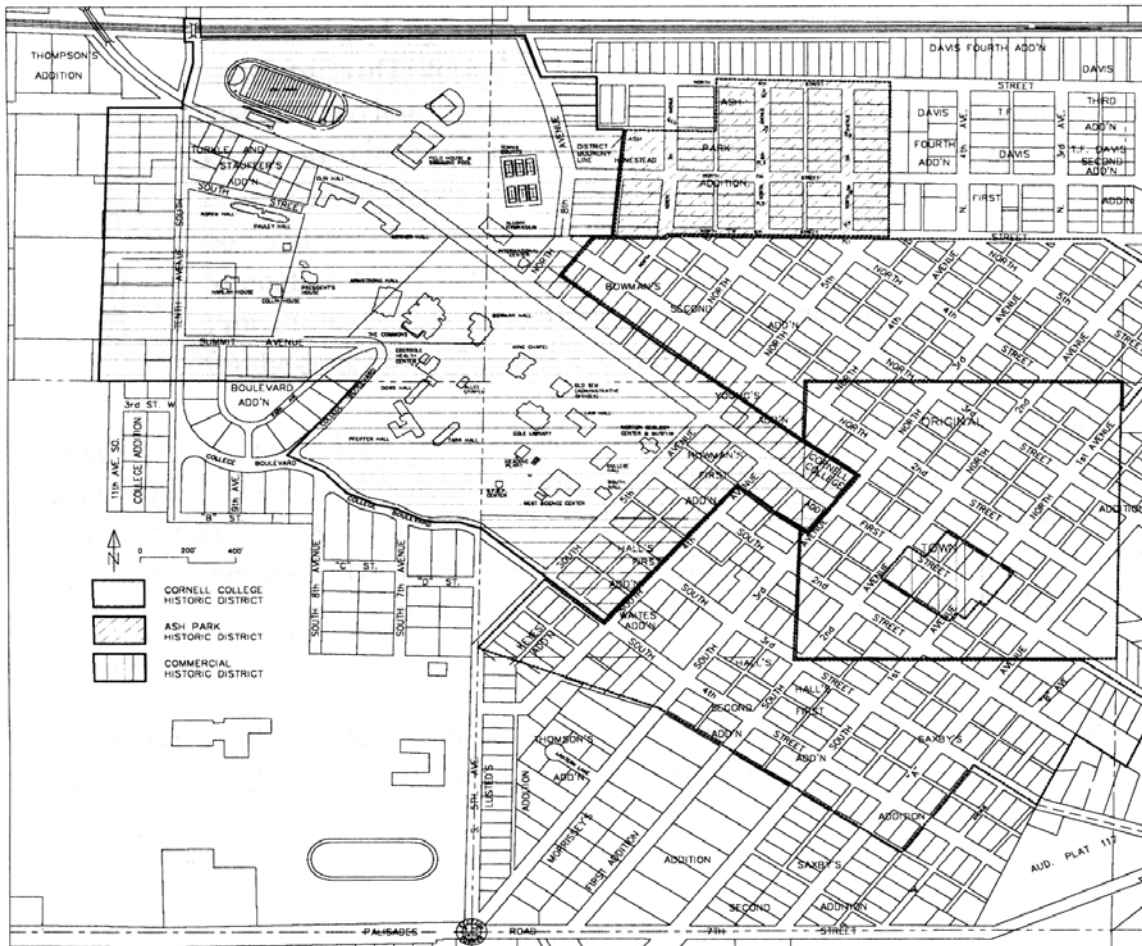


Certificate of Appropriateness

Mount Vernon, Iowa 52314

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LOCATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS

The Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Commission

The Mount Vernon Preservation Commission was established as Certified Local Government under a program of the Federal government in 1985 to foster preservation efforts at the local government level. The purpose and intent of the commission as per the Chapter 24 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Mount Vernon are to:

- 1) Promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the public through the recognition, enhancement, and perpetuation of sites and districts of historical and cultural significance;
- 2) Safeguard the City's historic, aesthetic, and cultural heritage by preserving sites and districts of historical and cultural significance;
- 3) Stabilize and improve property values;
- 4) Foster pride in the legacy of beauty and achievements of the past;
- 5) Protect and enhance the City's attractions to tourists and visitors and the support and stimulus to business thereby provided;
- 6) Strengthen the economy of the City; and,
- 7) Promote the use of sites and districts of historic and cultural significance as places for the education, pleasure, and welfare of the people of the City.

The goals of establishing Historic Districts are to stabilize and improve property values and to foster civic pride in well-maintained historic properties. The city of Mount Vernon has an ordinance covering property owners in its Historic District, which provides some assurance that neighboring properties will be kept compatible with the overall neighborhood. When major exterior changes are made, these changes will be in harmony with architectural aesthetic characteristics of the historic period.

Mt. Vernon currently has three districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places. These include the Commercial District, the Ash Park Residential District, and the Cornell College District. A fourth district, the Brick District, (consisting of non-contiguous brick structures throughout the city) was identified as a fourth potential National Historic District. Additionally, there are several other areas in the community that constitute areas or districts of historic significance.

Process for Designation of a Historic District

1. Historic Preservation Commission prepares background and survey information concerning significance of an area, building or site to American and Mt. Vernon history, archaeology and culture. Including information concerning integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship; association with lives of persons significant to our past; distinctive characteristics of types of construction; and possible yield of information important in history.
2. Advance mailing of notice to all property owners in the proposed historic district advising them of a public hearing.
3. Historic Preservation Commission holds a public hearing on proposed historic district designation.
4. Historic Preservation Commission report recommending designation of a historic district is submitted to the Planning and Zoning (P & Z) Commission.
5. Copy of report is submitted to State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Comments from SHPO must be received before action is taken by P & Z.
6. Within 60 days of receiving the report from the Historic Preservation Commission and comments from the SHPO, P & Z shall submit its recommendations to the City Council.
 - a. P & Z may approve, disapprove, or modify the proposed designation.
 - b. P & Z must notify Historic Preservation Commission of modifications.
 - c. If P & Z modifies, the City shall forward modifications to the SHPO for review.
 - d. SHPO comments must be received by the City before a public hearing before the City Council is held. Such comments must be available for public review.
7. The City Council provides notice of hearing and conducts a public hearing on an ordinance to designate a historic district.
 - a. The City Council may adopt, reject, or refer the proposal to the Historic Preservation Commission for modification.
 - b. If the Council refers the matter back to the Historic Preservation Commission for modification, the requirements of paragraphs 2 through 6 must be repeated.

Note: For further details, refer to the Mt. Vernon Code of Ordinances. The Code empowers the Commission to conduct studies for identification and designation of historic districts on its own initiative. It also provides for the procedures for designating historic districts.

Questions & Answers

WHAT IS A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

A historic district is an area that contains properties under different ownership that:

1. Are significant to American history, architecture, archaeology, and culture (National District) or Mt. Vernon history, architecture, archaeology and culture (Local District);
2. Possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials and workmanship;
3. Are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to our history or are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
4. Embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction; represent the work of a master; possess high artistic values; represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or, have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history.

HOW IS THE ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC INTEGRITY OF A PROPERTY IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT PROTECTED?

No individual or corporation may undertake a basic change in appearance of a building or site within a Historic District unless the proposed changes have undergone a review process and the Historic Preservation Commission grants a Certificate of Appropriateness. A change of appearance refers to exterior features and includes the architectural style, general design and arrangement of the exterior of a building including the kind and texture of building materials and type and style of all windows, doors, light fixtures, signs and other appurtenant fixtures. It refers only to changes in appearance, which are visible from the public way or from adjacent properties. Compliance with the Design Review recommendations is mandatory for changes for which a building permit is required (such as additions, new construction, and signs). If a building permit is not required, the recommendations from the Design Review are optional. A property owner is not prohibited from making normal repairs or maintenance that do not involve alterations or changes in the exterior features of a building. Changes made in the color of exterior surfaces of a building are considered ordinary maintenance and repair and are not subject to review.

WHEN IS A "CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS" REQUIRED?

A "Certificate of Appropriateness" is required for any proposed change to the exterior of a structure or the site of a structure located within one of Mount Vernon's Historic Districts.

Examples of work requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness include modifications or additions to:

- 1) Roof shape and materials (may require a building permit);
- 2) Window and door size, type, and location;
- 3) Cladding material (siding, brick, etc.),
- 4) Living spaces, porches, and decks (require a building permit);
- 5) Ancillary structures such as garages, storage buildings (require a building permit);
- 6) Chimneys;
- 7) Fences & Signs.

TO WHOM DOES ONE APPLY FOR A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

To the City of Mount Vernon. The Zoning administrator will review the project to see if it is within one of the City's Historic Districts. If the project is not within a Local or National Historic District, it is not subject to the review of the Design Review Committee. Structures in the districts must be reviewed by the Design Review Committee (a subset of the Historic Preservation Commission). Drawings, photographs, sketches should accompany the application, when appropriate, or other exhibits which will aid the Design Review Committee in considering the application.

If the proposed work does not have an impact on the historic integrity of the site or structure a certificate of "No Material Effect" is issued. The application is then returned to the zoning administrator for review for compliance with city zoning regulations.

If the work will impact the historic integrity of the structure or site, it is reviewed for compliance with the published guidelines, which are based on the Standards of the Secretary of the Interior. If in compliance, a "Certificate of Appropriateness" is issued. If not, specific recommendations are made to the applicant indicating how the work can be brought into compliance. The review committee will either issue the approval contingent upon the recommendations being followed, or they will reject the application and ask for it to be resubmitted once the modifications are made.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO OBTAIN A "CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS"?

No applicant will have to wait longer than 15 days before the Design Review Committee makes a decision. The Committee (Commission) meets on the first Saturday of each month. Meetings may be scheduled more frequently provided the demand for Certificates of Appropriateness warrant additional meetings.

ARE THERE SAFEGUARDS FOR THE PROPERTY OWNER IN CONNECTION WITH A CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

1. The Commission considers whether a proposed change conforms to standards set forth in the February 1990 revised edition of the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation" and may also use the Secretary of the Interior's "Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings."
2. The Commission may approve, modify, or disapprove an application for a Certificate of Appropriateness. The Commission acts on a written resolution setting forth the full reason for the decision and the vote of each Commission member participating in the decision.
3. An applicant aggrieved by the decision of the Commission may appeal the action to the Board of Adjustment. An appeal must be in writing and submitted not later than ten business days after the filing of the Commission's decision. A public hearing is held on the appeal. The Board of Adjustment may reverse or affirm wholly or partly, or make any decision or determination the Board of Adjustment believes should be made and shall have all the powers of the Commission from which the appeal was taken. If not satisfied with the decision of the Board of Adjustment, the appellant may appeal to the City Council, and ultimately, the Linn County District Court within thirty (30) days after the Council's decision.

WHAT ADDED REGULATIONS ARE THERE IF MY PROPERTY IS LOCATED IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

When an owner of a property within a historic district wishes to make exterior alterations, including additions and demolitions, a certificate of appropriateness is required. A certificate is issued after the Commission has reviewed the project and has determined that the proposed changes are in keeping with the character of the property and the surrounding district. The Commission evaluates each project using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation (February, 1990). The review process generally takes less than two weeks. A project review mandatory for all projects in which exterior will be made. If a building permit is required for the work, the recommendations of the Design Review committee are mandatory. If a building permit is not required compliance with the recommendations of the review are voluntary. Work such as painting, the installation of gutters, or routine maintenance require no certificate.

DOES THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION HAVE A TRACK RECORD OF APPROVING OR DISAPPROVING APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATES OF APPROPRIATENESS?

Although this is the first year the Design Review process has been operating in Mt. Vernon, the Commission has so far approved most applications. The Commission will work with individuals to revise their plans if necessary so that the proposed alterations to a property are appropriate and in keeping with the character of the property and the surrounding district.

WHEN SHOULD I APPLY FOR A BUILDING PERMIT AND CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS?

The submission should be made to City Hall as part of the building permit application process. Individuals contemplating modifications or additions to their property are encouraged, however, to set up a preliminary review with the Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Commission at one of their regular meetings. The preliminary design review session can save time and money by making sure the proposed changes are acceptable before applying for a permit.

WHO MAKES THE DECISION REGARDING A "CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATENESS"?

The Mount Vernon Historic Preservation Commission will meet to review and rule on applications. Three members of the commission constitute a quorum for considering an application.

IF I DON'T LIKE THE DECISION OF THE COMMISSION REGARDING MY REMODELING PROJECT, WHAT CAN I DO?

Decisions regarding historic districts may be appealed to the Board of Adjustment, then to the City Council and ultimately, to Linn County District Court.

IF MY PROPERTY LIES WITHIN A HISTORIC DISTRICT, WILL I HAVE TO FIX IT UP OR RESTORE IT?

No. Having a property designated does not prevent private property owners from making changes or force owners to make improvements to their property. It does not limit the use of the building; require owners to erect plaques, or to make the property accessible or open to the public.

ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS ON THE SALE OF A PROPERTY IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

No.

ARE THERE ANY RESTRICTIONS ON WHETHER MY HOUSE OR PROPERTY CAN BE RENTED OR LEASED?

No.

WILL THE CITY TELL ME WHAT COLOR I MUST PAINT MY HOUSE?

No. Painting is not subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

IF MY PROPERTY IS DESIGNATED, WILL I HAVE TO GET PERMISSION OF THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION TO LANDSCAPE THE PROPERTY?

No. It should be noted, however, the other City ordinances may control this type of construction.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IF MY PROPERTY IS LOCATED IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT?

District designation will provide you with a limited amount of protection from inappropriate development of property adjacent to yours. It may also help to increase the value of your property.

WILL THE VALUE OF MY PROPERTY DECREASE OR INCREASE IF DESIGNATED?

Many considerations determine the value of a home, but locally and nationally designated and protected properties have proven to increased in desirability and value.

IF MY HOUSE IS IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT, DO I HAVE ANY SPECIAL PRIVILEGES?

Yes. You help increase the public awareness of historic buildings and promote a sense of pride in past achievements. Historic districts offer protection from inappropriate demolitions, alterations or construction by a neighbor. In the past, Federal and State grants have targeted older houses, and particularly older houses that help make up a historic district.

ARE THERE ANY TAX ADVANTAGES FOR OWNING A DESIGNATED HISTORIC PROPERTY?

The State Legislature passed a tax abatement law. It allows for counties to hold back increases in property taxes resulting from renovation. The Linn County Board of Supervisors has not yet enacted this law. If your property is a commercial or rental property and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, you may be eligible for tax credits for restoration work.

