



# Metro Omaha and Council Bluffs Preservation Assessment

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HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION®

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT



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The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America's stories. For more information visit [www.PreservationNation.org](http://www.PreservationNation.org)

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# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

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# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the summer of 2011, the National Trust for Historic Preservation conducted an assessment of historic preservation in the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro region.

### OBSERVATIONS

Through an online survey, personal interviews with community leaders, focus groups with key constituencies and tours of both communities, we found that:

- Preservation is not a community priority.
- The preservation movement lacks vibrancy.
- Classic preservation tools are underused.
- Policy barriers are limiting preservation activity.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

A “preservation makeover” is needed for the metro region. This requires updating the preservation “story,” which is currently focused on losses, to reflect instead preservation’s many successes and positive impacts. We recommend three “makeover” strategies:

#### **Update the image of preservation**

- Develop new messages that highlight preservation success, document and share the economic and community benefits of preservation, and connect to robust movements such as the renewed interest in urban living, arts, music and sustainability.
- Expand the audience for preservation through events, promotion of community discovery, and connections to young, dynamic community leaders.

#### **Develop a smarter, more sustainable preservation infrastructure**

- Collaborate strategically and develop alliances between organizations.
- Organize a Metro Heritage Council to facilitate cooperation and plan joint activities.
- Form issue-specific task forces to carry out short-term, discrete goals.

#### **Effectively implement a set of incentives to facilitate preservation results**

- Make better use of existing incentives (grants, federal tax credits and tax increment financing).
- Develop new incentives, including a NE state tax credit and IA property tax exemption.
- Refine existing planning tools, such as building code and enforcement processes and landmarks ordinances.
- Implement new planning tools, including adoption of form-based conservation overlay districts.
- Provide technical assistance through workshops and training, especially for homeowners.

The elements of the “makeover kit” are designed to be related but independent. They can be developed and implemented over time, taking advantage of strategic opportunities, community interest, and funding as they become available.



# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## INTRODUCTION

Preservation matters because it speaks to our fundamental need to understand who we are and where we come from. It binds us to one another and to our shared past, reminding us that we all share a piece of the American story. It also creates very tangible economic and environmental benefits for people and communities. Across the country, restoration has been shown to promote neighborhood continuity, stable property values, conservation of resources and protection of places that are important to people, whether a home, a commercial building designed by a famous architect, a neighborhood street or a religious institution.

Historic preservation has played an important role in shaping the development and quality of life in the metro Omaha-Council Bluffs region. Buildings, neighborhoods and commercial districts have benefited from the application of a range of rehabilitation tools and techniques. The investments of both public and private entities have saved many individual properties and districts and helped revitalize areas that once suffered from neglect. As the metro area continues to evolve and change in the 21st century, what will be the role of historic preservation in the region? How will it contribute to larger community goals of economic development, improved quality of life and environmental sustainability?



DOWNTOWN COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011

## METHODOLOGY

Omaha by Design hired the National Trust for Historic Preservation to assess the current state of historic preservation and provide recommendations and strategies for programs, projects or policies that will strengthen historic preservation's role in improving the quality of life in the metro region, including Omaha and Council Bluffs. To gather information about historic preservation in the region, the National Trust designed a series of assessment tools: an online survey targeted to reach historic preservationists, community activists, design professionals, public agency staff and others; interview questions for community leaders and focus groups; and on-site tours of both Omaha and Council Bluffs with knowledgeable local representatives.

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## METHODOLOGY

National Trust staff made two visits to Omaha and Council Bluffs and conducted six focus groups with 25 participants, as well as 27 individual interviews with a broad cross-section of community leaders both inside and outside of the preservation field. A full list of focus group participants and interviewees is available in the appendices, along with a summary of the 188 responses received from the online survey.

Information collected from the online survey, focus groups and interviews was synthesized and analyzed and then used to develop a set of Observations and Recommendations. A preliminary summary of Observations and Recommendations was presented to the Conservation, Preservation, Restoration (CPR) Committee of Omaha by Design and at a luncheon presentation for invited stakeholders in June 2011. Throughout the process, National Trust staff also met several times with the CPR Committee of Omaha by Design and worked closely with Omaha by Design Director Connie Spellman.



DOWNTOWN OMAHA, JUNE 2011

## HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY RESPONSES

- Less than half of respondents worked or lived in a historic building
- 30% of respondents were under the age of 45
- When asked to name 5 key preservation leaders, some people could not name any, while others provided a wide spectrum of names and organizations
- The influence of preservation in the community was commonly believed to be a neutral force – neither positive nor negative
- Barriers to achieving more successful preservation outcomes included the cost of projects and lack of funding sources
- Preservation can help improve the quality of life by strengthening existing neighborhoods and promoting smart use of existing land and resources

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

Our assessment survey, interviews and focus groups produced a diverse range of observations, opinions, ideas and suggestions regarding historic preservation in the region. A number of common viewpoints emerged, however.

Perhaps the most important overall observation is that the general public neither strongly supports nor opposes historic preservation. Many characterized preservation as an activity that is viewed positively only when it is expedient. In addition, preservation is not seen as a cause or value that is gaining momentum in the community.

Additional observations that emerged from our survey, interviews and focus groups include:



OMAHA STOCKYARD BUILDING, OMAHA, JUNE 2011

- *“The metropolitan area of Omaha and Council Bluffs is not that interested in preservation.”*
- *“Preservation advocates have not had a major impact on community decision-making.”*
- *“There has never been a strong push for preservation in Omaha for the last 30 years compared to many cities its size.”*

*- Survey Respondents*

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### PRESERVATION IS NOT A COMMUNITY PRIORITY

Preservation was recognized as a moderately supported community value. Respondents believed rehabilitation projects were likely to be undertaken only if they were not too expensive, didn't take extra time, or didn't involve complicated issues.

**Recognition of preservation's role in community development is limited.** There was some recognition of the role preservation can play in community development. For example, the "100 Block" project in Council Bluffs, which involved the rehabilitation of several buildings on Broadway that have brought new businesses and vitality to downtown, was cited by many as a very positive development. However, many respondents noted that the connection between historic preservation and community development is not well understood and that it is important

*"Unless a historic building has immediate value and 'fits' into a redevelopment plan, the structure is usually demolished in favor of something new."*

*- Survey Respondent*

for preservationists to draw more connections, both for people in the community development field and for the general public. Several suggested a need to emphasize the beneficial role that rehabilitation plays in stabilizing property values or how it makes available unique financial tools for development projects.

**Preservation receives limited philanthropic support.** Many interviewees cited Omaha's large philanthropic tradition but lamented that preservation does not receive strong support from this community. In all of the assessment tools, no one was able to identify a high-profile philanthropist who was identified with

*"Preservationists are not connected enough to the political scene and the major philanthropists."*

*- Survey Respondent*

preservation causes. Several suggested that some prominent philanthropists were more in favor of new development and construction.



# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### THE PRESERVATION MOVEMENT LACKS VIBRANCY

The survey and the interviews revealed that for the most part, preservation groups and their efforts are not visible in the community. Some people could name a preservation organization or two, but that was often followed by a comment like “but I don’t really know much about what they are doing now.” In other cases, some interviewees identified groups that they thought were now defunct, but are in fact still active.

*“I . . . live in midtown and I don’t even know who these advocates are. I don’t think these groups have had the voice in Omaha that is needed. Most people don’t know who they are.”*

*- Survey Respondent*

**Restore Omaha is a bright spot.** Many identified Restore Omaha as a high-profile, growing event that provided needed services and assistance to preservationists across the region. People have high expectations of Restore Omaha – which it is meeting, so far – and have hopes that this gathering will continue to grow and expand its scope and reach.

*“Information learned at Restore Omaha has really been helpful with regard to all of the DIY projects I’ve done.”*

*- Survey Respondent*

**There are few commonly perceived preservation leaders.** Another interesting result of the survey was that when asked to name leaders in preservation, we received 121 different names. Ninety-two people were cited between one and three times each, while 11 people/entities were named more than 10 times. On one hand, it’s outstanding that such a large number of people were identified with preservation, but it’s a bit concerning that no commonly identified core leaders or spokespersons arose among survey respondents.

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

**No consensus about a need for a new, umbrella preservation organization.** We talked with leaders of the existing preservation groups in the metro area and with other constituents and found that while there was interest in organizational cooperation, particularly between Landmarks, Inc. and Restore Omaha, there was not sufficient momentum, financial support or leadership to start a new group from the ground up. However, there was definite interest in collaboration and cooperation, which will be further addressed in the Recommendations section of this report.

**Few current preservation battles or successes were identified.** We asked interviewees to name recent preservation successes or battles, and were somewhat surprised at the responses. First, a number of well-known successful projects were clearly identified – the Paxton Hotel, the Tip Top Building, etc. – but some people had difficulty naming a recent success or fight and commented that “all of the important buildings have already been rehabbed” or that “there haven’t really been any fights lately.” These indicated the perception that preservation was stagnant.

Secondly, there remains a large group of people who continue to raise the 1989 loss of Jobber’s Canyon as a major defeat, and seem to let that event define the preservation story even today. We found that many, many more places have been successfully saved since then, but Jobber’s Canyon remains an open wound to many.



HISTORIC PHOTO OF JOBBER'S CANYON

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### CLASSIC PRESERVATION TOOLS ARE UNDERUSED

Across the country, more than 2,500 communities have established local historic preservation ordinances to designate and protect historic sites and districts. Using the power of local land use regulation, these ordinances offer more protection for historic properties than do listings on the National Register of Historic Places. Many ordinances include mandatory design review and the power to delay or deny demolitions of designated landmarks or districts.

**Local landmark designation in the metro region has all but stopped.** Designation of local historic districts and individual landmarks has been a common technique used by preservationists to protect historic properties since the 1920s. Omaha has utilized this tool as well, but not vigorously. Omaha has only four local historic districts and 94 individual landmarks, protecting less than 500 historic

properties altogether. In contrast, Salt Lake City, which has roughly half the city population of Omaha, has protected more than 5,000 buildings. Denver, though somewhat larger,

has 50 local historic districts and approximately 10,000 protected properties. It has been more than 20 years since a new historic district was created in Omaha. Not surprisingly, there are fewer projects for the Landmark Commission to review and the Landmark Commission is not meeting on a regular basis. Council Bluffs has only one locally-designated historic district, which includes the downtown commercial core but none of the community's older residential areas.

#### Local landmark designations in the city of Omaha

*1978-79: 19 individual landmarks, 1 district*  
*1980-89: 51 individual landmarks, 3 districts*  
*1990-99: 21 individual landmarks*  
*2000-09: 3 individual landmarks*  
*2010-11: none*

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

**Tax credit rehabilitations have slowed.** There is also a belief on the part of interviewees that the number of federal rehabilitation tax credit projects has also slowed or stopped. This is attributed to the economy, the challenges in getting tax credit projects approved and the lack of a Nebraska rehabilitation income tax credit.

**The Main Street® Program is not active locally.** While there has been past interest in applying the National Trust's Main Street® program to urban neighborhood commercial centers of Omaha and Council Bluffs (as Baltimore and Boston have done), the concept has not gotten off the ground. In Omaha, areas like Dundee embrace the Main Street Four-Point Approach® of economic restructuring, design, promotion and organization. Downtown Council Bluffs has been pursuing Main Street® designation through the Iowa Main Street program for several years and seems to be poised to take the needed steps to apply in the near term. Nonetheless, the Main Street® program has been around for 30 years, and its time-tested concepts have yet to be fully embraced in the metro area.



VACANT APARTMENT BUILDING, OMAHA, MAY 2011



### PART I: OBSERVATIONS

#### CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS EXIST THAT PRECLUDE MORE SUCCESSFUL PRESERVATION PROJECTS

Our online survey and interview questions asked respondents to identify key barriers which they believe are slowing or preventing historic preservation from being more successful. The perceived barriers and challenges include:

**Administration of federal rehabilitation tax credit program.** A commonly held opinion among interviewees was that the management and administration of the federal (and Iowa's state) tax credit process has become increasingly onerous, making it more difficult than in the past to get project approval. Several reasons were offered: changes and experience levels in staffing at the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) and National Park Service (NPS), NPS office review of projects takes place only in Washington and without the benefit of in-person visits to projects, the fact that the types of buildings now being rehabbed are less high-style and require a different level of review, and the belief that expectations on the part of NPS and SHPO staff are not clearly defined at the beginning of a project.

A related issue is the difficulty in obtaining project approval from local governments, especially regarding building inspections. Similar reasons – changes and experience levels in staffing – were offered as likely explanations for these difficulties. The need to adopt other versions of building codes more favorable to existing buildings, such as the International Existing Building Code, was also raised as an issue. More information on building codes is included in the Recommendations section of this report.

**Non-profit leadership of community planning.** Our research further indicated that the non-profit sector plays a major role in leading community planning efforts in the metro area. Concern was raised that this may not be sustainable over time, and that planning departments need to lead planning efforts though continued cooperation with entities like the Chamber of Commerce. On the subject of planning in general, we also heard, especially in Council Bluffs, that there is a feeling of “planning fatigue.” There is a desire to stop planning – as the perception is that enough of that has been done for most issues involving the historic districts and neighborhoods of the community – and to start doing.



KIRN SCHOOL GYM, COUNCIL BLUFFS, MAY 2011

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

When asked to name model preservation projects, we heard about the Omaha Building, the Tip Top Lofts and NoDo's warehouses, the Livestock Exchange Building, housing in the Gifford Park Neighborhood, the Hughes Iron Building and Harvester Artspace Lofts, just to name a few. We also asked for specific sites that have potential for preservation success. We were reminded that it is important to not look only at individual landmark buildings as opportunities, but to take an approach that considers broader geographic areas such as whole neighborhoods.

It also appears that the preservation regime is at a critical point in Council Bluffs and additional assistance is needed to encourage groups such as Preserve Council Bluffs and Main Street Council Bluffs to take the next steps in growing their organizations to accomplish their goals in the community. Momentum is in their favor and sustaining it needs to be encouraged.

On both sides of the river, there was much civic energy around infill, urban living, arts, music and sustainability as movements in the metro area. Again, the preservation movement can be strengthened and expanded by drawing connections between preservation and these areas where people are already engaged.



INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER BUILDING, COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011



# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

#### Omaha



National Guard Complex



BNSF Station



Dundee neighborhood

#### Council Bluffs



Grape Growers Association Building



Park Avenue houses in Fairmount Park



Former YMCA Building

## PART I: OBSERVATIONS

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

**Neighborhood revitalization.** There is much interest in preservation among residents of older neighborhoods. In fact, most people cited rehabilitation efforts in their neighborhood or work on their home as the most visible evidence of how preservation promotes quality of life and livability. As mentioned above, Restore Omaha received high marks for its training provided to homeowners on topics like historic window repair. However, many interviewees also cited the need for additional assistance for owners of historic and older properties, particularly in lower income neighborhoods. It was pointed out that while a contractor list or database of skilled craftspeople is helpful and needed, so is training for people who want or need to do their own “hands on” repairs. Rehabilitation is seen as key to neighborhood revitalization in neighborhoods such as North and South Omaha. There is a greater role for preservationists to play with community development groups working in those areas. Preservationists can help to connect dots and share knowledge and expertise about tools like historic tax credits.

**Preserving the recent past.** Another opportunity exists with regard to growing recognition of the importance of post-WWII era buildings. Surveys have been completed for many recent past neighborhoods, and buildings from the 1950s and 60s have great potential as rehabilitation projects that could take advantage of historic tax credits.



INDIAN HILLS NEIGHBORHOOD, OMAHA 2006



# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the observations summarized in Part I above, the team looked at a range of possible recommendations for strengthening historic preservation's role in improving the quality of life in the metro Omaha and Council Bluffs region.

**Time for a preservation make-over.** The results of the survey, personal interviews, and focus groups indicate that small, incremental changes to the existing preservation regime will not be sufficient. New approaches and new ways of thinking are needed. In our interviews, we were struck by how many people portrayed the historic preservation movement in the region as either stagnant or in decline. Our observations confirm this impression to a large extent, particularly on the Omaha side of the river. Government-led preservation activities have decreased significantly in the past decade and the nonprofit sector has struggled to gain support and momentum. Yet while the organizational infrastructure of the preservation movement has not grown in recent years, there is strong evidence of preservation's positive impact "on the ground." The weak image of the preservation movement is at odds with the many notable preservation successes across the region. To address this disconnect, we suggest that it is time for a "preservation make-over" in metro Omaha and Council Bluffs.

### Three Ingredients for a Preservation Make-Over

1. *Update the image of preservation in the metro area*
2. *Develop a smarter, more sustainable preservation infrastructure*
3. *Target a set of incentives to facilitate preservation results*

**Need to update the historic preservation narrative.** A preservation make-over should include updating the common "story" of preservation that is told in the region. Over and over again, interviewees mentioned the loss of the Jobber's Canyon historic district, which occurred in 1989. This event is seen by many as a defining defeat for preservation advocates, casting a shadow from which the preservation community has not fully emerged. The description of preservation in the 22 years since Jobber's Canyon typically focuses more on losses rather than successes, from urban renewal-driven demolitions in downtown Council Bluffs to a string of unsuccessful preservation advocacy efforts in Omaha. Accounts of these various losses are often combined with comments regarding the lack of public or political support for preservation. Many interviewees had a difficult time coming up with positive examples to counter this largely negative portrayal of historic preservation in the region.

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

**Preservation is a Success Story, Not a Failure.** From our tours and our knowledge of the region, we know that historic preservation is playing a very positive role in both Omaha and Council Bluffs. Many of the older neighborhoods in both communities are cherished for their historic character and distinctive period-style homes. Neighborhood groups are organized and effective advocates for maintaining the distinctive character of these areas. Owners of historic homes also make up a large portion of the participants in the Restore Omaha conference, which has grown steadily in recent years by focusing on home improvement and maintenance.

### Re-positioning preservation

#### Old Preservation

Fighting  
Protection  
Regulation  
Isolated  
Movement

#### New Preservation

*Facilitating  
Conservation  
Incentive  
Integrated  
Value*

Preservation has also been a key driver of downtown revitalization in both Omaha and Council Bluffs. In Omaha, the rehabilitation of existing structures has spread beyond the Old Market to include numerous downtown landmarks as well as vernacular warehouses and commercial blocks. In Council Bluffs, the rehabilitation of storefronts on the “100 Block” of Broadway has helped to transform the image of downtown and is attracting new, independent businesses to the area. Nodes of revitalization, re-investment and infill construction are developing in areas near



HARVESTER ARTSPACE LOFTS, COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011

downtown as well. Innovative projects such as the Stockyard Exchange Building rehabilitation in Omaha and the Harvester Artspace Lofts warehouse conversion in Council Bluffs are spurring additional rehabilitations as well as new infill construction. A market for urban living is emerging in these areas. Preservation is also valued as a revitalization tool for diverse neighborhoods with embedded historic commercial districts, such as South and North Omaha.

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### UPDATE THE IMAGE OF PRESERVATION IN THE METRO AREA

**Develop new messages.** A set of new messages is needed to update and re-position historic preservation in the metro area. Work to develop these messages will be most effective if it is an organized, deliberate effort involving preservation and community revitalization organizations from both sides of the river. Testing messages with target audiences outside the traditional preservation community will also be important. The services of professional marketing consultants may prove worthwhile. We offer three general messaging strategies for consideration.

- **Highlight successes.** As described above, the number of preservation success stories in the region is remarkable. Some of these successes are hidden. Other projects may be relatively well-known, but the connection to preservation is not well understood. Documenting and sharing the story of these successes individually and in aggregate will help create a more positive image of preservation in the community.
- **Document the economic and community benefits.** Many states (Nebraska completed a study in 2007) and some cities (Philadelphia) have commissioned studies of the economic and community benefits of preservation. These studies capture key statistics on topics such as job creation, property values, tourism, affordable housing units and more, and can be extremely useful with the media and political leaders.
- **Make the sustainability connection.** Interest in green building and sustainability is growing fast, but preservation is not always seen as a part of this movement. New messaging should highlight the environmental benefits of recycling older buildings and investing in areas where transportation alternatives and public infrastructure are already in place.



DOWNTOWN COUNCIL BLUFFS,  
JUNE 2011

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

**Expand the audience for preservation.** Membership and participation in traditional historic preservation organizations in the region has not grown in recent years. The one exception is the Restore Omaha conference, which has attracted a growing audience of homeowners, contractors, consultants and suppliers. This example suggests the need to offer multiple opportunities for participation in historic preservation-related activities, beyond membership, committee work or board service. Strategies for expanding the preservation audience include:

- **Engagement through events.** It is important to give people several ways to get involved in preservation. Well-planned events can increase both participation and awareness among individuals who might not otherwise associate with preservation organizations. Events can highlight themes such as architecture and design, local history, food, and culture.
- **Promote community discovery.** As the market for urban living grows, there is an opportunity to offer ways to help people discover the richness and diversity of older neighborhoods and districts. This audience includes both new residents who have recently moved to the region, as well as long-time residents who are gaining a new interest in older areas. This audience may also seek ways to combine discovery with recreational activity, such as geo-caching and bike tours.
- **Connect with young leaders.** A generational shift in community leadership appears to be underway in the region. New leaders may be more likely to understand the role of preservation and its connection to other values, such as sustainability, arts, urban design and alternative transportation. Cultivating this new generation of leaders and making these connections will pay long-term dividends.



OLD MARKET, OMAHA, JUNE 2011



### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Ideas and examples

- **“Doors Open” programs.** Doors Open Denver is an annual two-day event that allows free access to more than 70 buildings and sites that are not regularly open to the public. Both guided and self-discovery tours are offered. A photo contest helps focus more attention on architectural character and details. Last year’s Doors Open Denver tour focused on architecture from the 1950s.

<http://www.denvergov.org/doca/DenverOfficeofCulturalAffairs/DoorsOpenDenver/tabid/440781/Default.aspx>



PHOTO: DOORS OPEN LOWELL WEBSITE

- **Kentucky “Preservation Pedal.”** Preservation Kentucky’s Preservation Pedal is an annual 50-mile ride through small towns and historic landscapes designed to promote the rich rural heritage of the region and encourage bicycle touring and bike-friendly public policies.  
<http://www.preservationkentucky.org/pages.php?id=6>
- **“What’s Out there Weekend” (W.O.W.)** The Cultural Landscape Foundation has organized a series of “What’s Out There Weekend” events to promote awareness of parks, neighborhoods and designed landscapes through guided tours led by local design professionals.  
<http://tclf.org/event/WOTW>

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### DEVELOP A SMARTER, MORE SUSTAINABLE PRESERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE BY COLLABORATING STRATEGICALLY

The team evaluated options for how a more sustainable infrastructure could be created, including retaining the status quo where a number of all-volunteer preservation groups operate independently, forming an all new preservation entity and various ways that existing groups could collaborate, as is already occurring with Landmarks, Inc. and Restore Omaha. We believe this type of collaboration is needed and could build upon the strengths of each group, when strategic alliances are warranted.

We also recommend that a new **“Metro Heritage Council”** be organized which could serve as a convener of a variety of historic preservation and other allied organizations with a common mission of using historic preservation to improve the quality of life in the metro area. While the formation of a new historic preservation organization was contemplated, we felt that this idea did not have momentum in the community, and we were not able to identify likely leaders, funders or a compelling mission to justify the creation of new entity.

A Council could serve as a forum to exchange information, brainstorm, share best practices, network and work together to achieve common programmatic goals. The Council should develop a charter or vision document to which all organizations wishing to participate must subscribe. A proposed operational structure could include the convening of monthly meetings, development of an annual work plan, and support for a small operating budget that could grow to include funding for contract staff. A lead organization would need to be identified to initially convene and coordinate the Council. The Council could undertake particular programs such as educational events, an outreach campaign or an economic impact study documenting and publicizing the financial benefits of historic preservation in the metro area. Over time, this group could likely support a paid staff, similar to the Nebraska City Museum Association (see below). The staff would not support each individual Council member, but rather the Council as a whole. It is also possible that the Council may serve as a transitional group that could grow or change over time, perhaps leading to a new stand-alone organization in the future. This recommendation responds to feedback received during our project.

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

Several examples of this model exist within the state and a similar effort was undertaken in metro Detroit.

#### **Nebraska City Museum Association & Platte Valley Attractions**

In 2001 the Nebraska Museum Association was formed to provide professional staff to six all-volunteer local museums. Today, 11 entities participate in funding the Association and receive the benefit of having a paid “community curator” available to help the volunteer groups with strategic planning, fundraising and specific museum management matters. In western Nebraska, Platte Valley Attractions coalition formed in 2008 to brainstorm, share best practices and network. The relatively informal PVA does not have paid staff or an operating budget but rather is comprised of 20 members from various entities that work in a committee structure, undertaking joint activities and raising funds in support of those efforts.

#### **Detroit Preservation Coalition**

In 2005, a large group of Detroit preservation stakeholders convened and recommended forming the Greater Detroit Historic Preservation Coalition, which included representatives of all stakeholder groups, and creating a unified Vision for Detroit to guide preservation efforts.

After the Vision was released, the Coalition approached foundation, corporation, and political contacts to get their buy-in and raise funds for staff to coordinate Coalition activities. In addition, the Coalition successfully established procedures to guide a unified preservation voice on advocacy issues, including development of position statements on high-profile advocacy issues that every member of the Coalition signed off on. Prior to the creation of the Coalition, preservation groups would often take contrary positions, making it difficult for elected officials and the public to know what side the preservation community was on.

*“We can unite to advocate and educate the general public and build a cohesive alliance.”*

*“While there is strength in numbers (referring to the various preservation entities operating in the metro area), those numbers need ONE voice.”*

*- Survey Respondents*

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to convening a Heritage Council, we also recommend **organizing issue-specific task forces** that would form to accomplish a short-term goal and then disband. These task forces would likely include, but not be limited exclusively to, members of the Council. Task force targets might extend to public policy goals, such as joining forces to pass a Nebraska State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit or working together to monitor and advocate for legislation supporting preservation throughout a state legislative session. They may also be organized around saving a specific historic site that is threatened.

#### **Washington State Heritage Caucus**

Organized in 1990, the Heritage Caucus is a bi-partisan gathering of state legislators and other elected officials; staff from state heritage, arts, and cultural agencies, and nonprofit organizations, such as the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, and citizens interested in supporting Washington's culture, heritage, and the arts. The caucus meets weekly during the legislative session and tracks bills relevant to its constituency. Caucus meetings usually consist of a review of pending legislation and present the opportunity for allied organizations to work together on legislation of common interest.

#### **Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative**

The Vermont Smart Growth Collaborative is a group of ten preservation and conservation organizations, such as the Preservation Trust of Vermont and the Vermont Natural Resources Council, working together to shape and implement smart growth policies and practices around the state. Their mission is to promote growth and development in downtowns and village centers while protecting Vermont's open landscape. They work primarily to advocate for improved policy, education and community strategies in areas such as transportation and land use.

#### **Kansas City "Save the Plaza" Campaign**

The Friends of the Plaza is a coalition of residents, neighborhoods, business owners, and advocacy groups working together to save the integrity of the Country Club Plaza and the Plaza Urban Design & Development Plan. The Friends have a vision, a mission – conserving the charm of the shopping area, the stability of residential neighborhoods, and the beauty of the parks and boulevards of the Plaza area, while accommodating growth and change – and specific objectives all narrowly related to the "Save the Plaza" campaign.



## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, we recommend that preservation entities ally more closely with community development and revitalization organizations that are already working at least in part in historic neighborhoods. For example, consideration should be given to developing partnerships with housing groups like NeighborWorks and Habitat for Humanity. Potential projects might include rehabilitation of the row of vacant Park Avenue single family houses in Council Bluffs' Fairmont Park neighborhood or various multi-family buildings along Park Avenue in Omaha.

The well-established Main Street Four Point Approach®, which is already successfully employed in communities in both Iowa and Nebraska, could also be adopted in Council Bluffs (which is working toward this goal) and in Omaha's neighborhood business districts. A similar approach is needed to promote retail development and retention to increase vibrancy of downtown Omaha. Preservationists can add value to this partnership by providing expertise in rehabilitation and in use of incentives only available for historic buildings and in the application of the Main Street® approach.



NORTH OMAHA, FORMER RUSSIAN SYNAGOGUE  
BEING REDEVELOPED BY NEIGHBORWORKS, JUNE  
2011



COUNCIL BLUFFS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
BUILDING, COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### TARGET A SET OF INCENTIVES TO FACILITATE PRESERVATION RESULTS

The limited use of preservation regulations in the Metro region indicates that incentives will be more fully embraced as a preservation strategy than additional regulations. Many respondents emphasized this point in our survey and interviews. Promotion of a targeted set of incentives will help reinforce changes to preservation's image and infrastructure, creating an environment where preservation is an alternative of first choice, supported by tools and technical assistance.

##### Make More Efficient Use of Existing Incentives

- **State grants available in Iowa**

Several grant programs offered through the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) could help preservation projects in Council Bluffs, including historic resource surveys, National Register nominations, and even capital funds for restoration projects.

Council Bluffs is part of the **Certified Local Government** (CLG) program and is eligible for CLG grants through SHSI. CLG grants can assist with preservation planning projects, undertaking historic surveys or designation, public education, and pre-development planning. In 2012, SHSI will distribute \$84,000 in CLG grants to communities across Iowa. Grants must be matched at 40% by local funds or in-kind donations.

<http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/local-preservation/clg-grant-information.html>

<http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/local-preservation/assets/2012-grant-manual.pdf>

Grants from SHSI's **Historical Resource Development Program** (HRDP) are also available. Awards of up to \$50,000 are available for acquisition and development, preservation and conservation, interpretation, or professional training and educational programs on the acquisition, development, preservation, conservation, and interpretation of historical resources. Matching funds are required on a sliding scale based upon the type of applicant.

<http://www.iowahistory.org/about/grants/hrdp/index.html>

<http://www.iowahistory.org/about/grants/assets/guide-hp-fy12.pdf>

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Advocate for extending the TIF payoff period in Nebraska**

Tax increment financing (TIF) in Nebraska is primarily designed to finance the public costs associated with a private development project. Under Nebraska law, local governments may use Tax Increment Financing (TIF) to aid in redeveloping substandard and blighted areas within a community. The property tax increases generated from the redeveloped site are applied to the TIF bonds until they are repaid, or for 15 years, after which the increases revert to local government taxing jurisdictions (Revised Statutes of Nebraska, Sec. 18-2147). Many developers find that 15 years is not enough time to make TIF projects viable financially. This important incentive for preservation could be greatly improved if the State Statute were revised to extend the TIF payoff period for longer than 15 years.

<http://www.neded.org/tax-increment-financing>

- **Implement the International Existing Building Code**

Both Nebraska and Iowa have adopted the International Existing Building Code (IEBC) at a state level, but in order to utilize these codes, they must be adopted at the local level as well. The IEBC contains requirements intended to encourage the use and reuse of existing buildings, covering repair, alteration, addition and change of occupancy while achieving appropriate levels of safety without requiring full compliance with the new construction requirements contained in other codes. Adoption of the IEBC in Omaha and Council Bluffs would help address concerns about current requirements for inappropriate alterations to historic structures, providing a method for achieving code compliance while making allowances for the retention of historic fabric.

<http://www.iccsafe.org/Store/Pages/Product.aspx?id=3550X12>

<http://search.legis.state.ia.us/nxt/gateway.dll/ic?f=templates&fn=default.htm>  
2011 IOWA CODE, TITLE III PUBLIC SERVICES AND REGULATION, SUBTITLE 6 BUILDING CODES, CHAPTER 103A STATE BUILDING CODE, 103A.43 Application of state historic building code as alternative

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Raise issues with the Federal Historic Tax Credit program**

The Federal Historic Tax Credit program is one of the private sector's most powerful tools for preservation. Through a 20% tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of certified historic structures, it has leveraged over \$58 billion in private investment to preserve and reuse 37,000 historic properties since 1976. The program is administered by National Park Service and the Internal Revenue Service in partnership with State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs).

A number of individuals and organizations have expressed concerns about the implementation of the Federal Historic Tax Credit program in both Nebraska and Iowa, including the difficulty of getting National Register nominations approved through SHPO for historic rehabilitation projects, and inconsistencies with review by SHPO and NPS of project plans and their conformance to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The preservation community should work to address these issues to ensure that the Federal Historic Tax Credit remains an attractive incentive rather than a complicated and time-consuming process.



APARTMENT BUILDINGS IN OMAHA, MAY 2011

<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/>

<http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/tax-incentives-for-rehabilitation/index.html>

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Develop New Financial Incentives

- **Create a State Historic Tax Credit program for Nebraska**

State Historic Tax Credit programs are among the most effective tools for spurring private investment in revitalization projects. To date, thirty states have adopted laws creating credits against state taxes to provide incentives for the appropriate rehabilitation of historic buildings. In most cases these tax credits take the form of the very successful federal income tax credit for historic rehabilitation contained in Section 47 of the Internal Revenue Code. Iowa offers a State Historic Tax Credit program which has incentivized the revitalization of several buildings in downtown Council Bluffs. Nebraska would greatly benefit from implementation of a State Historic Tax Credit program modeled on Kansas and Missouri, which are among the most successful programs nationally.

[http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/rehabilitation-tax-credits/additional-resources/state\\_tax\\_credits-chart-5-20-2011-2.pdf](http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/rehabilitation-tax-credits/additional-resources/state_tax_credits-chart-5-20-2011-2.pdf)

- **Implement a Historic Property Tax Exemption program in Council Bluffs**

Iowa's Temporary Historic Property Tax Exemption provides a local property tax incentive for the sensitive, "substantial rehabilitation" of historic buildings. While all counties are required to offer this exemption, not all counties have set priorities for the program. The County Board of Supervisors must establish priorities for which an exemption may be granted and must annually designate real property in the county for a historic property tax exemption. If Pottawatomie County implemented this program, eligible property owners would receive four years full exemption from any increased valuation due to the rehabilitation, followed by four years of property tax increases (25% per year) up to the new valuation.

<http://www.iowahistory.org/historic-preservation/tax-incentives-for-rehabilitation/temporary-property-tax-exemption.html>



## PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

### Refine Existing Planning Tools

- **Review code and inspection process in Omaha and Council Bluffs**

A number of individuals expressed concerns about the code and inspection process in both Omaha and Council Bluffs, indicating that the process is time-consuming and inconsistent, and it is difficult to reach compliance. Implementation of the International Existing Building code, as discussed above, may help alleviate some of these problems, but an overall review of the code and inspection process in both cities could help identify areas where streamlining or better sharing of information could improve the function of these important processes.



DOWNTOWN COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011

- **Review and update Omaha Landmarks Preservation Ordinance**

The Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission is a nine-member board that was established by ordinance in 1977 to review and recommend to the City Council on all matters pertaining to the designation of structures or districts of local historical significance. The ordinance has not been substantially updated since that time, and a number of individuals expressed concern that not many properties were being put forward for designation because the process is perceived as onerous. A review of the Ordinance and review process would help identify areas where improvements could be made.

<http://www.cityofomaha.org/planning/landmarks/landmarks-commission>

[http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?](http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientID=10945&stateID=27&statename=Nebraska)

[clientID=10945&stateID=27&statename=Nebraska](http://library.municode.com/index.aspx?clientID=10945&stateID=27&statename=Nebraska) (Chapter 24, Article II)

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Expand training for Preservation Commissions**

Hand in hand with a review of the Preservation Ordinance in Omaha, both Omaha and Council Bluffs should explore ways to bring additional training to the members of their preservation commissions. Preservation commission training ensures that

commissions function smoothly and maintain a strong public image. Effective commissions are also more likely to take a proactive role to provide preservation education to the public through such programs as workshops or walking tours; to research and identify new landmarks and districts; or to update design guidelines to ensure their effectiveness. The National Alliance for Preservation Commissions (NAPC) provides training and other support services for preservation commissions.



APARTMENT REHABILITATION PROJECT, MIDTOWN OMAHA, JUNE 2011

<http://www.uga.edu/napc/>

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Implement New Planning Tools

- **Use Neighborhood Conservation/Enhancement District overlay zoning in historic neighborhoods in Omaha**

As part of Omaha's Urban Design Code, implemented in 2007, several new types of overlay zoning designations were created. The Neighborhood Conservation/Enhancement District (NCE) overlay zoning is intended to guide new development in older neighborhoods that conserves or even enhances the historic character of

the existing urban district. This type of zoning overlay provides protection for historic character for areas that may not be right for full landmark status, or for neighborhoods that prefer less regulation but still want to ensure compatible new development. NCE zoning would be a good fit for many of



DOWNTOWN OMAHA, JUNE 2011

Omaha's currently unprotected older neighborhoods and would help maintain their livability and character while guiding new development that respects the urban setting.

[http://www.cityofomaha.org/planning/urbanplanning/images/stories/UD\\_pdfs/Urban%20Design%20Handbook%20V1.1.pdf](http://www.cityofomaha.org/planning/urbanplanning/images/stories/UD_pdfs/Urban%20Design%20Handbook%20V1.1.pdf)

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Fully Implement Form-Based Zoning Approaches in Omaha**

As indicated in the Observations section, Omaha's landmarks preservation ordinance has been lightly used in recent years. In comparison with other cities, a very small percentage of the Omaha's historic fabric is protected through the landmark ordinance. In addition, the Neighborhood Conservation District Overlay zone, which was added as part of the 1987 re-write of the zoning code, has also been rarely used. This overlay tool was designed to conserve residential areas that might not qualify as historic districts, but are seeking more contextual and historically compatible zoning. More recently, Omaha-by-Design collaborated with the city to develop a Neighborhood Conservation and Enhancement (NCE) overlay, which targets mixed use districts rather than single family residential areas and focuses on compatible infill design more than the conservation of existing structures.

Like conservation district overlays, **Form-Based Codes** offer another tool to help conserve valued, historic development patterns. Form-Based Codes can be implemented in the form of optional base zone districts and overlays, as well as through comprehensive zoning code re-writes. Omaha could be a place to test the use of Form-Based Codes as a historic preservation strategy in Nebraska and other states. Other communities that have recently adopted Form-Based Codes include Nashville, Miami and Denver. Denver's new, citywide Form-Based Code offers a full set of base zone districts and form standards that are much more compatible with existing development patterns. This new zoning gives the city a more complete toolbox with which to accomplish preservation, conservation and sustainability goals.

<http://www.formbasedcodes.org/>

<http://www.denvergov.org/tabid/432507/Default.aspx>



### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Provide Technical Assistance

- **Create Educational Programs for Homeowners**

A number of individuals and groups expressed a strong interest in more programs to assist homeowners with repairs and rehabilitation projects. This could include anything from lists of contractors and trades people experienced in historic home rehabs, to educational programs and workshops, to a comprehensive homeowner rehab toolkit. A variety of programs exist across the nation that could provide models for these types of resources.

- **Des Moines Rehabbers Club**

The mission of the Des Moines Rehabbers Club is to promote neighborhood revitalization and restoration of Des Moines' unique building stock by informing, educating, inspiring and supporting each other in all phases of home renovation and maintenance. The club is an all-volunteer nonprofit group with a detailed website including contractor lists, sample documents, in-depth articles, and useful links. The Rehabbers Club also runs a listserv to allow members to share helpful information, and puts on educational workshops like Renovation Boot Camp, designed to give participants a basic understanding of the renovation process from purchase to project completion.

<http://renovatedsm.com/>

- **Utah Heritage Foundation**

In the late 1990s the Utah Heritage Foundation (UHF) began a set of educational workshops for potential loan applicants who owned historic homes. Initially, all-day, inexpensive workshops were offered on a range of subjects. That then evolved into a Saturday morning Rehab-It-Right series where monthly two-hour workshops were offered, again targeted at historic homeowners. Today, Rehab-It-Right workshops are offered annually as part of a conference and also occasionally on weekends. Recent subjects have included historic window repair, mechanical systems, energy efficiency considerations and seismic upgrades in historic homes. The next iteration of this ongoing program is for UHF to use a newly-acquired historic home as a pilot laboratory to demonstrate Rehab-It-Right techniques on a building undergoing rehabilitation.

<http://www.utahheritagefoundation.org>

## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Review and refine residential rehabilitation program in Council Bluffs**

The Home Improvement Program run by the Community Development Department of the City of Council Bluffs provides forgivable and interest-free installment loans to eligible homeowners. The homeowner's income determines the amount and type of loan. The City has also offered a residential rehab program without income restrictions, which was subsidized by the Iowa West Foundation. The City of Council Bluffs indicated that they may not be continuing the loan program for Low-to Moderate-Income residents and that it was not widely used. Concerns were expressed by some residents that information about the program was difficult to find and inconsistent. Incentivizing rehabilitation of residential properties in Council Bluffs is an important activity, and this program should be reviewed to determine if it should be continued and how it could be improved.



COUNCIL BLUFFS RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD, MAY 2011

<http://communitydev.councilbluffs-ia.gov/>

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Explore new incentives for residential rehabilitation in Omaha and Council Bluffs**

**Example:**

**Historic Chicago Bungalow Association**

The Historic Chicago Bungalow Association (HCBA) is a nonprofit organization designed to foster an appreciation of the Chicago Bungalow as a distinctive housing type, encourage sympathetic rehabilitation of Chicago bungalows, and assist bungalow owners with adapting their homes to current needs, which in turn helps to strengthen Chicago bungalow neighborhoods. HCBA offers a variety of financial resources, including grants for energy efficiency and rehabilitation. Homeowners must first go through an on-line certification

process to be eligible for financial assistance. HCBA also offers technical resources like special permit assistance and “how-to” seminars. They have undertaken five “Green Bungalow Blocks,” including purchase and rehab of homes to demonstrate best preservation practices and

sustainable design. They also hold an annual “Historic Chicago Bungalow and Green Home Expo” where attendees can visit more than 120 exhibitor booths and learn from a variety of workshops about energy-efficient home improvement solutions, historic preservation and more.



PHOTO: HISTORIC CHICAGO BUNGALOW ASSOCIATION WEBSITE

<http://www.chicagobungalow.org/>

### PART II: RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Example:**

#### **Cleveland Restoration Society's Heritage Home Program**

Designed to help homeowners preserve the historic character of their home and increase its value, while updating interior features and installing energy efficient systems, Cleveland Restoration Society's (CRS) Heritage Home Program includes technical assistance, educational workshops, resources, and a low-interest loan program. Since 1992, CRS has provided over 3,000 homeowners with complimentary technical assistance and their loan program has facilitated the revitalization of over 850 houses with projects totaling \$30.8 million in neighborhood reinvestment. CRS partners with City, County and State agencies to provide a subsidy for their low fixed loan rates, which are typically 3% below market and are available at terms from 5 to 12 years.

<http://www.clevelandrestoration.org/index.php>



PHOTO: CLEVELAND RESTORATION SOCIETY WEBSITE



## METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

### CONCLUSION

The results of our surveys and interviews demonstrate that there is strong interest in historic preservation within the metro area – in neighborhoods and commercial districts and among home owners, developers and the non-profit sector. To date, however, that interest has not been translated into an energized, effective local preservation movement. We hope that the recommendations described in this report provide a practical, realistic path for increasing the visibility and effectiveness of historic preservation as a tool for improved quality of life in the metro Omaha-Council Bluffs area over the next five years.



HARVESTER ARTSPACE LOFTS, COUNCIL BLUFFS, JUNE 2011

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

Name	Primary Organizational Association
Ron Abdouch	Neighborhood Center
Jude Beller	Baird Holm
Doug Bisson	City of Omaha Landmarks Commission and Omaha by Design Committee Member
Anne Branigan	Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce
Terry Poe Buschkamp	Main Street Iowa
Arlo Burk	Main Street Council Bluffs
Ralph Christian	State Historic Preservation Office
Amanda Brewer	Habitat for Humanity
Matt Daugherty	Private Developer
Todd Graham	Iowa West Foundation
Jamie Grayson-Berglund	Destination Midtown
Don Gross	City of Council Bluffs
George Haecker	Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects
Tom Hanafin	Mayor, City of Council Bluffs
Jacqueline Hankins	NeighborWorks Omaha
Alesha Hauser	National Park Service
John Heaston	The Reader
Todd Heistand	NuStyle Development
Jennifer Honebrink	Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
Larry Jacobsen	Schemmer Associates
Rick Jeffries	Cline Williams and Omaha by Design Committee Member
Sheriffa Jones	Preservation Iowa
Steve Jensen	Jensen Consulting and Omaha by Design Committee Member
Andrea Kathol	Pottawatomie County Development Corporation
Jim Kieffer	Preserve Council Bluffs
Mike Leonard	City of Omaha
David Levy	Baird Holm and Omaha by Design Committee Member
Nano Little	Joslyn Castle Trust
Albert Macchietto	Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
Nicole Malone	The Architectural Offices and Restore Omaha

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: LIST OF INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

Name	Primary Organizational Association
Mike Maroney	Omaha Economic Development Corporation
Tom Miller	Developer/ Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects
Reed Morgan	Iowa West Foundation
Jed Moulton	City of Omaha
Paul Nelson	Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects and Landmarks, Inc.
Bob Peters	Robert Peters Company
Jack Porter	State Historic Preservation Office
Perry Poyner	Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
Julie Reilly	Omaha 2020
Jim Royer	J Development
J.L. Schmidt	Heritage Nebraska
Tom Schmitt	Daily Nonpareil
Marty Shukert	RDG Planning & Design
Mike Smith	Nebraska Historical Society
Connie Spellman	Omaha by Design
Julie Stavneak	J Development
Jim Suttle	Mayor, City of Omaha
Cindy Tooker	Omaha 2020
Nate Watson	Downtown Neighborhood Alliance – Council Bluffs
Ryan Willer	Neighborhood Center – Council Bluffs
Janice Warm	Main Street Council Bluffs
Dan Worth	Bahr Vermeer Haecker Architects

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 2: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you see as the three greatest strengths or assets of the Metro Omaha area?
2. What are the three most important problems currently facing the Metro Omaha area?
3. What is the image of historic preservation in Metro Omaha, especially in relation to the problems you've just identified?
4. How would you rank the general public's concern for historic places, based on a continuum ranging for the utmost concern to no concern at all?
5. What organizations, government agencies and people are the key preservation partners in Metro Omaha?
6. How do you evaluate their effectiveness?
7. Is preservation thought of differently in residential neighborhoods than in commercial areas or in downtown?
8. What preservation activities, if any, do you participate in? Restore Omaha conference? Historic home tours? Other?
9. Please talk about one recent high profile preservation success. Why was it successful?
10. Please talk about one recent high profile preservation loss. Why was it not a success?
11. What do you think are key opportunities for future preservation successes?
12. What are some barriers that prevent more rehabilitation and preservation projects from being carried out?
  - a. If funding is a barrier, can you offer specific examples needed to overcome that? (e.g. grants, tax credits, more lending)
  - b. Other barriers? What is needed to overcome them?
13. What ideas do you have to spur more preservation projects in the Metro Omaha area?
14. Are there specific tools needed that are not now available?
15. Are there specific policies that need to be added, removed or changed?
16. Are there organizations in place to spur more projects, add new tools, change policies, etc?
17. Are there particular trends – economic, demographic, social, etc. – that are impacting preservation in the Metro Area?
18. What messages about preservation do you think resonate best with the media and the public? (green building, smart growth, revitalization, history, etc.?)
19. How can preservation help improve the quality of life in Metro Omaha?



# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

	Architects Focus Group	Developers Focus Group	Planners Focus Group	Finance Focus Group	Historic Pres- ervationists Focus Group
<b>Current image?</b> What is your organization best known for?					<b>X</b>
<b>New development?</b> What is the most exciting new development that has occurred in your community in the past five years?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			
<b>New leader?</b> Tell us about a new community leader who has emerged in the past few years?	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	
<b>Cool group?</b> Which nonprofit organization would you most like to be associated with? Why?				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Favorite place?</b> Tell us about one of your favorite places in the Metro Omaha area?		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		
<b>Image makeover?</b> Does historic preservation need a new image in Metro Omaha?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>New brand?</b> Does historic preservation need a new brand in Metro Omaha?					<b>X</b> Umbrella group, new group, mergers, shared services
<b>Staffing?</b> How would staff change the capacity of preservation groups in Metro Omaha?					<b>X</b> Who would likely be able to financially support this?

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

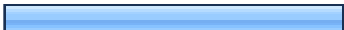
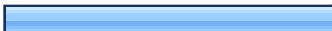
	Architects Focus Group	Developers Focus Group	Planners Focus Group	Finance Focus Group	Historic Pres- ervationists Focus Group
<b>Barriers?</b> What are the barriers to carrying out more preservation projects?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>New tools?</b> What new tools, programs, policies or incentives do you think would help to overcome these barriers?	<b>X</b> Building codes, zoning codes, working with city officials, access to craftspeople	<b>X</b> Tax credits, more expertise in putting deals together	<b>X</b> Regional decision-making, planning tools, conservation districts, neighborhood plans	<b>X</b> Loan pools, tax credits, loosening lending constraints, more expertise in putting deals together	<b>X</b>
<b>How can preservation make a difference?</b> What are concrete ways that historic preservation can make a difference in Metro Omaha in the next ten years?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Steps needed?</b> What steps need to be taken to reach these goals?	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Image in 10 years?</b> What do you want to be best known for in 10 years?					<b>X</b>

# METRO OMAHA AND COUNCIL BLUFFS PRESERVATION ASSESSMENT

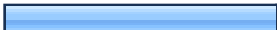

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 4: ONLINE SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY













## 1. Do you live in a historic building or district?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		50.8%	94
No		49.2%	91
answered question			185
skipped question			3

## 2. Do you work in a historic building or district?





		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		40.8%	75
No		59.2%	109
answered question			184
skipped question			4

### 3. What is your professional field?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Preservation nonprofits		6.7%	8
Historic sites		3.4%	4
Community revitalization		10.9%	13
Government		19.3%	23
Banking		0.0%	0
Philanthropy		5.0%	6
Real Estate/Development		11.8%	14
Preservation trades or crafts		3.4%	4
<b>Design (architecture, landscape architecture)</b>		<b>30.3%</b>	<b>36</b>
Planning		10.1%	12
Law		6.7%	8
Finance/Accounting		9.2%	11
Retail		4.2%	5
Other (please specify)			75
<b>answered question</b>			<b>119</b>
<b>skipped question</b>			<b>69</b>










#### 4. What is your age?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Under 18		0.0%	0
19-29		4.3%	8
30-45		24.9%	46
<b>46-60</b>		<b>46.5%</b>	<b>86</b>
Over 60		24.3%	45
answered question			<b>185</b>
skipped question			<b>3</b>

#### 5. What is your home zip code?

	Response Count
	182
answered question	<b>182</b>
skipped question	<b>6</b>






## 6. In which of these activities have you participated in the last year?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Historic homes tour		53.6%	97
<b>Visit to a museum</b>		<b>86.2%</b>	<b>156</b>
Restore Omaha conference		42.0%	76
Preservation workshop		22.7%	41
Neighborhood association event		61.3%	111
Commercial historic preservation project		28.7%	52
Residential historic preservation project		34.3%	62
answered question			<b>181</b>
skipped question			<b>7</b>

## 7. What is the image of historic preservation in Metro Omaha?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Rating Average	Response Count
Obstructionist	7.4% (13)	25.6% (45)	<b>36.4% (64)</b>	25.6% (45)	5.1% (9)	2.95	176
Core community principle	4.0% (7)	28.3% (49)	27.7% (48)	<b>32.9% (57)</b>	6.9% (12)	3.10	173
Highly visible	3.4% (6)	19.8% (35)	<b>33.3% (59)</b>	32.2% (57)	11.3% (20)	3.28	177
Elitist	5.1% (9)	27.4% (48)	<b>34.3% (60)</b>	24.6% (43)	8.6% (15)	3.04	175
Key green building strategy	3.4% (6)	16.7% (29)	<b>43.7% (76)</b>	25.3% (44)	10.9% (19)	3.24	174
answered question							<b>180</b>
skipped question							<b>8</b>

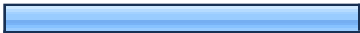

## 8. Name up to five key preservation leaders in Metro Omaha:

			Response Percent	Response Count
1			98.3%	116
2			79.7%	94
3			68.6%	81
4			55.1%	65
5			40.7%	48
answered question				118
skipped question				70

## 9. How important are these groups to the future of preservation in the Metro Omaha area?

	Very important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	No opinion	Rating Average	Response Count
City of Omaha Landmarks Heritage Preservation Commission	<b>45.8%</b> <b>(81)</b>	32.8% (58)	7.9% (14)	2.3% (4)	11.3% (20)	2.01	177
Council Bluffs Historic Preservation Commission	<b>39.9%</b> <b>(71)</b>	27.5% (49)	9.0% (16)	3.4% (6)	20.2% (36)	2.37	178
Landmarks, Inc.	28.4% (50)	<b>34.1%</b> <b>(60)</b>	18.2% (32)	5.1% (9)	14.2% (25)	2.43	176
Preserve Council Bluffs	19.9% (35)	26.7% (47)	17.6% (31)	3.4% (6)	<b>32.4%</b> <b>(57)</b>	3.02	176
Omaha 2020	14.5% (25)	26.7% (46)	25.6% (44)	4.7% (8)	<b>28.5%</b> <b>(49)</b>	3.06	172
Restore Omaha	<b>44.6%</b> <b>(79)</b>	36.2% (64)	12.4% (22)	1.1% (2)	5.6% (10)	1.87	177
My neighborhood association	<b>30.4%</b> <b>(51)</b>	28.0% (47)	18.5% (31)	7.1% (12)	16.1% (27)	2.51	168
My downtown association	19.1% (31)	<b>27.8%</b> <b>(45)</b>	19.1% (31)	6.2% (10)	<b>27.8%</b> <b>(45)</b>	2.96	162
Other (please specify)							23
answered question							<b>181</b>
skipped question							<b>7</b>

### 10. Are preservation advocates influential in Metro Omaha community decision-making?


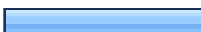
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		53.3%	90
No		46.7%	79

If you answered "no," please explain briefly:

83

answered question	169
skipped question	19

### 11. Is preservation thought of differently in residential neighborhoods than in commercial areas or in downtown?


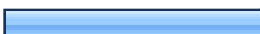
		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		70.5%	117
No		29.5%	49

If so, how?

88

answered question	166
skipped question	22

### 12. Have you undertaken a preservation project recently, either personally or as part of your profession?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		61.5%	112
No		38.5%	70

answered question	182
skipped question	6



**13. If you answered "yes" to Question 12, what lessons did you learn during your project?**

**Response  
Count**

97

**answered question**

**97**

**skipped question**

**91**

**14. If you answered "yes" to Question 12, did you have needs that were unmet? (i.e. I couldn't find a tradesperson, couldn't find a lender) How did this impact your project?**

**Response  
Count**

79

**answered question**

**79**

**skipped question**

**109**

**15. Please describe one high-profile preservation success with which you are familiar. Why was it successful?**

**Response  
Count**

100

**answered question**

**100**

**skipped question**

**88**

**16. Please describe one recent high-profile preservation loss with which you are familiar. Why was it not successful?**

	Response Count
	81
answered question	81
skipped question	107

**17. What are barriers that prevent more preservation projects from being successfully carried out?**

	Major barrier	Barrier	Minor barrier	Not a barrier	Rating Average	Response Count
Limited access to lending	32.5% (53)	<b>47.2% (77)</b>	16.0% (26)	4.3% (7)	1.92	163
Zoning	12.6% (21)	<b>38.9% (65)</b>	37.1% (62)	11.4% (19)	2.47	167
Cost of projects	<b>58.4% (101)</b>	31.2% (54)	8.1% (14)	2.3% (4)	1.54	173
Lack of skilled tradespeople	19.6% (32)	<b>36.8% (60)</b>	31.9% (52)	11.7% (19)	2.36	163
Lack of funding sources	<b>44.0% (74)</b>	42.9% (72)	11.3% (19)	1.8% (3)	1.71	168
Poor market conditions	24.5% (39)	<b>44.0% (70)</b>	23.3% (37)	8.2% (13)	2.15	159
Other (not listed above)	<b>50.0% (17)</b>	26.5% (9)	8.8% (3)	14.7% (5)	1.88	34

Explain other barriers if needed

37

answered question	174
skipped question	14

## 18. What additional tools would be helpful to preservation efforts in Metro Omaha?

	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Useful	Response Count
Government supported grant program	73.3% (126)	23.3% (40)	3.5% (6)	172
Workshops or other types of training on preservation techniques	59.4% (104)	37.7% (66)	2.9% (5)	175
State tax credits	78.5% (135)	20.3% (35)	1.2% (2)	172
Changes to regulations	61.4% (97)	36.7% (58)	1.9% (3)	158
			Other (please specify)	33
answered question				179
skipped question				9

## 19. What other ideas do you have to spur more preservation projects in Metro Omaha?

	Response Count
	74
answered question	74
skipped question	114

**20. What do you think are the most important ways that preservation can improve the quality of life in Metro Omaha in the future?**

	Highly important	Important	Less important	Not important	Response Count
Increase heritage tourism	39.0% (69)	<b>43.5% (77)</b>	15.3% (27)	2.3% (4)	177
Revitalize downtown	<b>58.3% (105)</b>	32.2% (58)	8.9% (16)	0.6% (1)	180
Strengthen existing neighborhoods	<b>79.0% (143)</b>	19.9% (36)	1.1% (2)	0.0% (0)	181
Increase awareness and understanding of local history	<b>58.2% (106)</b>	37.4% (68)	3.3% (6)	1.1% (2)	182
Enhance arts and culture	<b>49.7% (89)</b>	41.3% (74)	8.9% (16)	0.0% (0)	179
Promote smart use of existing land and resources	<b>73.9% (133)</b>	19.4% (35)	6.1% (11)	0.6% (1)	180
Conserve energy and natural resources	<b>56.7% (101)</b>	29.2% (52)	11.8% (21)	2.2% (4)	178
Fosters local and independent businesses	<b>51.7% (92)</b>	36.5% (65)	11.2% (20)	0.6% (1)	178

Other (please specify) 9

<b>answered question</b>	<b>184</b>
<b>skipped question</b>	<b>4</b>

## 21. How do you think these preservation benefits resonate with the public?

	Very well	Moderately	Not at all	Rating Average	Response Count
Green building	27.4% (49)	<b>56.4% (101)</b>	16.2% (29)	1.89	179
Sustainable communities	29.2% (52)	<b>55.6% (99)</b>	15.2% (27)	1.86	178
Smart growth	29.0% (51)	<b>52.3% (92)</b>	18.8% (33)	1.90	176
Community revitalization	<b>55.8% (101)</b>	40.3% (73)	3.9% (7)	1.48	181
Saving places	35.4% (64)	<b>54.7% (99)</b>	9.9% (18)	1.75	181
History education	22.9% (41)	<b>61.5% (110)</b>	15.6% (28)	1.93	179
Economic development	<b>54.5% (97)</b>	36.5% (65)	9.0% (16)	1.54	178
Enhanced property values	<b>60.3% (105)</b>	31.6% (55)	8.0% (14)	1.48	174

Other (please specify)

7

**answered question**

**181**

**skipped question**

**7**

## 22. Please share any additional information or comments you have.

**Response  
Count**

36

**answered question**






**36**

**skipped question**

**152**



### 23. Provide your contact information if desired.

		Response Percent	Response Count
Name:		92.5%	86
Company:		65.6%	61
City/Town:		93.5%	87
State:		94.6%	88
Email Address:		89.2%	83
		answered question	93
		skipped question	95