

Before You Demolish



Suggestions from the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office

To some, Iowa is saddled with aging infrastructure. Over fifty percent of the State's housing was built prior to 1950. The bulk of commercial and industrial buildings, as well as farm-related structures, are fifty years old or older. These comprise those "blighted buildings" that some believe impede progress and development.

From another perspective, older buildings are a silent testament to the quality of design, excellence in construction and high grade of materials used in their construction. After years of deferred or no maintenance, these buildings are still standing and in use. Can the same be said for many late 20th century structures?

Aging houses, stores, offices, factories, barns, farm outbuildings and farmhouses represent a significant percentage of the State's collective capital investment. That they are still standing, and in many cases eminently usable, points to their economic importance. In effect, these buildings are under-utilized resources available for re-development, not impediments to it. Generally, they are strategically sited on improved roads, served by utilities, and located in viable commercial zones or residential neighborhoods. Over the long term, rehabilitating these properties can be more cost effective than demolishing them and hauling their remains to the landfill. This is definitely the case when a building is a **HISTORIC PROPERTY**.

National studies demonstrate that historic property rehabilitation projects do the following:

- Save Costs: It costs 4 percent less to rehabilitate an older building than to construct a new one. If demolition of an older building is required before construction of a new one, the savings can be as much as 16 percent.
- Create more jobs, because it is labor intensive.
- Use local suppliers, stimulating local markets.
- Result in attractive buildings, creation of commercial space or housing, attract new residents and businesses, and increase visits, business, sales and tax revenues.
- Contribute to the revitalization of traditional commercial and residential areas that were once part of "walking communities".

For more information, check a sampling of studies at these web sites:

- "Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Missouri" , <http://www.dnr.state.mo.us/shpo/homepage.htm>
- "Historic Districts are Good for Your Pocketbook: The Impact of Local Historic Districts on House Prices in South Carolina". <http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/propval.htm>
- "Report: Property Value Appreciation for Historic Districts in Alabama", <http://preserveala.org/intro1.htm>
- Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in West Virginia, <http://www.be.wvu.edu/serve/bureau/reports/historic/historic.pdf>
- "The Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation" (New Jersey) http://www.njht.org/features.htm#impact_study
- "Profiting From the Past: The Economic Impact of Historic Preservation in Georgia", <http://www.gashpo.org/>



Take Action

Before you demolish that “derelict building”, we recommend you do the following:

1. Find out if the building has historic value:
 - See if the State Historic Preservation Office has information about it. Contact Berry Bennett (515/281-8742 or berry.bennett@dca.state.ia.us), and provide the street address, town and county in which the building is located.
 - See if there is information in the city or county historic property inventory -- if your city or county has a local historic preservation program, contact your city clerk or assessor, or historic preservation commission and provide them with the street address, city, or in rural areas the section, township and range. A list of contacts for Iowa counties and cities with historic preservation programs can be found at http://www.iowahistory.org/preservation/clg_program/clg_cities_counties_list.htm.
 - Complete and submit an Iowa Site Inventory form with photo for a preliminary evaluation of historical or architectural significance. The Inventory forms and instructions can be downloaded from our website: http://www.iowahistory.org/preservation/review_compliance/site_inventory_forms.html

2. If the building is a **HISTORIC PROPERTY** (is eligible for listing or is listed on the National Register and/or if it is listed on a municipal list of historic places), please consider rehabilitation before you demolish.
 - Minimally, you can “warehouse or mothball” the building--do the basic repairs needed to keep moisture out of the building and to secure it from vandals. National Park Service, Preservation Brief #31: is available on line at <http://www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/brief31.htm>
 - Get an architect or engineer with experience in rehabilitating historic properties to evaluate, assess and make recommendations for rehabilitation and future use. Get the following (property owner, city officials, local financial organizations, local historic preservation commission, local Main Street organization, Chamber, and/or Economic Development organization) to work with you to find to partner in finding financing, a developer and future occupants. For information on how to organize this type of project, contact Jack Porter, State Historic Preservation Office, at jack.porter@dca.state.ia.us or 515/242-6152 or Tim Reinders, Iowa Main Street, at tim.reinders@ided.state.ia.us or (515) 242-4762.

3. Check out the financial incentives that are available to encourage preservation, rehabilitation and continued use of Historic Properties (properties that are eligible for or are listed on the National Register of Historic Places or a municipal list of historic places). These include:
 - Certified Local Government Grants to underwrite the research, recording and registration of properties and the development of rehabilitation, stabilization, and reuse plans. Available only to Cities and Counties in the Certified Local Government program. For more information go to http://www.iowahistory.org/grants/shsi_grants/clg_grant/index.html or contact Kerry McGrath at kerry.mcgrath@dca.state.ia.us or 515/281-6826.
 - Iowa Community Cultural Grants for all of the above activities as well as rehabilitation. For more information go to <http://www.culturalaffairs.org/ICCG/main.htm> or contact riki.saltzman@dca.state.ia.us.
 - Tax Credit and abatement programs for rehabilitation projects is available from Elizabeth Foster-Hill at beth.foster@dca.state.ia.us.
 - Iowa Department of Economic Development programs:

Community Development and Services, <http://www.community.state.ia.us/community/index.html>;
 Farm Bill programs,
<http://www.community.state.ia.us/downloads/farmbill.pdf>,
 Housing, <http://www.community.state.ia.us/housing/index.html>

List of Resource People at the State Historic Preservation Office:

Lowell Soike, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and Chief of the Iowa State Historic Preservation Office,
 Historical Building, Third Floor East
 600 East Locust Street
 Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0290
lowell.soike@dca.state.ia.us
 515/281-3306

Questions such as “What is the National Register of Historic Places?” or “What happens if my property is listed on the National Register?” or “How do I nominate my property to the National Register” or “How can I get more information?”, Contact Elizabeth Foster-Hill at beth.foster@dca.state.ia.us.

Questions about the federal, state, and county tax programs for historic property rehabilitation, such as “Could you explain how they work?” or “Would my project qualify” or “How do I get the applications and instructions?” Contact Elizabeth Foster-Hill at beth.foster@dca.state.ia.us.

Questions about the Certified Local Government Program, such as “What is the Certified local Government Program?” or “What is a local historic preservation program?” or “How can we save this building, barn, or block of houses?” or “Can I use a CLG grant for?” or “Does my city/county have a historic preservation commission and what are they supposed to be doing?” or “How can we develop a plan to identify and save historic properties in our community?”, Contact Kerry McGrath, Local Governments Coordinator, at kerry.mcgrath@dca.state.ia.us.

Questions about history such as, “What is historic significance?” Or “Is that old commercial building a historic property?” or “What kind of building is this, how was it used?” or “What makes a building’s history important? or “How to start researching a building’s history?”, Contact Ralph Christian, historian, at ralph.christian@dca.state.ia.us.

Questions about architecture and architectural history, such as “What is architectural significance?” or “How do determine if a building has architectural significance” or “How can I tell what style or design my building is? or “How did they build it, what type of construction?” or “What kind of materials?” or “What is the best way to maintain, repair, restore or add-on to my historic property”, Contact Barbara Mitchell, architectural historian and architect, at barbara.mitchell@dca.state.ia.us

Questions about “How to use the tax credits for rehabilitating historic properties?” or “How to plan a rehabilitation project, what should be done first? or “What is the best way to maintain, repair, restore or add-on to my historic property?”. Contact Jack Porter, Preservation Architect, at jack.porter@dca.state.ia.us

Questions such as “What can you tell me about the old house located at 15 Maple Street, Hometown, in Happy County, Iowa?” or “Do you have the National Register Nomination for the commercial building at 15 Main Street in Farmville, Iowa” or “Has anyone tried to locate historic properties in Soaring Eagle County, is there some kind of report?” or “I am not sure how to fill out the Iowa Site Inventory form, can you help me?”, Contact Berry Bennett, Historic Property Inventory Manager at berry.bennett@dca.state.ia.us.