



**HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2023 - 6:30 P.M.  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
110 N. POPLAR STREET, WEST BRANCH, IOWA  
*Council Quorum May Be Present***

**<https://zoom.us/j/829677991> or  
*dial in phone number 1-312-626-6799 with Meeting ID 829 677 991***

**AGENDA**

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approve Agenda/Move to action
  - a. Approve minutes from the July 19, 2023 Historic Preservation Commission meeting.
4. Public Hearing/Non-Consent Agenda. /Move to action
  - a. Review and authorize a Certified Local Government application to the Iowa Arts & Culture office.
5. Discussion –
  - a. 102 W. Main Sign Review
  - b. Review Historic Preservation Plan Goals
6. Comments from commission members
7. Adjourn

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**Mayor:** Roger Laughlin • **Council Members:** Colton Miller, Nick Goodweiler, Jodee Stoolman, Tom Dean, Jerry Sexton  
**City Administrator** Adam Kofoed • **City Clerk** Leslie Brick • **Fire Chief** Kevin Stoolman • **Library Director** Becky Knoche  
**Parks & Rec Director** Matt Condon • **Police Chief** John Hanna • **Public Works Director** Matt Goodale

West Branch Historic Preservation Commission Meeting

Wednesday, July 19, 2023 @ 6:30 pm

City Council Chambers

Present: Peggy Herman, Lou Picek, John Fuller, Dana Gafeller, Liz Sieberling, Karen Suchomel. Adam Kofoed, City Administrator, was also present.

The Commission reviewed the Nuisance Letter sent to Hoover Fine Arts @ 102 W. Main Street.

The Commission agreed that we needed an application for the additional "Gallery" signs. We had received an earlier application for the original signs at the front of the building but not for the new signs placed on the corner of the building.

Additional discussion centered on letting new businesses in the Historic District know that there is a sign ordinance that seeks to preserve the time and place of the Historic District between the 1870's through 1916. Jessi Simon at Main Street knows. Adam will remind her.

Certified Local Government update: Adam has the additional inventory of houses in WB from 50 years ago and is working on the application. The State knows that WB is going to be sending in their application. Adam is working on finishing up the final details. The application is due in September.

Traveler's Rest update: Adam will take copies of the abstract that belongs to the property of the Traveler's Rest and forward to the NPS for their nomination information. The abstract start date is from 1851.

Hoover Medallion Homes update: letters are being drawn up to be sent to Hoover Medallion Homes in WB. These homes were in existence when Herbert Hoover lived in West Branch in his formative years.

Commission discussion: the Commission will review the sign standards worksheet for discussion to be at the next meeting.

Next meeting dates:

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

Wednesday, January 10, 2023

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Suchomel, Secy

**STANDARDS FOR THE RESTORATION AND REHABILITATION OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES**

1. Every reasonable effort should be made to provide a compatible use for building which will require minimum alteration to the building and its environment.
2. Rehabilitation work should not destroy the distinguishing qualities or character of the property and its environment. The removal or alteration of any historic material or architectural features should be held to the minimum, consistent with the proposed use.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced wherever possible. In the event replacement is necessary, the new material should match the material being replaced in design, color, texture and other visual qualities. Repair or replacement of missing architectural features should be based on accurate duplications or original features, substantiated physical or pictorial evidence rather than on conjectural designs or the availability or different architectural features from other buildings.
4. Distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftsmanship which characterize older structures should be treated with sensitivity.
5. Alterations to buildings and environments which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the building and the neighborhood. These changes may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected.
6. All buildings should be recognized as products of their own time. Alterations to create an appearance inconsistent with the actual character or the building should be discouraged.
7. Contemporary design for new buildings in old neighborhoods and additions to existing buildings or landscaping should not be discouraged if such design is compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the neighborhood, building or its environment.
8. Wherever possible, new additions or alterations to buildings should be undertaken in such a manner that if they were to be removed in the future the essential form and integrity of the original building would be unimpaired.
9. For a fuller explanation of these standards, refer to Checklist for the Application of the Standards for the Restoration and Rehabilitation of Historic Structures which follows.

**CHECKLIST FOR THE APPLICATION OF THE STANDARDS FOR THE RESTORATION AND REHABILITATION OF HISTORIC STRUCTURES\***

The following guidelines are listed as a series of construction practices. They are divided by basic building elements and into two groups – those practices recommendation and those not recommended.

DO:	DO NOT:
<b>The Environment</b>	
In new construction, retain distinctive features of the neighborhood’s existing architecture, such as the distinguishing size, scale, mass color, materials and details, including roofs, porches and stairway, that give a neighborhood its special character.	Introduce new construction into the neighborhood that is incompatible with the character of the district’s differences in size, scale, color and detailing.
Use plant materials, fencing, walkways and street lights, signs and benches that are compatible with the character of the neighborhood in size, scale, material and color, and the time period under consideration.	Introduce signs, street lighting, street furniture, new plant materials, fencing, walkways and paving materials which are out of scale or inappropriate to the neighborhood.
Retain existing landscape features such as parks, gardens, street lights, signs, benches, walkways, streets, alleys and building setbacks that have traditionally linked buildings to their environment.	Destroy the relationship of buildings and their environment by widening existing streets, changing paving materials, or by introducing poorly designed and inappropriately located new streets and parking lots or introducing new construction incompatible with the character of the neighborhood.
<b>Existing Buildings: Lots</b>	
Inspect the lot carefully to locate and identify plants, trees, fencing, walkways, out buildings and other elements that might be an important part of the property’s history and development.	
Retain plants, trees, fencing, walkways, and street lights, signs and benches that reflect the property’s history and development.	Make changes to the appearance of the site by removing old plants, trees, fencing, walkways and street lights, signs and benches before evaluating their importance in the property’s history and development.

\* These guidelines are adapted from *The U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic Preservation Projects*.

<b>DO:</b>	<b>DO NOT:</b>
Base decisions for the new work on actual knowledge of the past appearance of the property found in photographs, drawings, newspapers and tax records. If changes are made, they should be carefully evaluated in light of the past appearance of the site.	Give the site an appearance it never had.
<b>Existing Buildings: Exterior Features</b>	
Masonry buildings – retain original masonry and mortar, wherever possible, without the application of any surface treatment.	Apply waterproof or water repellent coatings or other treatments unless required to solve a specific technical problem that has been studied and identified. Coatings are frequently unnecessary, expensive and can accelerate deterioration of the masonry.
Duplicate old mortar in composition, color and textures.	Repoint with mortar of high Portland cement content which can create a bond that is often stronger than the building material. This can cause deterioration as a result of the differing coefficient of expansion and the differing porosity of the material and the mortar.
Duplicate old mortar in joint size, method of application and joint profile.	Repoint with mortar joints of a differing size or joint profile, texture or color.
Repair stucco with a stucco mixture duplicating the original as closely as possible in appearance and texture.	
Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and always with the gentlest method possible, such as low pressure water and soft, natural bristle brushes.	Sandblast brick or stone surfaces; this method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration.
Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and always with the gentlest method possible, such as low pressure water and soft, natural bristle brushes.	Sandblast brick or stone surfaces; this method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration.
	Use chemical cleaning products which could have an adverse chemical reaction with the masonry materials, i.e., acid on limestone or marble.
Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible	Apply new material which is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial brick siding, artificial cast stone or brick veneer.

<b>DO:</b>	<b>DO NOT:</b>
Replace missing architectural features, such as cornices, brackets, railings and shutters.	Remove architectural features, such as cornices, brackets, railings, shutters, window architraves and doorway pediments. These are usually as essential part of a building's character and appearance.
Retain the original or early color and texture of masonry surfaces wherever possible. Brick or stone surfaces may have been painted or whitewashed for practical and aesthetic reasons.	Indiscriminate removal of paint from masonry surfaces. This may be historically incorrect and may also subject the building to harmful damage.
<b>Frame Buildings:</b>	
Retain original material whenever possible.	Remove architectural features such as siding, cornices, brackets, window architraves and doorway pediments. These are, in most cases, an essential part of a building's character and appearance.
Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible.	Resurface frame buildings with new material which is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles, plastic or aluminum siding. Such materials also can contribute to the deterioration of the structure from moisture and insect attack.
<b>Roofs:</b>	
Preserve the original roof shape.	Change the original roof shape or add features inappropriate to the essential character of the roof, such as oversized dormer windows or picture windows.
Retain the original roofing material, whenever possible.	Apply new roofing material that is inappropriate to the style and period of the building and neighborhood.
Replace deteriorated roof coverings with new material that matches the old in composition, size, shape, color and texture.	Replace deteriorated roof coverings with new materials which differ to such an extent from the old in composition, size, shape, color and texture that the appearance of the building is altered.

<b>DO:</b>	<b>DO NOT:</b>
Preserve or replace, where necessary, all architectural features which give the roof its essential character, such as dormer windows, cupolas, cornices, brackets, chimneys, cresting and weather vanes.	Strip the roof or roof lines of architectural features important to its character.
Place television antennae and mechanical equipment, such as air conditioners, in an inconspicuous location.	Place television antennae or satellite dishes and mechanical equipment, such as air conditioners, where they can be seen from the street.
<b>Windows and Doors:</b>	
Retain existing window and door openings including window sash, glass, lintels, sills, architraves, shutters, door pediments, hoods, steps and all hardware.	Introduce new window and door openings into the principal elevations or enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes.
	Alter the size of window panes or sash. Such changes destroy the scale and proportion of the building.
	Discard original doors and door hardware when they can be repaired and reused in place.
Respect the stylistic period or periods a building represents. If replacement is necessary, it should duplicate the material, design, and the hardware of the older window sash or door.	Inappropriate new window or door features such as aluminum storm and screen window combinations that require the removal of original windows and doors right-of-way the installation of plastic or metal strip awnings or fake shutters that disturb the character and appearance of the building.
<b>Porches and Steps:</b>	
Retain porches and steps which are appropriate to the building and its development. Porches or additions reflecting later architectural styles are often important to the building's historical integrity and whenever possible should be retained.	Remove or alter porches and steps which are appropriate to the building and its development and the style it represents.
Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated architectural features of wood, iron, cast iron, terra-cotta, tile and brick.	Strip porches and steps of original material and architectural features, such as handrails, balusters, columns, brackets and roof decoration of wood, iron, cast iron, terra-cotta, tile and brick.

<b>DO:</b>	<b>DO NOT:</b>
Repair or replace, where necessary, deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible.	Apply new material which is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed, such as artificial cast stone, brick veneer, asbestos or asphalt shingles or plastic or aluminum siding.
	Enclose porches and steps in a manner that destroys their intended appearance.
<b>Existing Buildings: Exterior Finishes</b>	
Discover and retain original paint colors or repainting with colors based on the original to illustrate the distinctive character of the property	Repaint with colors that are not appropriate to the building and neighborhood.
<b>Existing Buildings: Plan and Function</b>	
Use a building for its intended purpose whenever possible.	
Find an adaptive use, when necessary, which is compatible with the plan, structure and appearance of the building.	Alter a building to accommodate an incompatible use requiring extensive alterations to the plan, materials and appearance of the building.
Retain the basic plan of a building, whenever possible.	Alter the basic plan of a building by demolishing principal walls, partitions and stairway.
<b>New Construction:</b>	
Make new additions and new buildings compatible in scale, color and texture with the earlier building and the neighborhood.	Make incompatible new additions or new construction
Design new work to be compatible in materials, size, scale, color and texture with the earlier building and the neighborhood.	Design new work that is incompatible with the earlier building and the neighborhood in materials, size, scale and texture.
Use contemporary design compatible with the character and mood of the building or the neighborhood.	Imitate an earlier style or period of architecture in new construction, except in rare cases where a contemporary design would detract from the architectural unity of an ensemble or group. Especially avoid imitating an earlier style of architecture in new construction that has a completely contemporary function, such as a drive-in bank or garage.



<b>DO:</b>	<b>DO NOT:</b>
<b>Safety and Code Requirements:</b>	
Comply with Code requirements in such a manner that the essential character of a building is preserved intact.	
Investigate variances for historic properties under local codes.	
Install adequate fire prevention equipment in a manner that does minimal damage to the appearance or fabric of a property.	
Provide access for persons with disabilities without damaging the essential character of the property.	

**STANDARDS FOR SIGNAGE DESIGN AND DISPLAY****I. GENERAL**

These standards cover all exterior signs and all interior signs within six inches of the window.

Signs are intended to communicate function or use of an establishment. Businesses are encouraged to use signs and symbols reminiscent of the turn of the century.

Approval by the West Branch Preservation Commission of design plans and specifications for signs is prerequisite to obtaining a sign permit.

The City strongly recommends that applicants consult with the Commission prior to applying for a permit.

**SAFETY AND MAINTENANCE.** All signs shall be so designed and located as to pose no danger to life or property and shall be well maintained at all times. Signs shall not be arranged to interfere with traffic by causing glare or to block reasonable sight lines at intersections. Neither the color nor location of signs should cause confusion or interfere with traffic control devices.

**ILLUMINATION.** Signs with open light bulbs or with flashing, blinking, or rotating lights are not permitted. Externally illuminated signs are permitted so long as they do not cast glare onto streets or adjacent properties. No external signs with internal lighting or exposed neon or similar tube-type lighting are allowed. Each business establishment may display not more than two exposed neon signs, totaling no more than nine square feet, as secondary interior signs.

**II. PRINCIPAL SIGNS**

Principal signs are permanently affixed signs identifying the name of the establishment. The name or trademark of the product or service offered may be included in the principal sign, but it is recommended that it not overshadow, in size or color, the name of the establishment.

**TYPES AND SIZES OF PRINCIPAL SIGNS.**

**APPLIED SIGNS.** Signs attached flat against the building facade or painted on the facade or window shall not project higher than the eave line or parapet wall of the building or project more than six inches from the building. Applied signs include signs painted directly on the building or window. The size of applied signs for businesses whose primary building facade has less than 75 feet of principal frontage shall not exceed one square foot of surface area for each linear foot of building frontage up to a maximum of 25 square feet. Size of applied signs for businesses whose primary building facade has 75 feet or more of principal frontage shall not exceed 50 square feet. The area of a sign containing individual letters without a frame or outline shall be calculated on the basis of a regular geometric form enclosing the lettering.

**PROJECTING SIGNS.** Signs projecting more than six inches from a building wall shall not project higher than the eave line or parapet wall of the building. Roof signs shall not be permitted. The size of projecting signs shall be limited to 15 square feet in area, shall not extend over a public right-of-way more than one-half the distance between the property line and the curb line, or four feet, whichever is less, and shall provide at least seven and one-half feet of clearance above the right-of-way. Size shall be measured by the sign's largest dimensions as if enclosed within a square, rectangle, or circle.

AWNINGS. Signs shall be applied only to the valance section of an awning. Signs shall not occupy more than three-quarters of the height of an awning valance, or six inches, whichever is less.

FREE-STANDING FIXED-POST SIGNS. Free-standing fixed-post signs shall be permitted in areas of open space between the sidewalk and the principal frontage. Sign posts shall be no taller than 12 feet. Each sign shall be no larger than 12 square feet. If more than one business occupies the building and each chooses to use a single sign, they shall be attached to the same post(s) and the total sign area shall not exceed 12 square feet.

FREE-STANDING ELEVATED SIGNS. Free-standing elevated signs shall be permitted for buildings with 800 or more square feet of open space on a public right-of-way or parking lot. The bottom of a free-standing elevated sign shall be a minimum of 10 feet above ground level, and the top shall be no more than 22 feet above ground level. No free-standing elevated sign shall be permitted which is closer than 60 feet to any other free-standing elevated sign on the same side of the public right of way. The permanent area of the free-standing elevated sign shall not exceed 30 square feet. No signs containing internal lighting shall be allowed. Illumination is prescribed pursuant to paragraph one above.

CHANGE-PANEL SIGNS. Change-panel signs used to display current prices of items sold shall be placed and displayed as follows:

- a. One change-panel sign shall be allowed per establishment. The sign shall consist of no more than three panels.
- b. The maximum size of each panel shall be nine square feet.

**NUMBER AND LOCATION OF PRINCIPAL SIGNS.**

Each building shall have only one primary building facade, normally an exposed wall fronting on a public right-of-way or parking lot.

A business shall erect no more than two signs, each of which must be of a different permissible type, on or in front of its primary building facade. A business with additional exposed walls on a public right-of-way or a parking lot shall erect no more than one sign, which must be an applied sign, on each of its additional exposed walls.

If more than one business occupies a single store front, there shall be no more than one sign per business. The total of all applied signs together shall not exceed 25 square feet for buildings with less than 75 feet of frontage or 50 square feet for buildings with 75 feet or more of frontage.

A business occupying a floor above the ground floor shall use only an applied window sign or, if it has a separate entrance at the ground floor, an applied sign or a projecting sign at its ground floor door. Such signs must meet all other requirements of these standards.

Only the following signs shall be permitted in the Heritage Square area, including South Downey Street and the intersections of South Downey with Wetherell Street and Main Street:

- a. Applied signs.
- b. Projecting signs on the east and west sides of the Heritage Square area.

**III. SECONDARY SIGNS - MENUS, SPECIALS, HOURS, ETC.**

MOVABLE FREE-STANDING SIGNS AND SANDWICH BOARDS. Applications for movable free-standing signs shall be made to the West Branch Preservation Commission. No more than one such sign shall be permitted per building. Such a sign

shall not exceed six square feet in area and shall be placed so that it does not interfere with pedestrian or vehicular traffic. Movable signs shall be displayed only during daylight hours and must be stabilized by a safe means of anchoring or weighting.

**INCIDENTAL INFORMATION SIGNS.** Signs providing additional and incidental information about a business (such as business hours, whether the business is open or closed, which credit cards are accepted, or listings of menus, specials, and similar information) shall not exceed 12 square feet in total and shall not be any of the types of signs prohibited in Section six, below. Signs meeting these requirements need not be approved in advance by the Commission and do not require a permit.

**IV. TEMPORARY SIGNS**

The following signs may be erected without a permit if they meet the conditions stated below:

**DEVELOPMENT SIGNS.** One temporary sign not to exceed 20 square feet in area may be affixed to each lot or parcel of property to designate future use of such property by the business. Continued use of such signs shall be subject to review by the West Branch Preservation Commission every 3 months following initial installation.

**SALE OR RENT SIGNS.** Signs advertising the premises where the sign appears for lease or sale shall be limited to one such sign not to exceed 16 square feet in area. Such signs shall be removed from the premises within five days subsequent to the leasing or sale of such premises.

**OTHER TEMPORARY SIGNS.** Announcement signs shall be permitted to indicate the names of community events or events to be conducted on the premises and of persons associated with those events (including contractors' signs on construction sites). Such signs, which shall not exceed 16 square feet in area, shall be installed no more than three weeks before the event and shall be removed from the premises within five days following the conclusion of the event.

**PENNANTS, BANNERS, AND STREAMERS.** Such devices shall be up no longer than three weeks prior to an event and shall be removed within five days following the event. There shall be no restriction on the proper display of an American or Iowa flag on a flagpole.

**V. INFORMATIONAL AND REGULATORY SIGNS**

The following types of signs, displayed for the direction, safety, convenience, or information of the public, may be erected without a permit:

Signs required to be maintained or posted by law or other regulation. Examples include traffic or similar regulatory signs.

Utility signs not over two square feet in area identifying parking area entrances and exits, off-street loading areas, and the like.

Memorial plaques, cornerstones, historical markers, and the like.

Name plates or address signs.

Bulletin boards, not to exceed 15 square feet in area, for schools, churches, clubs, parks, playgrounds, and other community facilities.

Signs identifying apartment buildings, not to exceed eight square feet in area, indicating the name, address, and management of apartment buildings.

Signs and decorations for City-sponsored activities and events.

**VI. PROHIBITED SIGNS**

The following types of signs and display material are prohibited.

Temporary signs attached to store windows after the particular sale or event for which intended.

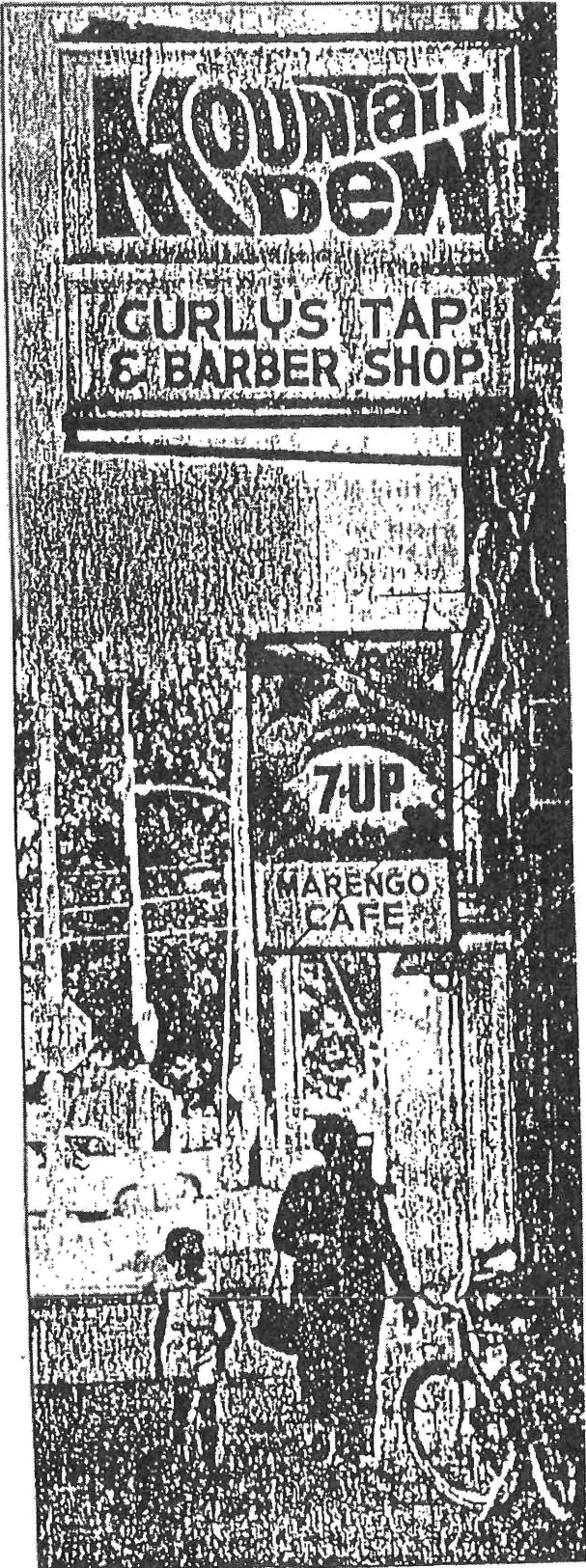
Blinking, flashing, animated, beacon, and moving signs or devices, except when approved by the Commission as temporary signs for approved openings, sales, and other special events.

Signs that advertise a business, service, or product not situated on the premises.

Signs using reflecting, fluorescent, "neon colors" or other garish paint or colors.

Signs applied to the main sections of an awning.

EXAMPLE OF PROHIBITED SIGNS



## **Action Steps for Goal Achievement**

**Goal 1. Become CLG Certified and strengthen partnerships between municipal and state government agencies.**

**Action 1:** Incorporate an updated 2017 Historic Preservation Plan as an amendment to the West Branch Comprehensive Plan

**Action 2:** Actively seek historic preservation training for all Commission members and encourage the citizens of West Branch to receive additional preservation training

**Action 3:** Schedule and complete annual Historic Preservation Plan and Certified Local Government Reviews:

Regular evaluation of historic preservation activities undertaken in West Branch will inform the planning process by identifying how well programs and initiatives are or, are not working. Regular evaluations are very useful in nearby Iowa City for both informing the City staff, and by showing progress to funders that make projects more attractive when seeking grants. Following adoption of the Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan in 1992, the Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) conducted annual reviews of the plan's ten basic goals and the work plan to achieve them.<sup>15</sup> The results were reported each year in progress reports submitted for Iowa's Certified Local Government program. Annual review and reporting helped the HPC achieve steady progress. It also helped make Iowa City one of the most successful state grant recipients in Iowa. Regular evaluations made the historic preservation plan for Iowa City an ongoing successful program. The City of West Branch will benefit from evaluating its historic preservation efforts in a similar fashion, using the goals enumerated in our plan.

**Action 4:** Establish, update, and review enforcements of the Historic Preservation Ordinance in the HPC annual reviews:

Consider administrative changes to improve enforcement of historic preservation design review, including regular review of the "Definitions" section in the Historic Preservation Ordinance to make sure the language is concise and not open to interpretation. Possible review elements include:

Strengthening remedies for noncompliance. Examples of such remedies include fines, injunctive relief and compliance orders, forced reconstruction, and loss of further entitlement

Using provisions of the International Building Code to promote maintenance and upkeep of historic properties

**Action 5:** Evaluate the need for zoning changes in historic and conservation districts to promote neighborhood stabilization and enhancement.

This would include: establishing an historic overlay district, which would encourage developments or renovations preserving the charm of West Branch's older neighborhoods, increasing flexibility among non-conforming houses constructed before zoning was implemented in West Branch, and evaluating the City's historic design review process.

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<sup>15</sup> 1992 Iowa City, Iowa Historic Preservation Plan by Svendsen Tyler Inc. Prepared for Iowa City, Iowa.



## **Goal 2. Heighten public awareness of historic preservation in West Branch and provide preservation education**

**Action 1:** Start, sponsor, or encourage historic tours highlighting West Branch history and preservation activity.

Many residents expressed interest in historic tours where, in the past, they learned a lot about West Branch<sup>16</sup>. The Historic Preservation Commission Members should host or sponsor historic walking tours to promote and teach residents about historic preservation in West Branch. Cemetery walks are also a strong possibility. Clarinda, Iowa has seen a lot of success getting children in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade active in historic preservation from cemetery walks and their adopt a grave program.<sup>17</sup>

**Action 2:** Partner with the Hoover Museum, the National Park Service, and the West Branch Heritage Museum to start a historic preservation educational event for students in the West Branch Schools or with nearby Scattergood Friends School.

Educational awareness is an important part of the CLG program. An important value of West Branch is passing down community pride to the next generation. The West Branch HPC is looking to start engaging students in the historic preservation process. There were many possibilities discussed such as a treasure hunt, student visits to the Heritage Museum, and an afterschool program at the Hoover Library.

**Action 3:** Request an annual historic preservation column in the West Branch Times in the month of May to highlight historic preservation month

The local media is an important player in small towns like West Branch. Utilizing local media will help educate the public about historic properties, increase name recognition, and encourage local tourism. One possible scenario is to highlight historic preservation and tell the history of West Branch and its historic properties during the month of May. Participants in the public meeting on August 1, 2017, suggested telling the story of Traveler's Rest, or highlighting Hoover Medallion Homes, in local newspapers could also raise awareness.

**Action 4:** Actively and regularly account for public concerns and innovative ideas regarding historic preservation in the community. This may entail taking surveys or hosting annual public gatherings.

A periodic survey of the opinions of historic and conservation district property owners regarding their concerns about the design review process, or the kinds of design aids they would like to see provided, should be taken. These surveys should also be inventoried with the rest of the City's historical documents and surveys.

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<sup>16</sup> During a February, 23, 2017 work session on historical preservation many of the attendees expressed they had learned a lot and enjoyed their cemetery and night walks taking place around 2010. The event was believed to be led by Christopher Reed who was the choir teacher for the West Branch School District.

<sup>17</sup> Representatives of Page County Historical Museum presented at the 2017 Iowa Preserve Summit in Fort Dodge, Iowa.



### **Goal 3. Improve public accessibility and documentation of historic properties**

**Action 1:** Add a section to the City of West Branch's website highlighting the West Branch Historic District, the Historic Preservation Plan, maps of historic landmarks, and the historic residential program.

Easy access to information is very important for an historic housing program to be successful. The City of West Branch, should strive to have a website similar to Sioux City, Iowa, which has plenty of information on how to perform maintenance for homeowners. As a potential educational project, West Branch High School (WBHS) web design students could help start the website additions and/or improve the additional content.

**Action 2:** Develop maps for the current historic preservation district and potential preservation buildings

Sometimes maps are the best way of providing easily understandable information. The Commission should strive to store and provide up to date maps of historical buildings, potential historic places, and record map significant stories.

**Action 3:** Archive historic preservation materials and stories of West Branch's history with the West Branch Library, the Herbert Hoover Library, and the Heritage Museum.

### **Goal 4. Sponsor a Commission member, community member, or City staff person to obtain grant writing training.**

Applying for grants can be a lengthy process for small towns. The HPC should seek to receive grant writing training or sponsor a community member to participate in grant writing courses. This will help West Branch become more competitive and more assertive when seeking grant opportunities to improve the health, safety, and welfare of its town. Some staff members suggested that managing a grant program is a concern here.<sup>18</sup> Special attention should be given to this concern, and the possibilities of hiring a consultant to carry out the management of the grant process could be a solution.

### **Goal 5. Seek approval from the current owner of Traveler's Rest to add the site to the national registry, and, if approval is received, start the application process**

Traveler's Rest is one of West Branch's best kept secrets. Some Iowans only acknowledge West Branch with President Herbert Hoover, but John Brown's historic Underground Railroad routes passed through West Branch. Although the Springdale house where John Brown stayed in the winter of 1858 is no longer standing, Traveler's Rest, a hotel which housed John Brown briefly, is still standing in West Branch. The house does qualify as a Hoover Medallion Home and it is especially important for the town and should be placed on the national register. However, the HPC should seek the homeowner's permission first.

The National Park Service has a program which periodically provides assistance to landmarks in the Network to Freedom.<sup>19</sup> The West Branch HPC will seek out and investigate if joining the Network to Freedom program is beneficial and feasible for them.

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<sup>18</sup> During the August 1<sup>st</sup> public hearing on the Historic Preservation Plan draft

<sup>19</sup> Based on grant history on grants.gov and the Network of Freedom website, grants are funded inconsistently. In the early 2000's they were well funded, then funding stopped, and increased from 2006-2008. The last grant given was in 2014.

## **Goal 6. Successfully complete an application for the Town Hall to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places**

Guidelines to getting started on national registry applications include:

Action 1: Research and gather information on the historic events and significant stories taking place at the Town Hall;

Action 2: Survey the architecture and materials of the building; Use Appendix V Paragraph 2 Pg.32;

Action 3: Follow the local landmark designation process in Appendix V Pg. 32;

Action 4: Start the register application process found on the Sect. of Interior's Website;

Action 5: There are grants for a consultant to complete action 2 and 5 for the City of West Branch. However, there are some volunteers in West Branch who have experience registering buildings.<sup>20</sup>

## **Goal 7. Establish a residential historic preservation program for housing and neighborhood development.**

**Action 1:** Create a Hoover Medallion Residential Program and a Century Medallion Program in partnership with the National Park Service.

The Hoover Medallion Program was previously run by Red Cedar Chapter No. 238 of Questers with an assisting grant from the Iowa Questers. Hoover Medallion Homes were houses that stood during Herbert Hoover's residency in West Branch and were given medallions in 1974. As of March of 2017, only 12 of 18 are currently standing that received medallions.

A.) Investigate if these houses still have medallions, whether there are more houses meeting the Hoover Medallion criteria, and investigate other ideas which may enhance a future program.

B.) Restarting the program and preserving these houses will help begin a residential historic housing program that many residents voiced concerns about in a February, 2017 Historic Preservation work session. Strengthening the City's ability to preserve and recruit historic housing preservation will help encourage housing revitalization.

C.) Create an application process for homeowners interested in the Hoover Medallion Program and homeowners looking to preserve and revitalize their historic houses.

D.) Develop recruitment goals for Hoover Medallion Houses.

E.) Develop a strong marketing and outreach plan to boost participation.

F.) Develop a plan to advertise historic houses, such as small signs for people to read as they walk or bike by Hoover Homes. If such a program exists, it will increase awareness and encourage visiting nearby historic neighborhoods.

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<sup>20</sup> An individual who attended the August 1, 2017 meeting named Dan Rice offered to help with this process. Contact the Historic Preservation Commission for further information or the authors of this plan.

**Action 2: Encourage historic preservation and revitalization of local preserved residential properties by establishing a historic housing incentive and financing program.**

Historically recognized homes tend to increase in value faster than other homes, but it can be costly to find materials and maintain the house. Incentives such as tax abatements, tax credits, freezing assessed home values over a number of years, and financial aid will help reduce possible burdens of owning historic homes and will increase the quality of the housing in West Branch.

Examples: The City of Bloomfield, Iowa applied for CDBG grants and used them to put rooftop apartments above their town square.<sup>21</sup> Dubuque, Iowa has received numerous state tax credits to improve its historic district.<sup>22</sup>

**Action 3: Develop a Historic Housing recruitment and real estate packet.**

A good historic housing program should encourage owning or selling houses and should relieve doubts in maintaining an older home. The Preservation Commission can work with realtors to develop a real estate packet, which provides positive information about owning, selling, recruiting, and maintaining older preserved housing.

**Action 4: Seek partnerships with Iowa City organizations to facilitate the sharing of historic preservation techniques and materials needed to ensure proper preservation takes place in West Branch**

Providing information to the public is an important part of West Branch's plan to preserve its older housing. The City and its Preservation Commission should plan to receive preservation training, provide a list of developers who are experienced in maintain older homes, and provide a list of businesses that specialize in preserving older material for restoring and revitalizing buildings.

**Goal 8. Develop a list of potential historic properties such as the Friends Church, other downtown buildings, and other churches that may be of historical significance to West Branch.**

West Branch community members have expressed a lot of interest in historical areas of the town. It is important for the City of West Branch to document significant historical places and provide that information for citizens. This can lead to future preservation activity but also provides additional information on the history of West Branch.

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<sup>21</sup> 2017 City of Bloomfield Website Section Community/News Under the Street Scape Section  
<http://www.cityofbloomfield.org/index.php/community-news>

<sup>22</sup> Lipsman, Zhong Jin and Mike. 2009. *Iowa's Historic Preservation and Cultural and Entertainment*. Des Moines, Iowa: Tax Research and Program Analysis Section Iowa Department of Revenue

**Goal 9. Partner with the Parks and Recreation Commission, Cedar County, and Johnson County to investigate the possibility of an Underground Railroad biking trail following John Brown's Freedom Route.**

An idea that could make West Branch unique is preserving the Underground Railroad that John Brown traveled. Establishing a bike route would encourage more local tourism, provide education for the local public, and increase West Branch's economic advantage in historic tourism. There are many biking grants as well as historic grants that could be used to help fund such a project. Cedar County recently has shown interest in applying for cultural affairs grant programs, and coordinating with the county might provide additional resources. Johnson County is expecting that in 2023 that county's trail construction leading from Iowa City will be completed. This construction includes a separate bike path from Iowa City to West Branch and follows the Freedom Trail.

**Goal 10. Maintain and strengthen economic activity in West Branch's current Historic District in coordination with the West Branch Economic Development Group.**

**Action 1:** Collaborate with the Hoover Museum, the National Park Service, the Heritage Museum, local businesses, the Presidential Inn, and frequently visited regional locations to promote visiting West Branch's Historic District.

Members of the Historic Preservation Commission should design a brochure and other advertising materials while partnering with other regional tourist areas to promote historic West Branch and regional destinations. Participants in the August 1, 2017 meeting suggested there were brochures but the brochures probably have not been distributed lately and revisiting this action item is recommended.

**Action 2:** Partner and act in guidance with the West Branch Economic Development Group on ways to promote advertising and seeking grant/funding opportunities for historical properties.

Working together is an important aspect of small town historic life. Businesses and houses in the Historic Preservation Districts should advertise together creating name recognition for all historic partners. Similar to Marion, Iowa, West Branch should develop a plan to advertise shopping, opening a business, and visiting historic downtown West Branch.<sup>23</sup>

**Goal 11. Start the process for story telling about West Branch, which could be done through a book, documentary, or other creative options.**

**Action 1:** Collaborate and coordinate with local newspapers, the Hoover Museum, National Park Service, and local historians to record their history of West Branch.

**Action 2** By the end of 2023, recruit a committee tasked with telling the story of 175 years of West Branch.

If the HPC wants to follow previous major year celebrations, such as the 150 sesquicentennial book on the history of West Branch, it will be helpful if the West Branch HPC starts the coordinating processes. Based on the 150-year book committee, it was a 2 ½ year process to recruit members and complete a book. Based on that timeframe, at the end of this Historic Plan in 2023, the HPC should start seeking a committee dedicated to celebrating and telling the story of 175 years in West Branch.

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<sup>23</sup> 2010 Uptown Marion, Iowa Streetscape Plan <http://www.cityofmarion.org/home/showdocument?id=3497> pg. 16 and 19

## Maintaining CLG Status and Annual Reviews

The West Branch Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) intends to complete as many goals as possible. In accordance with maintaining a certified local government (CLG) status and good planning practices, the HPC will meet annually to review the commission's progress. The following is the CLG checklist which will be used for the Commission's annual review process. A timeline for implementation is also provided below the checklist.

### "The Commission

- Members are all officially appointed by the Mayor/ Board of Supervisors.
- Members who are continuing on the commission are officially re-appointed by the Mayor or Board of Supervisors.
- No vacant positions.
- Demonstrated positive interest in historic preservation.
- Members should have the time to attend meetings and support projects.

### Meetings

- Minimum three times a year but realistically and minimally a commission should be meeting quarterly if not bimonthly.
- There is a regular meeting day, time, and location.
- An announcement and the agenda is posted 24 hours before the meeting.
- Follow the agenda, do not stray off agenda topics. Be concise and to the point in discussions.
- There is a written set of minutes for every official meeting.
- The public is welcome to do business only when there is a Quorum of members present. Any time a quorum of commissioners gathers, that is considered an official meeting and must be conducted in adherence to Chapter 21 of the Iowa Code.

### Other Responsibilities

- Report regularly to your mayor and city council or county board of supervisors.
- Comply with local and state regulations regarding conflict of interest.
- Comply with State Gift Law 4. Meet CLG program requirements.
- Operate in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines.
- Set up a system for on-going survey, evaluation and registration.
- Maintain a Historic Property Inventory that complies with the State's. Store inventory and other commission in a city or county-owned facility that is controlled but accessible.
- Prepare and follow an annual work plan.
- Meet annual historic preservation training requirement.
- Complete a minimum of one historic preservation activity a year.
- Review National Register of Historic Places nominations.
- Complete and submit the CLG Annual Report <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The checklist information for CLG Reviews was found on and copied from page 53, State Historical Preservation Office Certified Local Government Guide. <https://iowaculture.gov/sites/default/files/History%20-%20Grants%20-%20Certified%20Local%20Government%20-%20Grantee%20Handbook%20%28PDF%29.pdf>