



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION MEETING
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 18, 2026 - 6:30 P.M.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
110 N. POPLAR STREET, WEST BRANCH, IOWA
Council Quorum May Be Present

<https://zoom.us/j/5814699699> or
dial in phone number 1-312-626-6799 with Meeting ID 581 469 9699

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Approve Consent Agenda/Move to action.
 - a. Approve minutes from the June 17, 2026 meeting.
4. Non-Consent Agenda. /Move to action.
 - a. Review and Approve Historic Preservation Chapter with recommendations. / Move to Action.
6. Comments from Commission Members
7. Next regular Historic Preservation Commission meeting;
8. Adjourn



Chapter Nine

Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Vision & Goals

2050 Vision

The City of West Branch preserves its historic resources as a foundation of community identity and economic activity, including its connection to the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site. Through coordinated planning, education, and investment, the community protects historic assets, prioritizes access to cultural resources, and supports their continued use. Historic preservation is integrated into land use decisions, downtown development, and partnerships with local and regional institutions.

Goals

1. Identify, protect, and preserve the integrity of West Branch's historic assets
2. Increase public education and awareness of West Branch's history and historic resources
3. Promote West Branch's history to sustain and strengthen economic vitality

Goal HZ5 Address and reduce risks associated with human-caused or technological hazards with a proactive approach.	Objective HZ5.1 Improve emergency response capacity for transportation and technological incidents. • Strategy PR5.1a Improve emergency response coordination for incidents along Interstate-80 and other major transportation corridors. • Strategy HZ5.1b Strengthen local preparedness for cybersecurity threats affecting municipal systems and infrastructure. Objective HZ5.2 Improve infrastructure resilience and communication systems. • Strategy HZ5.2a Coordinate with regional agencies to maintain and update pipeline emergency response plans. • Strategy HZ5.2b Maintain and improve emergency communication infrastructure, including the radio network tower. Objective HZ5.3 Protect critical water infrastructure. • Strategy HZ5.3a Incorporate water storage infrastructure and irrigation systems into hazard mitigation and emergency response planning. • Strategy HZ5.3b Identify and pursue funding opportunities to modernize water and wastewater treatment infrastructure and improve long-term system resilience.
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Introduction

During the 2025-26 academic year, the City of West Branch worked with the University of Iowa's Initiative for Sustainable Communities (IISC) to update the West Branch Historic Preservation Plan. This chapter highlights key information from that document.

West Branch's history is deeply woven into the identity of the community and remains one of its greatest assets. From its origins as a small settlement to its connection with President Herbert Hoover, the city has preserved a remarkable collection of historic buildings and cultural resources that distinguish it from many communities of similar size.

The city's historic resources extend beyond individual landmarks to include its traditional downtown, established neighborhoods, civic buildings, and nationally significant historic sites. The presence of the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site and the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum attracts visitors from across the country, creating opportunities for heritage tourism and supporting local businesses. At the same time, many of West Branch's historic

buildings continue to serve everyday community needs, demonstrating how preservation and continued use can work together to strengthen the local economy and maintain the city's distinctive character.

Historic preservation is the identification, evaluation, and protection of significant historic resources. Historic preservation supports environmental stewardship by encouraging the continued use of existing buildings and infrastructure. It strengthens community identity, fosters public appreciation of local heritage, and contributes to economic vitality through tourism, downtown investment, and the rehabilitation of historic structures.

The city's historic assets, including its downtown, residential neighborhoods, and its connection to the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, reflect the community's development and cultural significance. Preservation efforts not only protect these resources but to support broader planning goals related to economic development, land use, and community character.



Figure 9.1 Location of Historic District Boundaries
– Downtown District and Travelers Rest Inn



Existing Conditions

In 2026, the City of West Branch updated its Historic Preservation Plan, which provides a framework for preserving the community's historic resources. Building upon the city's previous preservation efforts, the updated plan identifies strategies to protect historic buildings and neighborhoods, strengthen partnerships, expand public education and heritage tourism, pursue Certified Local Government (CLG) designation, and better integrate historic preservation into community planning and economic development

West Branch Historic Preservation District

The West Branch Historic Preservation District includes a portion of downtown, as shown in Figure 9.1. and contains several of the city's most significant historic structures.

The district also includes one noncontiguous property, the historic Traveler's Rest Inn. West Branch's historic resources extend beyond the district and include several significant sites that contribute to the community's identity.

Historic Properties

A 2023 citywide historic resource survey effort led by the Historic Planning Commission (HPC) identified approximately 185 buildings and structures with historic or architectural significance, including residential, commercial, institutional, and civic properties.

These resources collectively contribute to the city's distinctive character and sense of place. Fifteen properties are individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, while many additional buildings retain historic integrity and contribute to the character of established neighborhoods and downtown.

The Herbert Hoover National Historic Site is a nationally significant historical and cultural resource located adjacent to downtown West Branch. Together, these historic assets provide an important foundation for preservation, heritage tourism, and community revitalization.

Preservation & Design Policies

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) serves as the primary local body responsible for guiding preservation efforts, reviewing projects, and supporting policy implementation with guidance and support by City staff. These efforts are complemented by partnerships with organizations such as Main Street West Branch, the Hoover Presidential Foundation, and the Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, and other local and regional stakeholders. West Branch participates in the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) of Iowa Certified Local Government program, which provides access to technical assistance, training, and exclusive funding opportunities.

West Branch utilizes Main Street Iowa's Guidelines Principles for Design and the HPC utilizes these principles to guide its decision-making. Further design guidelines can be found in the City of West Branch Book of Code Chapter 29, Historic Preservation District Boundaries and Regulations.

Key Recommendations

The following goals and strategies are drawn from the 2026 Historic Preservation Plan.

Goal 1 – Identify, Protect, and Preserve the Integrity of West Branch’s Historic Assets

West Branch’s historic resources form the foundation of the community’s identity and sense of place. Protecting these assets requires a proactive approach that combines policy, documentation, sustainable funding, and ongoing capacity building. This goal establishes the framework for identifying and safeguarding the full range of the community’s historic character – from nationally recognized landmarks to locally significant properties.

Strategy 1.1 – Identify and Protect West Branch’s Historically Significant Properties

Identify appropriate mechanisms to protect historically significant properties, utilizing information gathered in the 2023 property survey as a starting point for further investigation. For properties that meet the criteria, actively pursue listing in the National Register of Historic Places to unlock federal protections and funding

eligibility. For properties that do not meet National Register criteria but contribute meaningfully to West Branch’s historic character and cultural heritage, establish a local landmark designation program to ensure they receive appropriate recognition and protection.

Strategy 1.2 – Pursue Funding to Support Preservation and Revitalization Efforts

Identify, pursue, and leverage federal, state, and private funding opportunities to support the preservation, rehabilitation, and revitalization of West Branch’s historic resources.

Strategy 1.3 – Build Preservation Capacity Among Commission Members and City Staff

Provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities to Historic Preservation Commission members and a designated city staff liaison to strengthen technical skills, expand knowledge of preservation standards, and improve the community’s ability to administer an effective local preservation program.

Goal 2 – Increase Public Education and Awareness of West Branch’s History and Historic Resources

The public’s understanding and appreciation of local history are essential to sustaining West Branch’s historic resources and long-term preservation efforts. This goal focuses on expanding educational programming, improving access to historical information and documentation, cultivating meaningful institutional partnerships, and developing the next generation of preservation advocates in West Branch.

Strategy 2.1 – Develop and Expand Historic Preservation Educational Programming

Partner with local institutions to create and promote a range of educational opportunities that highlight West Branch’s history and the importance of historic preservation for diverse audiences, including residents, students, business owners, and visitors. Programming may include workshops, field trips for students, walking tours, interpretive signage, and community events designed to deepen public appreciation for the community’s historic character. Connecting

young people to the community's unique history fosters early appreciation for preservation and builds long-term civic investment in West Branch's historic character.

Strategy 2.2 – Improve Public Access to Historic Preservation Information and Documentation

Update and maintain a dedicated section of the City of West Branch website featuring historic surveys, designation information, preservation guidelines, and community history resources. Improving the visibility and accessibility of this information ensures that residents, property owners, researchers, and visitors can easily find and use preservation-related materials.

Strategy 2.3 – Archive Historic Preservation Materials and Community History Records

Work with the West Branch Public Library, the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, and the West Branch Heritage Foundation to archive and preserve historic materials, oral histories, photographs, and documentation of West Branch's historic resources.

Strategy 2.4 – Develop Local Internship and Volunteer Opportunities in Historic Preservation

Create structured internship and volunteer opportunities in partnership with local institutions including the University of Iowa to engage students and young professionals in hands-on historic preservation work.

Goal 3: Promote West Branch's History to Sustain and Strengthen Economic Vitality

West Branch's historic character is not only a source of community pride can be a meaningful driver of economic activity. Heritage tourism, a thriving historic district, and a well-connected downtown attract visitors, support local businesses, and encourage reinvestment in the community. This goal focuses on leveraging West Branch's historic assets strategically to strengthen the local economy, expand the boundaries of historic recognition, and create a more visible and welcoming experience.

Strategy 3.1 – Explore Opportunities to Update West Branch's Historic Preservation District.

Work with city staff to identify and assess adjacent properties for potential inclusion in the

Historic Preservation District. Determine recommended boundary updates to ensure the district accurately reflects the community's historic character and provides meaningful protection for significant properties.

Strategy 3.2 – Implement a Wayfinding Plan to Connect the Hoover Historic Site and West Branch's Historic Preservation District.

Develop and implement cohesive wayfinding that connects historic assets and important landmarks. Utilize wayfinding to increase foot traffic in the historic Main Street district and encourage visitors and residents to explore and engage historical assets throughout West Branch.

Strategy 3.3 – Collaborate with Local Partners to Promote the Historic Preservation District.

Build and sustain active partnerships with the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum, the National Park Service, and Main Street West Branch to jointly promote West Branch's Historic Preservation District as a heritage tourism destination.

Conclusion

Historic preservation is most effective when it is integrated into the community's broader planning and development efforts rather than treated as a standalone initiative.

West Branch community leaders and residents recognized that local historic buildings, sites, and stories are valuable community assets that contribute to economic development, tourism, sustainability, housing, education, and overall quality of life. Preservation planning should continue to balance protection of significant historic resources with opportunities for appropriate growth, ensuring that new development complements the community's established character while allowing it to evolve over time.

Local design standards and preservation policies emphasize maintaining historic character, prioritizing rehabilitation over replacement, and ensuring compatibility between new and existing development. These standards help guide incremental change while preserving the integrity of historic areas.

West Branch can best guide local historic preservation efforts through collaboration among local governments, property owners, historical organizations, educational institutions, nonprofit groups, and state and federal partners. West Branch hopes to soon receive Certified Local Government (CLG) designation, which opens new opportunities for the community to work with state and federal officials.

Regularly updating historic resource inventories, pursuing appropriate historic designations, and coordinating preservation efforts with land use planning, downtown revitalization, tourism, and economic development initiatives help ensure that preservation remains an active part of community decision-making.

By viewing historic preservation as an investment in the future rather than simply the protection of the past, communities can leverage their historic assets to attract visitors, encourage reinvestment, enhance quality of life, and preserve the distinctive character that makes them unique.

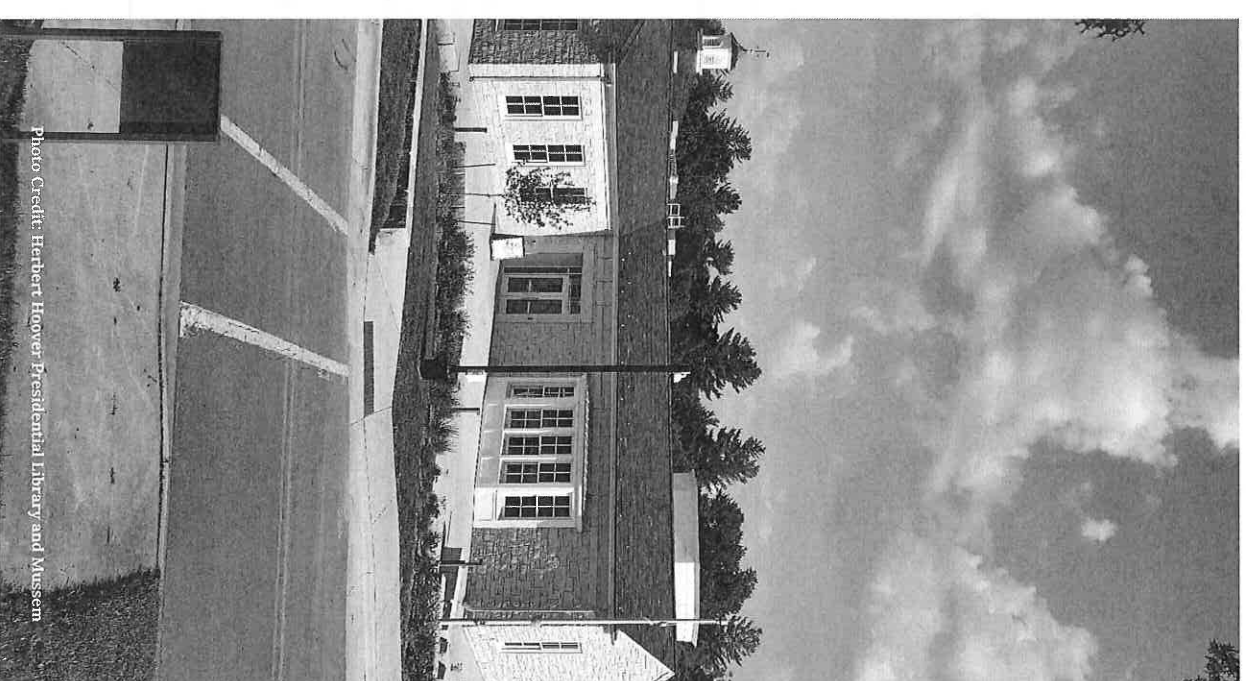


Photo Credit: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum

Goal HP1 Identify, protect, and preserve the integrity of West Branch's historic assets	• Strategy HP1.1 Identify and protect West Branch's historically significant properties. • Strategy HP1.2 Pursue funding to support preservation and revitalization efforts. • Strategy HP1.3 Build preservation capacity among commission members and City staff.
Goal HP2 Increase public education and awareness of West Branch's history and historic resources	• Strategy HP2.1 Develop and expand historic preservation educational programming. • Strategy HP2.2 Improve public access to historic preservation information and documentation. • Strategy HP2.3 Archive historic preservation materials and community history records. • Strategy HP2.4 Develop local internship and volunteer opportunities in historic preservation.
Goal HP3 Promote West Branch's history to sustain and strengthen economic vitality	• Strategy HP3.1 Explore opportunities to update West Branch's Historic Preservation District. • Strategy HP3.3 Implement a wayfinding plan to connect the Hoover Historic Site and West Branch's Historic Preservation District. • Strategy HP3.3 Collaborate with local partners to promote West Branch's Historic Preservation District.