

Iowa City Historic Preservation Handbook

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*Contains guidelines for the historic review
of properties in historic and conservation
districts and historic landmarks, and
an explanation of the historic preservation
process and regulations.*



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I.0 Historic Preservation and Conservation in Iowa City

I.1 “Why should a community like Iowa City care about historic preservation?”

“The simple answer is that conserving old buildings and neighborhoods makes a good community better. Iowa City is blessed with a collection of fine, well-maintained older neighborhoods and individual landmarks which are recognized and appreciated by the entire community. Historic preservation has the potential to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of current and future residents.”

Marlys Svendsen

Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan

In 1992, the Iowa City City Council adopted the *Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan* that was prepared by architectural historian Marlys Svendsen. The plan carefully and thoughtfully evaluated Iowa City’s historic buildings and neighborhoods and set forth a plan of action for their stewardship. Historic neighborhoods and buildings are protected by the designation of historic districts, conservation districts and historic landmarks. Designation provides for the careful management of these resources by the Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission through the historic review process. The purpose of historic review is to preserve or conserve historic architectural resources by discouraging alterations that either destroy the unique characteristics of a building or alter the character of historic neighborhoods.

I.2 The Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission

The Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission was created by local ordinance in December 1982. Its mission statement as described in the Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan is “To identify, protect, and preserve the community’s historic resources in order to enhance the quality of life and economic well-being of current and future generations.” Its members are citizen volunteers appointed by the City Council. Many of the members reside in historic districts and have expertise in fields related to historic preservation.

The Commission is responsible for surveying historic neighborhoods and recommending to City Council neighborhoods that should be designated as conservation or historic districts, as well as individual properties that should be designated as historic landmarks. Once districts and landmarks are identified and designated, the Commission reviews proposed changes to the exteriors of these properties through the historic review process.

I.3 Districts and Landmarks

Historic and conservation districts, and historic landmarks, are designated by ordinance by the Iowa City City Council with recommendations from the Historic Preservation Commission, the State Historical Society of Iowa, and the Planning and Zoning Commission. Recommendations for the historic designation of districts and properties are also received from professional architectural historians following an intensive survey and evaluation of a neighborhood’s historic properties and resources.

Historic Districts

Historic districts are geographically cohesive areas with significant concentrations of buildings and other resources that possess a high degree of historic integrity. Historic districts are typically first nominated to and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and then designated as local historic districts. Designation as a local district provides the Historic Preservation Commission with the authority to review changes to properties that may affect the historic character of the property and the district. The overall character of a historic district must convey a distinct sense of time and place.

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts are neighborhoods that appear similar to historic districts in character. However, because they have fewer properties that retain a high degree of historic integrity or contribute to a distinct sense of time and place within the neighborhood, they do not qualify as historic districts based on State Code. Because they are still considered worthy of protection, City Council may designate these neighborhoods for historic conservation.

Iowa City Historic Landmarks

Historic landmarks are buildings that are individually significant for their architectural and/or cultural merits. Like historic districts, these properties are typically listed on the National Register of Historic Places, or are eligible for listing on the National Register.

I.4 Classification of Properties in Districts

Properties in conservation and historic districts are classified based on their historic and architectural significance and integrity. Because neighborhoods change over time, these districts typically have some structures that are not historic or that have been severely altered. Buildings in historic or conservation districts may range from outstanding historic landmarks to architecturally incompatible, modern structures. Depending on the classification of a property, certain exceptions to the guidelines or financial incentives may be applicable.

To determine the classification of a specific property in a historic or conservation district, refer to the *Table of Contents* to locate the appropriate district map that indicates the property's classification. To determine if a property has been designated a historic landmark, see section *12.0 Historic Landmarks*.

Contributing and Noncontributing Properties

When districts are evaluated and nominated for preservation and conservation, individual properties are classified as either contributing or noncontributing to the historic character of the proposed district.

Contributing Properties

In historic districts, to be classified as a contributing property the primary building must (1) have an architectural style and character that is clearly evident and (2) was constructed during the district's period of significance and relate to a significant historic context in the neighborhood's history. The period of significance and the historic context(s) for each district are determined by professional consultants prior to designation. Contributing properties in historic districts may be eligible for Federal, State and local tax incentives for substantial rehabilitation.

Conservation districts tend to exhibit a greater variety of building styles from different time periods and are less culturally cohesive, so their historic contexts are more loosely defined. The primary determining factors in classifying a property in a conservation district are (1) the historic integrity of the primary building and (2) the age of the primary building, which typically must be at least 50 years old at the time a district is designated.

Noncontributing and Nonhistoric Properties

Properties that are not classified as contributing are classified as noncontributing. Noncontributing properties have a primary building that has been significantly altered or that is nonhistoric. Nonhistoric buildings are buildings constructed after a district's period of significance and were generally less than 50 years old at the time the district was designated.

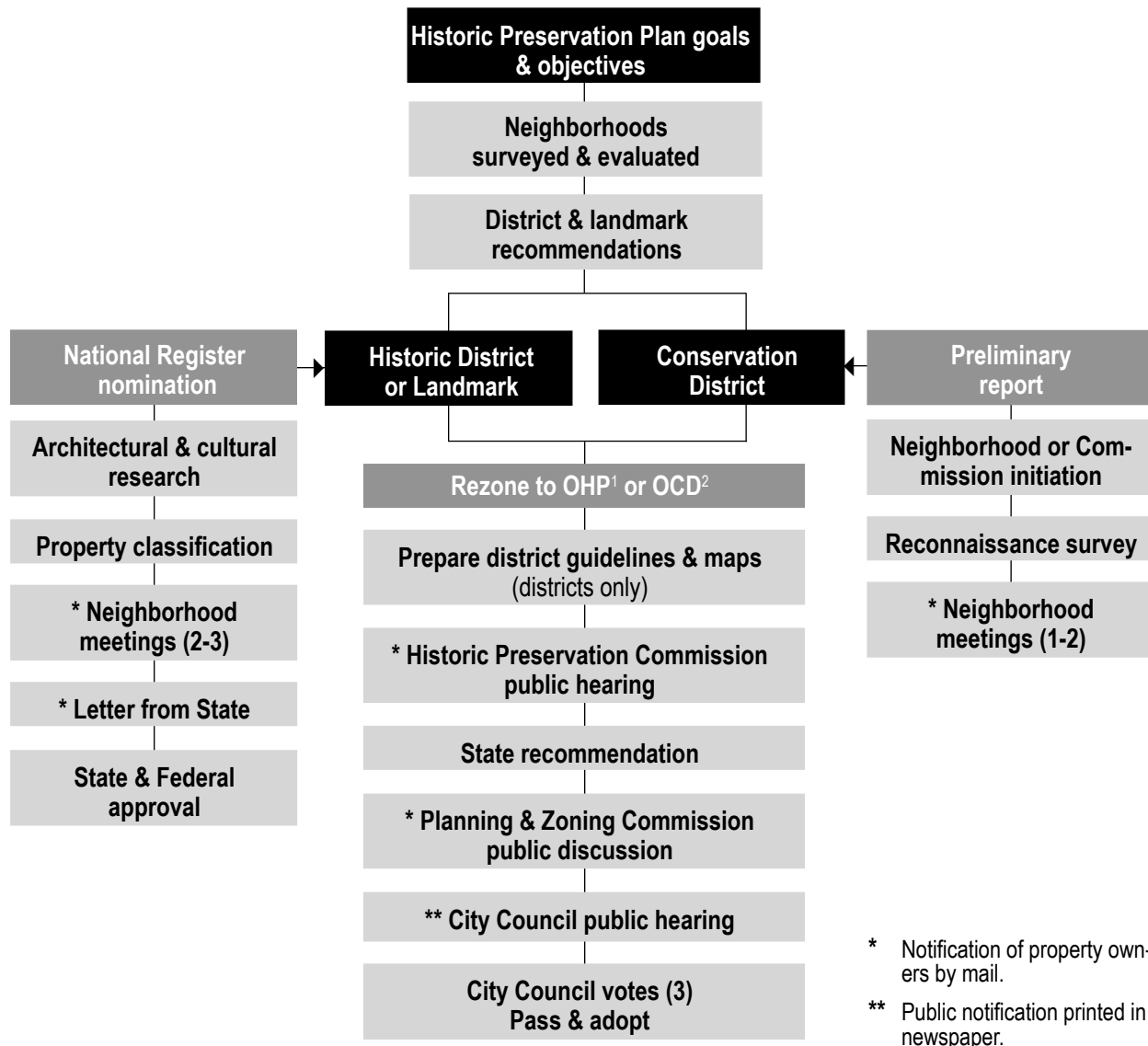
These properties are **NOT exempt** from historic preservation regulations, but exceptions to the guidelines are applicable. The rehabilitation of noncontributing historic buildings is encouraged. The demolition of existing nonhistoric buildings and construction of new, more architecturally compatible buildings is allowed.

During the process of preparing the survey and evaluation for each historic neighborhood and, for historic districts, the National Register of Historic Places nomination, each property is visually inspected and historically researched by a professional architectural historian. The Commission uses this information to determine the classification of each property. However, the Commission may vote to change the classification of a property under the following conditions:

1. Additional information is discovered that documents it has greater cultural significance than originally determined.
2. It is determined that the original research and inspection did not conclusively or accurately document the architectural or historic fabric of the property.
3. A property has been substantially altered since it was originally classified.

If an owner feels his or her property has been incorrectly classified, the owner may submit a letter to the Preservation Planner requesting that the property be re-evaluated. The Preservation Planner will submit the request, along with a report and recommendation, to the Commission for a determination.

I.5 Historic Designation Process



¹ Historic districts and landmarks are designated by rezoning a property or area to Historic Preservation Overlay (OHP).

² Conservation districts are designated by rezoning an area to Conservation District Overlay (OCD).

Landmarks and Key Properties

Landmarks are properties that are individually significant because of their architectural quality, integrity and historic or cultural significance. Iowa City has over 40 local historic landmarks that are subject to the historic preservation regulations. Properties classified as key are either landmarks or are eligible for designation as landmarks. Key properties are subject to the same historic preservation guidelines as contributing buildings in historic districts. Key properties and landmarks may be eligible for Federal, State and local tax incentives for substantial rehabilitation. See section 12.0 *Historic Landmarks* for a complete list of landmarks. Key properties are illustrated on the district maps in sections 14.0 through 17.0. For a list of properties located outside existing districts that are eligible for landmark designation, contact the Preservation Planner.

2.0 Historic Review

The historic preservation guidelines contained in this handbook will be used by the Historic Preservation Commission to determine if a proposed change to a landmark or property in a district is compatible with the historic character of the district and property. The intent of the historic review process is:

- To ensure that changes to landmarks and properties in districts do not substantially alter or destroy the defining architectural character of the building, site or neighborhood.
- To provide property owners, contractors and consultants with technical assistance and alternatives to ensure that proposed projects conform with the historic preservation guidelines.

2.1 When is Historic Review Required?

Historic review by the Commission is required for all construction projects that require a regulated permit, and change the exterior features of any property in a historic or conservation district, or any historic landmark. The proposed project must be approved by the Commission before a building permit will be issued by Housing and Inspection Services. Examples of common projects that require a regulated permit and historic review are:

- Application or reapplication of new siding.
- Replacement or addition of windows (including sash replacement).
- Porch construction, reconstruction or replacement.
- Construction of new dormers.
- Construction of additions.
- Construction of decks and ramps.
- Adding skylights.
- Demolition of a garage or other outbuilding.
- Removal of porches, trim, brackets, chimneys, dormers or other defining architectural features.
- Construction of a new garage.

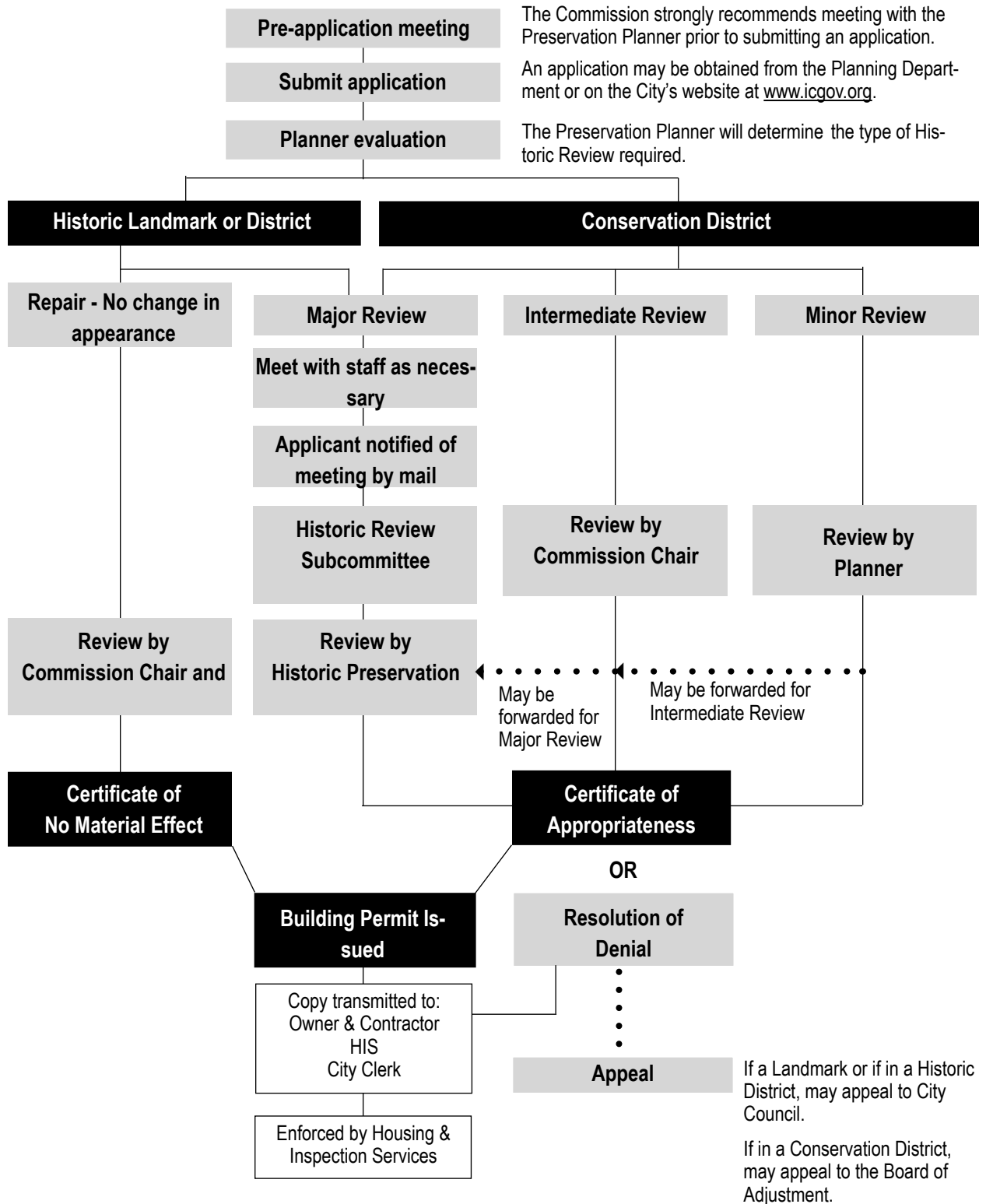
NOTE: The application of siding, window replacement, and demolition of portions of a building require a building permit for properties within districts and landmarks. For properties that are not within a historic or conservation district, and that have not been designated landmarks, these actions do not require a permit.

Examples of common projects that may not require a regulated permit and need not be reviewed by the Commission are:

- Exterior painting.
- Reapplication of roof shingles.
- Installation of new storm windows.
- Replacement of external gutters and downspouts.
- Window repair (excluding sash replacement).
- Construction of fences that are less than 6 feet high.
- Construction of accessory structures, such as garden sheds, less than 144 square feet in area.

A complete list of work exempt from permit can be found in *Amendments to: International Residential Code, International Building Code*, which is available through Housing and Inspection Services.

2.2 Historic Review Process



2.0 Historic Review

2.3 Application for Historic Review

An application for historic review must be submitted to the Preservation Planner. The application should include dimensioned drawings, sketches, photographs, text, product samples, or other exhibits that accurately portray the work to be done. The Commission may request additional information if it cannot fairly evaluate the application as submitted. A pre-application conference with the Preservation Planner is recommended to help ensure that a proposed project will comply with the guidelines. Application forms may be obtained from the Planning and Community Development Department, Housing and Inspection Services or on the web at www.icgov.org.

2.4 Major Review and Certificates of Appropriateness

Most applications for landmarks and properties in historic districts, and applications for significant changes in conservation districts, will require major review. These applications will be reviewed by the Historic Review Subcommittee, which is composed of three members of the Historic Preservation Commission. The Subcommittee will make recommendations to the Historic Preservation Commission and a quorum of the Commission will vote to approve or deny the application at its next regularly scheduled meeting. If a majority of the Commission votes to approve the application, a Certificate of Appropriateness will be issued to the owner and contractor, and will be filed with Housing and Inspection Services and the City Clerk.

2.5 Alternative Review in Conservation Districts

In conservation districts, there are two alternative types of review that are intended to shorten the historic review process. Intermediate review and minor review may be used to approve Certificates of Appropriateness for certain types of projects. The applicant, Preservation Planner, or Commission members may request that a minor review be treated as an intermediate review or that an intermediate review go to the full Commission.

Intermediate Review

For *contributing properties* in a conservation district, the following items may be approved by the Preservation Planner and Commission Chair or the Chair's designee:

- Alterations: All alterations except changes in window type, pattern or dimension, and addition of dormers.
- Additions: Decks located behind the primary structure.
- New construction: New outbuildings, provided they are located behind the rear plane of an existing primary structure.
- Demolition: Nonhistoric outbuildings and nonhistoric features of a primary building.
- Certificates of No Material Effect.

Minor Review

For *noncontributing properties* in a conservation district, the following items may be approved by the Preservation Planner:

- Alterations: All alterations except changes in window type, pattern or dimension, and addition of dormers.
- Additions: Decks located behind the primary structure and ramps.
- New construction: New outbuildings, provided they are located behind the rear plane of an existing primary structure.
- Demolition: Nonhistoric outbuildings and nonhistoric features of a primary building.
- Certificates of No Material Effect.

2.6 Certificates of No Material Effect

The Commission Chair and the Preservation Planner or their designees may issue a Certificate of No Material Effect if the work contemplated in the application will have no effect on the appearance of significant architectural features and review by the full Commission is not required.

2.7 Appeals

Applicants may appeal decisions of the Commission to the City Council for properties in historic districts and landmarks, and to the Board of Adjustment for properties in conservation districts. The Certificate of Appropriateness, or the Resolution of Denial, which states the reason for the decision, will be filed with the City Clerk within five days of the decision. The applicant has 10 days from the time it is filed with the Clerk to file a letter with the Preservation Planner requesting an appeal. The City Council or Board of Adjustment will determine if the decision of the Historic Preservation Commission was arbitrary or capricious, but neither the Council nor the Board has the authority to override a decision by the Commission if it is determined that it was not arbitrary or capricious.

3.0 About the Guidelines for Historic Preservation

The purpose of the historic preservation guidelines is to:

- Provide comprehensive design guidelines for construction projects to landmarks and properties within each district.
- Provide property owners with design criteria that will be the basis for approving or denying Certificates of Appropriateness.
- Identify the defining characteristics of each individual historic or conservation district.

In writing the historic preservation guidelines, the Historic Preservation Commission has made every effort to clarify the criteria for historic review. However, not every situation can be anticipated. The Commission, at its discretion, may allow some flexibility for unique properties and situations. The Preservation Planner is available to answer any questions, assist an owner or contractor with their project, and provide additional preservation information.

3.1 Iowa City Guidelines

These guidelines were written by the Iowa Historic Preservation Commission to address specifically the historic preservation issues in Iowa City and to provide more detailed guidance to property owners and builders as they design their construction projects. The guidelines are based on *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*, which can be found in section 9.0. The *Iowa City Guidelines* are the guidelines that will be used to evaluate most projects. If there are issues that are not addressed in these guidelines, then the Historic Preservation Commission will use *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation* and the *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*, which are guidelines for interpreting the *Standards*.

Typically, there are four types of projects that modify the exterior of landmarks or properties within districts. The *Iowa City Guidelines* are divided into four sections that correspond to these project types. These are:

- 4.0 *Iowa City Guidelines for Alterations*
- 5.0 *Iowa City Guidelines for Additions*
- 6.0 *Iowa City Guidelines for New Construction*
- 7.0 *Iowa City Guidelines for Demolition*

Alterations

Alterations are modifications to a site or to the exterior of a building that do not increase the size of the building's footprint. Most maintenance and remodeling projects such as siding repair, reconstruction or repair of historic porches, adding dormers to convert an attic space to a living space, and replacing doors and windows are considered alterations. These projects will be evaluated using *4.0 Iowa City Guidelines for Alterations*.

Additions

Construction that results in a larger building footprint, increases the building's overall height, or adds an attached structure to a building are additions. Additions include construction of a new room, porch, or deck. These projects will be evaluated using *5.0 Iowa City Guidelines for Additions* as well as *8.0 Neighborhood District Guidelines*.

Setback Additions

A setback addition is constructed behind an existing building, opposite the street facade, and is set back eight inches or more from the side walls. The roof of a setback addition can be no higher than the roof of the existing building. This results in an addition that is narrower and no taller than the building to which it is attached, and is therefore not highly visible from the street. Setback additions are encouraged because they have less impact on a historic building and district. Therefore, the guidelines for these structures are less stringent. Setback additions will be evaluated using *5.0 Iowa City Guidelines for Additions* as well as *8.0 Neighborhood District Guidelines*.

New Construction

Although most lots in conservation and historic districts are developed, there may be occasions where a new primary building or outbuilding is constructed. Outbuildings include garages, garden sheds, gazebos and other accessory structures that require a building permit. Under most circumstances, nonhistoric buildings and structures may be demolished and the lot redeveloped. However, the new building and the demolition must be approved by the Historic Preservation Commission before any building or demolition permits are issued. These projects will be evaluated using *6.0 Iowa City Guidelines for New Construction*, *8.0 Neighborhood District Guidelines* and if applicable *7.0 Iowa City Guidelines for Demolition*.

Demolition

Demolition involves the complete removal of a building or a portion of a building. Removal of dormers, decorative trim, porches, balusters, chimneys and other significant features requires a building permit for demolition, and therefore historic review. Demolition projects will be evaluated using *7.0 Iowa City Guidelines for Demolition*.

3.2 Exceptions to the Iowa City Guidelines

In order to provide flexibility for changes to properties in conservation districts, noncontributing properties in historic districts, and setback additions, a number of exceptions to the *Iowa City Guidelines* have been created. These exceptions are intended to provide additional flexibility in cases where a proposed construction project does not significantly affect the architectural character of a historic structure. These exceptions, where applicable, are listed at the end of each section of the guidelines.

3.3 Exceptions for Nonhistoric Properties

The historic preservation regulations are intended primarily to protect the character and integrity of historic properties and districts. The great majority of properties located in historic and conservation districts are historic properties, and were constructed in or before 1945. For the relatively small number of properties that are classified as nonhistoric properties and were constructed after the period of significance of a district, the Historic Preservation Commission may grant exceptions to the *Iowa City Guidelines*. In order to qualify for an exception, the proposed change to the exterior of a nonhistoric property must comply with the following criteria:

1. Does not further detract from the historic character of the district.
2. Does not create a false historic character.
3. Is compatible with the style and character of the nonhistoric property.

Examples of exceptions that may be granted for nonhistoric properties are:

- Use of vinyl and vinyl clad wood windows and snap-in muntin bars for replacement windows.
- Installation of sliding patio doors or other modern-style doors.
- Use of synthetic siding on existing buildings provided the replacement siding is similar in appearance to the original siding.
- Use of synthetic siding on new accessory structures.
- Use of concrete for a porch floor provided the floor is less than 18 inches above grade.
- Use of dimensional lumber for porch floor boards provided the gap between boards is no more than 1/8 inch.
- Alternative baluster and handrail designs.

3.4 Additional Historic Preservation Guidelines

Neighborhood District Guidelines

The size and location of a primary building on a site are some of the defining characteristics of historic and conservation districts. The size of buildings, lots and yards, as well as the architectural character of the buildings varies by district. Section 8.0 *Neighborhood District Guidelines* deals specifically with site, scale, structure location, and architectural style for properties within individual historic or conservation districts.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the *Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings* are national standards for historic preservation. The Secretary of the Interior defines rehabilitation as "the process of returning a property to a state of utility, through repair or alteration, which makes possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions and features of the property which are significant to its historic, architectural, and cultural value." The goals of the *Standards* can be summarized as follows:

1. Identify and preserve those materials and features that are important in defining the building's historic character.
2. Undertake routine maintenance on historic materials and features. Routine maintenance generally involves the least amount of work needed to preserve the materials and features of the building.
3. Repair damaged or deteriorated historic materials and features.
4. Replace severely damaged or deteriorated historic materials and features in kind.

The *Iowa City Guidelines* are based on the *Standards*, but they provide more specific guidance. Occasionally alterations are proposed to properties that were not anticipated in the *Iowa City Guidelines*. When this occurs, the Historic Preservation Commission will refer to the *Standards* when deciding on a Certificate of Appropriateness. The *Standards* are located in section 9.0.

Design Guidelines for Multi-Family Buildings in the Central Planning District

These guidelines are based on the *Multi-Family Residential Design Standards in the Central Planning District* of the Iowa City Zoning Code and apply to the construction of buildings with three or more dwelling units. Typically, a new multi-family building would be evaluated by the Staff Design Review Committee. However, if it is located within a historic or conservation district, the Historic Preservation Commission is responsible for design review and has adapted the

original guidelines to be more applicable to districts. Within districts, more weight is given to the architectural style of the proposed building and its compatibility with other historic structures. The *Design Guidelines for Multi-Family Buildings* are located in section 10.0.

3.5 Building Code and Zoning Ordinances

The requirements of the building code and the zoning ordinance must be met in addition to the requirements of the *Iowa City Guidelines*. For certain requirements such as mass, scale, size, siting considerations, and setbacks from the street, the *Iowa City Guidelines* may be more stringent than the building code or the zoning ordinance. The Historic Preservation Commission does **NOT** review projects for compliance with the building code or zoning ordinance. Please consult with Housing and Inspection Services to ensure the project complies with these regulations.

3.6 Alternative Designs

Alternative design solutions or exceptions to the *Iowa City Guidelines*, the *Design Guidelines for Multi-Family Buildings*, or the *Neighborhood District Guidelines* may be considered by the Historic Preservation Commission. The intent in considering alternative designs is to allow architectural flexibility in exceptional circumstances. The intent is not to reduce the scope or quality of work required by these guidelines.