Form-based Guidelines for Historic Preservation

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What do we want to protect?
Unique architectural / community character
What specifically are some of the “character-defining” elements of the Vinton Street area?
The unique diagonal street pattern
The bend in the street that creates a view of the buildings at the end of the street
The bend in the street that creates a view of the buildings at the end of the street
The sense of place created by the continuous wall of commercial buildings that line Vinton Street.
The historic architecture, much of it Italianate in the commercial area, and various historic styles in the surrounding residential areas.
What do we want to prevent?
Loss of architectural / community character.
Overview

• National Register of Historic Places
  Accomplishments
  – Thousands of historic surveys have been done
  – Thousands of historic districts have been designated
  – Thousands of older neighborhoods have been revitalized
  – Tens of thousands buildings have been preserved
Overview

• National Register of Historic Places Disappointments
  – National Register status alone does not provide protection of historic sites and buildings
  – Many potential historic districts are never designated
  – Each year more and more historic buildings are altered or destroyed
Overview

• National Register / Local Historic District Problems
  – National Register District Designations do not prevent damage unless Federal tax credits are used.
  – Local historic district designations are usually an “all or nothing” approach
  – Property owners and communities are often concerned about restrictions on their property
  – Incentives are often insufficient to overcome owner concerns
Overview

• New Tools for Historic Preservation
  – Form-based guidelines
  – Pattern books
  – Zoning overlay districts
New Preservation Tools

• Form-based Guidelines
  – Originally created to provide design guidelines for new development
  – Used by cities as an alternative to land use oriented zoning codes
  – Can also be used to provide protection of historic neighborhoods and properties

What is a Form-Based Code?

“Form-based codes foster predictable built results and a high-quality public realm by using physical form as the organizing principle of the code…” - Form-based Codes Institute

- They:
  - Promote specific urban forms
  - Are more focused on what is wanted vs. what is not wanted
  - Are not overly focused on the activities that occur within buildings
New Preservation Tools

• Pattern Books
  – Used to document the physical characteristics of historic sites and buildings
  – Combines site related form-based guidelines and historic building guidelines
  – Helps inform the public of area’s uniqueness
  – Provides a “menu” of features to be preserved
  – When used with Secretary of Interior Standards they provide clear guidance for preservation
New Preservation Tools

- **Zoning Overlay Districts**
  - Does not replace base zoning and protects basic property rights
  - Allows property owners and community leaders to agree upon the features to be protected
  - Allows for a level of protection for areas lacking a historic district designation
  - Can be easier to achieve than local historic district designations

Sec. 55-601. NCE neighborhood conservation/enhancement district.

Sec. 55-602. Purpose.

The NCE neighborhood conservation/enhancement overlay district is intended to help preserve unique pedestrian-oriented land use, urban design, and other distinctive characteristics of older established neighborhoods and commercial areas as well as to enhance more recently developed neighborhoods and commercial areas in order to implement the urban design element of the city’s comprehensive plan. The NCE district, used in combination with a base district, allows changes in permitted uses and adjustments to site development standards in order to respond to the needs of a specific residential neighborhood or neighborhood commercial area. In addition, the NCE district may include supplementary site development standards and guidelines, based upon a neighborhood conservation/enhancement plan adopted by the city council as a part of the city’s comprehensive plan.

(Code 1980, § 55-602; Ord. No. 37810, § 5, 8-14-07)

Sec. 55-603. Qualifications for designation; manner of designation; applicability; conflict of provisions; permitted uses.

(a) Qualifications for designation. To qualify for adoption, a proposed NCE district shall satisfy the following requirements:

1. Minimum area. Each NCE district shall include a contiguous area of at least five acres, including intervening streets, alleys and private ways.
2. Status of area at time of adoption. The area included in each NCE district shall be located in one of the following categories:
   a. Conservation. Areas intended to be conserved must have been recorded as a subdivision with the county register of deeds no later than 1960.
   b. Enhancement. Areas intended to be enhanced must have been recorded as a subdivision with the county register of deeds no earlier than 1981.
Process

• Review historic survey
• Document neighborhood character
• Create a catalog/Pattern Book
• Conduct neighborhood workshops
• Create Local Historic District / Overlay District
Process

- Historic Survey
  - Survey to document the historical importance of the area and determine the potential for designation of individual buildings and districts
  - Identifies important residents and businesses
  - Identifies important historical events that have taken place there
  - Provides historical photos and drawings of the potential district
Reconnaissance Survey of Portions of South Omaha
Chapter 3. Recommendations

Views of houses within the Proposed Vinton Street Residential Historic District

Views of houses within the Proposed Ostronic Heights Residential Historic District

Figure 4. Map Showing Boundaries of the Proposed Vinton Street Commercial Historic District
A Proactive Role of Preservation within the Survey Area

Neighborhoods within the survey area have a significant amount of historic preservation potential, whether in commercial or residential areas. Using locally sponsored preservation tools, the city and local preservation-oriented groups can foster preservation efforts within the survey area. The goal is to have preservation become an embraced community value, similar to public safety and quality education.

A variety of preservation activities include:

- Working with neighborhood associations to understand area history and to include preservation as a priority of their future plans and organization.
- Organizing events to increase public education on preservation issues.
- Designating local landmarks and districts.
- Listing properties in the National Register.
- Promoting walking tours.
- Strengthening local historical societies, preservation-oriented groups, and museums.
- Continued survey efforts on behalf of Omaha CLG and the NSHS.

Preservation tools available include:

- Promoting tax credits to help stimulate downtown and neighborhood revitalization - the preservation and continued use of the historic buildings in the survey area can contribute to a vibrant and economically successful downtown and surrounding neighborhoods. The historic tax credit program and the adaptive reuse of historic buildings are two tools of preservation. For buildings that were constructed before 1936, not eligible for the National Register, and used for non-residential uses, the Internal Revenue Service administers a 10 percent tax credit.

- Promoting the use of state and federal tax credits available for properties listed in the National Register.

For more information on tax credits contact the National Park Service (NPS) or visit their brochure on the web at www2.cr.nps.gov/tps/tax/brochure2.htm or the NSHS.

- Establishing local design guidelines-

Design guidelines recommend practices to improve and protect the visual character and defining features of a historic commercial district or neighborhood. They offer property owners guidance for the sensitive rehabilitation of the exterior of historic buildings. Design guidelines could suggest techniques for the restoration of storefronts, appropriate alterations, or suitable replacement of windows. For example, property owners could learn appropriate cleaning and repointing methods for masonry that would not damage the structural stability of the bricks, yet would still renew the appearance of a building.

Each community can tailor a set of guidelines to a particular area such as Vinton Street or other areas within South Omaha, to address issues for specific building types. Design guidelines should follow the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation and the National Park Service’s guidelines.
Process

• Catalog/Pattern Book Steps
  – Public record search to
    • Document the physical characteristics of the neighborhood and buildings
  • Obtain information on public infrastructure / spaces
  • Obtain information on architectural styles, building floor plans, and elevation
  – Photo survey to document existing characteristics of the area and buildings
  – Physical measurements of the area and buildings
Process

- **Catalog/Pattern Book Components**
  - Documents the key physical characteristics of the historic area through site plans, drawings, photos, and written description
  - Set of guidelines that, if followed, will help maintain, preserve, and restore the physical character of the district
Examples of catalog/pattern book components:

• Setbacks; siting
• Massing
• Roof shapes; pitch; eave details
• Facade composition; window and door placement
• Window and door types and proportion
• Materials
• Porches and porch details
• Signs
• Fences
• Street alignment; curb types; pavement; radii
• Planting
- Massing
- Roof shapes
- Facade composition
Architectural Features

While details may vary considerably, the typical late nineteenth and early twentieth century commercial building is made up of a series of standard components as noted on the drawing below. It is the presence of these particular architectural features that gives the buildings from the period their distinct character. If the goal is to retain the character of Red Cloud's historic architecture as it is renovated over time, then it is useful to become familiar with the parts of the buildings.

Starting at the top is the cornice, the crowning feature of the building as it meets the sky. Cornices range from elaborately formed metal to simple patterns of brick. Below the cornice are the upper floor windows, which are often topped by decorative lintels. Separating the upper floors from the first floor is the storefront lintel, a structural element that carries the weight of the upper wall over the large display windows of the main floor. The storefront itself is typically made up of three parts vertically—a transom, a display window and a base panel. Columns frame the outer edges of the display windows and support the ends of the storefront lintel. Sometimes the column is simply the end of the brick bearing wall that runs the depth of the building. The storefront is usually arranged symmetrically and often features a central entry that is recessed. This allowed for even more square feet of display window.

- Window and door placement
- Window and door types and proportion
Signs

Recommended

One important way to maintain the distinct character of historic areas and to help distinguish them visually from contemporary commercial districts is to keep signage simple and to a minimum. This gives the architectural details, which are often subtle, a chance to be seen.

One of the best places for a sign and a place that has a strong historical precedent, is the storefront lintel. The most appropriate sign of this type is painted on an attached panel. Signs painted on the glass of the display windows and on upper floor windows were also used historically and are encouraged.

Signs on awnings as shown in the examples to the right work well in historic districts. The Laundry sign is an excellent example of a sign that provides identification but doesn’t overpower the features of a small building.

Projecting signs are another alternative. The best ones are double-sided painted panels supported in simple frames and that are externally lit. Projecting signs should be moderately sized and not should not obscure architectural details as shown at the lower right.
Process

- Local Historic District / Overlay District Creation
  - Meet with area property owners and public
  - Present information to help inform them of the area’s unique character and its importance
  - Determine areas of agreement on features to protect
  - Create local historic district or neighborhood conservation zoning overlay district
Local Historic District Designation vs. Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District
Historic District Designation (local)

- Setbacks; siting
- Massing
- Roof shapes; pitch; eave details
- Facade composition; window and door placement
- Window and door types and proportion
- Materials
- Porches and porch details
- Signs
- Fences

Neighborhood Conservation Overlay District

- Setbacks; siting
- Massing
- Roof shapes; pitch; eave details
- Facade composition; window and door placement
- Window and door types and proportion
- Materials
- Porches and porch details
- Signs
- Fences
- Street alignment; curb types; pavement; radii
- Planting
NCE Overlay-TIF Level

• Setbacks; siting
• Massing
• Roof shapes; pitch; eave details
• Facade composition; window and door placement
  • Window and door types and proportion
• Materials
• Porches and porch details
• Signs
• Fences

• Street alignment; curb types; pavement; radii
• Planting

NCE Overlay- “Covenant “ Level

• Setbacks; siting
• Massing
• Roof shapes; pitch; eave details
• Facade composition; window and door placement
  • Window and door types and proportion
• Materials
• Porches and porch details
• Signs
• Fences

• Street alignment; curb types; pavement; radii
• Planting
# Overlay District Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Alter size</th>
<th>Alter shape</th>
<th>Alter pattern</th>
<th>Transparency</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Floor window</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Clear glass with shades</td>
<td>Second floor windows must maintain their historic shape, pattern and level of transparency, but may have interior shades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display window</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Clear glass with shades</td>
<td>Main floor display windows must maintain their historic shape, pattern and level of transparency but may have interior shades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transom window</td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Not allowed</td>
<td>Allowed</td>
<td>Allowed</td>
<td>Opaque glass</td>
<td>Transom windows must maintain their historic size. However, their shape may be altered and they are allowed to be opaque.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

- Preservation Components
  - Historic Survey
  - Catalog/Pattern Book
  - Local Historic District / Conservation Zoning Overlay District
Conclusion

- Preserving historic neighborhoods maintains a community’s uniqueness
- In the 45 years since the creation of the National Register of Historic Places many districts have been designated but many more have not
- Current “all or nothing” local historic district approach, while offering the greatest protections, often results in no protection
- Pattern books and form-based zoning overlay districts provide an alternative that can provide some protection for historic districts