

PLAN ELEMENT X: HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Community character has a physical dimension. Its preservation tells us who we are and how we got here, and it helps us shape the direction in which we want to go.

The only direct reference to historic preservation in the Year 2000 Plan was the recommendation that the City designate “appropriate areas as historic districts in order to protect the character of these neighborhoods from incompatible uses.” While a separate historic preservation plan was prepared and adopted in 1985, it was not conceived as an integral part of the comprehensive plan nor was it adopted as such.



In this plan, we recognize that historic preservation is important not only in retaining the physical evidence of the history and individual character of Rockford, but also as a tool in maintaining the viability of our older neighborhoods. In at least one case, that of Haight Village, historic district designation has played a key role in bringing a neighborhood back from one verging on blight to one that has established a greater level of stability. The assessed valuation within Haight Village increased by 148% between 1977 and 1999, compared with an increase of just 42% for a neighborhood just across Kishwaukee Street that was very similar to Haight Village at the time it was designated a district in 1980.

We also recognize that historic preservation, like anything else, does not exist in a vacuum. Just as historic sites must be evaluated within the context of their surroundings and their history, they must also be viewed within the wider context of preservation of the community as a whole. However, this wider context needs to be evaluated very carefully and should not be used as a means of getting rid of something simply because it's old, beat up and nobody seems to want it at the moment. When deciding whether or not to preserve something, we need to bear in mind that once a building or site has been destroyed, it's gone forever; there is no going back.

The overall goal of the 2020 Plan as it relates to historic preservation is for the City of Rockford to identify, protect and preserve Rockford's historic resources in order to enhance the quality of life and economic wellbeing of current and future generations. The City officially recognizes the important role of historic preservation in the life of the community and will work to ensure that municipal actions encourage and promote the preservation of Rockford's historic resources. In order to accomplish this, the following steps need to be taken:

1. Provide a solid planning and informational basis for historic preservation.

- ▶ Update Rockford's 1985 Preservation Plan, outlining a comprehensive approach for the City to follow in carrying out its historic preservation program for the next 15-20 years. A new plan would include many of the work elements listed below, plus it would address the following areas of concern:
 - ▷ Show how historic preservation in Rockford, which has heretofore focused on sites relating to the community's European heritage, can expand and embrace all those groups making up Rockford's past, including African-American, Latino and Asian.
 - ▷ Address the need to work with Rockford's large institutions, such as the three hospitals, in protecting the neighborhoods around them while still allowing the institutions to grow and prosper.
 - ▷ Look for ways to help fund renovation of historic resources, whether they be single-family homes or something as grand as the old National Guard Armory on North Main Street.
- ▶ Complete the comprehensive survey of Rockford's historic resources.

2. Integrate historic preservation into other City functions, including neighborhood planning and redevelopment, zoning processes, and public improvements.

- ▶ Build a working relationship between staff of the Rockford Historic Preservation Commission (RHPC) and staff in Public Works, Neighborhood Development, Economic Development and Zoning to bring consideration of preservation issues to the fore.
- ▶ With assistance from such groups as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, work to find viable solutions for problems related to redevelopment/renovation of older properties.
- ▶ Ensure that preservation and redevelopment issues, such as lot size and setback requirements, are addressed when the Zoning Ordinance is rewritten.

3. Build community support for preservation activities.

- ▶ RHPC and its staff should continue to work with River District, Mid Town District and other interested organizations in creation of workshops on preservation-related topics.
- ▶ Work with neighborhood groups in existing and potential historic districts to increase understanding of what local historic designation does and does not do.
- ▶ Work with local educators to introduce the basics of historic preservation to students.
- ▶ Work with neighborhood groups interested in pursuing historic district status.

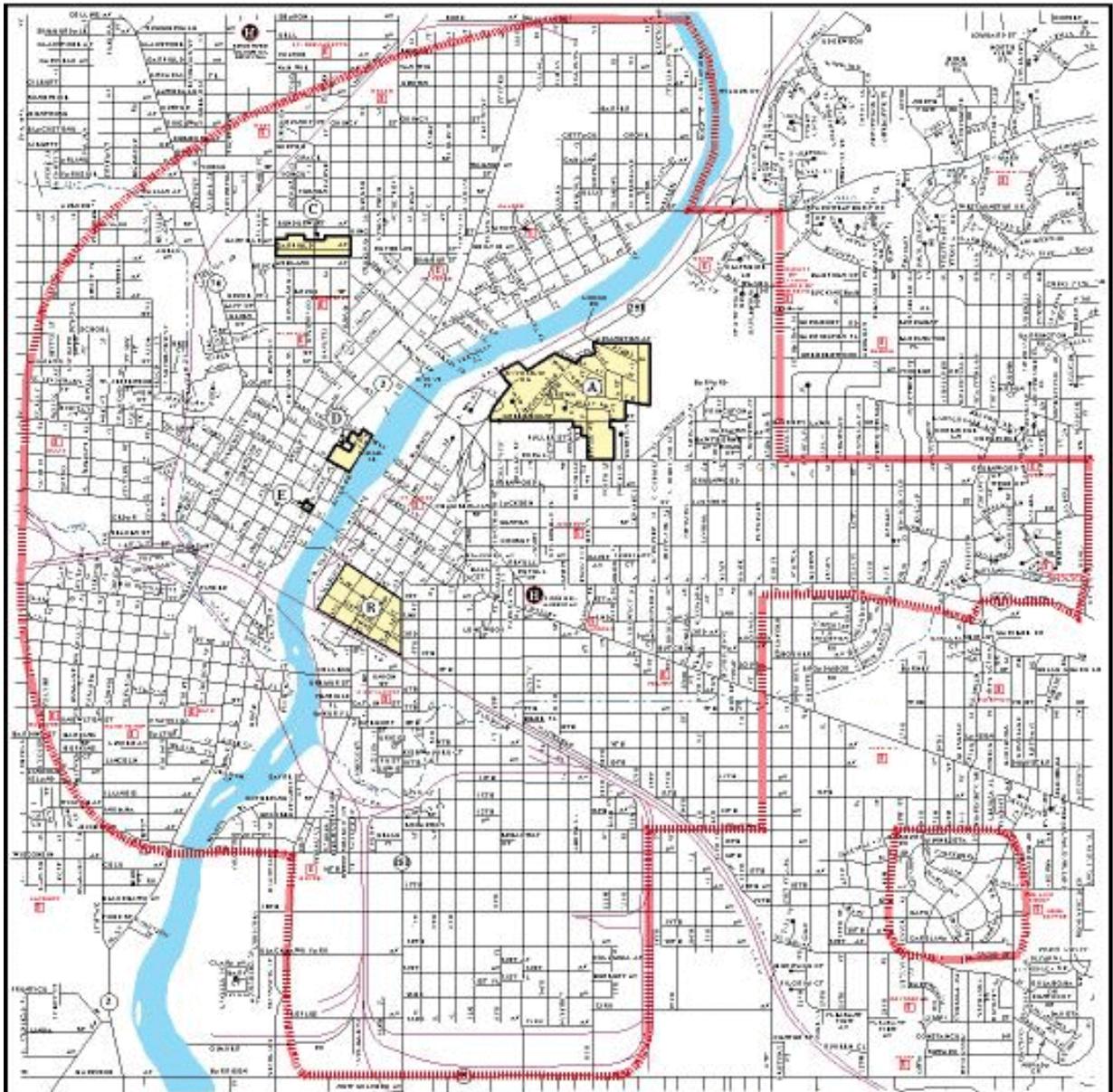
4. Build on existing heritage tourism efforts within Rockford.

- ▶ Find ways to take advantage of areas where a “critical mass” of historic sites exists, such as the South Main areas where Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, the Graham-Ginestra House and Ethnic Heritage Museum are all located.
- ▶ Continue to assist groups such as River District in planning and carrying out walking tours of historic areas.



- ▶ **5. Broaden the base of historic preservation in Rockford** by working to establish a local private organization that can serve as an advocate for preservation, and that can serve as a private funding source for preservation initiatives and projects.

As a first step towards recognizing the importance of preservation, the map on the next page shows existing historic districts and outlines areas of the City with potential as historic districts, based on information contained in the various surveys that have been carried out by the RHPC over the years. These potential historic districts include the City’s oldest neighborhoods, many of which would benefit from the Healthy Neighborhoods Planning Program.



Map B

Historic Districts

— Existing historic district

- (A) Brown's Hills/Knightsville
- (B) Haight Village
- (C) Garfield Avenue
- (D) Indian Terrace
- (E) NE State & Main

— Areas with historic district designation potential



MAY 2001

Historic Preservation Implementation Matrix

Goal	Objective	Action	Who	When
Identify, protect and preserve Rockford's historic resources in order to enhance the quality of life and economic wellbeing of current and future generations	Provide a solid planning and informational basis for historic preservation	Update Rockford's 1985 Preservation Plan, outlining a comprehensive approach for the City to follow in carrying out its historic preservation program for the next 15-20 years	Community Development Department/Rockford Historic Preservation Commission, Human Services	1-2 years
		Complete the comprehensive survey of Rockford's historic resources	Community Development Department/Rockford Historic Preservation Commission	10 years
	Integrate historic preservation into other City functions, including neighborhood planning and redevelopment, zoning processes, and public improvements	Develop working arrangement with DPW, Neighborhood Development, Economic Development, and Zoning for consideration of preservation concerns	RHPC staff	1 year
		With assistance from groups such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation, work to find viable solutions for problems related to redevelopment/renovation of older properties	RHPC staff	Ongoing
		Work to ensure that preservation and redevelopment issues are addressed when the Zoning Ordinance is rewritten	RHPC staff; Zoning staff	1-2 years
	Build community support for preservation activities	Continue to work with River District, Mid Town District and other interested organizations in creation of workshops on preservation-related topics	RHPC staff; River District; Mid Town District; other interested groups	Ongoing
		Work with neighborhood groups in existing and potential historic districts to increase understanding of what historic designation does and does not do	RHPC staff and Commission members	Ongoing
		Work with educators to introduce the basics of historic preservation to local students	RHPC staff and Commission members; interested educators	Ongoing
		Work with neighborhood groups interested in pursuing historic district status	RHPC staff and Commission members	As needed

Historic Preservation Implementation Matrix cont.

Goal	Objective	Action	Who	When
Identify, protect and preserve Rockford's historic resources in order to enhance the quality of life and economic wellbeing of current and future generations cont.	Build on existing heritage tourism efforts within Rockford	Find ways to take advantage of areas where a "critical mass" of historic sites exists, such as the South Main area where Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, the Graham-Ginestra House and Ethnic Heritage Museum are all located	RHPC staff and Commission members; RACVB; museum officials	Ongoing
		Continue to assist groups such as River District in planning and carrying out walking tours of historic areas	RHPC staff and Commission members	As needed
	Broaden the base of historic preservation in Rockford	Work to establish a private organization in Rockford that can serve as an advocate for preservation, and that can serve as a private funding source for preservation initiatives and projects	RHPC staff and Commission members	2-5 years