WDM City Council Workshop
Valley Junction Historic Context

Workshop Outline	
Introduction	What we Heard
	Goals for the Workshop
Overview	Research and Information Sources
	Defining Historic Properties and Approaches to Development
	Flow Chart – Methods of Setting Expectations and Regulation
Discussion @ Workshop	Staff Summary and Public Input
	Key Elements for Determining Approach/Questions
	Status of Moratorium
	Next Steps

What We Heard

We can't lose the momentum of redevelopment

The character of the neighborhood is why we moved here

The historic buildings are important to us and represent the beginnings of our City

Why are these changes happening without notice to the neighborhood or asking for input?

Who is making decisions on what is historic and what buildings should be saved?

The City shouldn't infringe on property rights or the owner's ability to make choices

The new construction is ugly and out of place

Why are we tearing down good buildings and chasing out businesses?

We need to allow the district to evolve

New development and incentives are not bringing in the uses we need or want

We need to also focus on our existing housing stock

Workshop Goals

Summarize Approaches to Defining Historic Properties

Explain Expectations versus Regulation

Gather Public Input

Status of Moratorium

Next Steps

Research and Information Sources		
Plans, Studies and Guidelines for the area (follow link below for files)	Valley Junction Design Guide (late 1980's)	
	City of West Des Moines Comprehensive Plan – Valley Junction Sub Area (1993)	
	Architectural/Historical Reconnaissance Survey of Valley Junction (1998) – Text only, photos available for viewing at City Hall	
	Valley Junction Streetscape Plan (1999)	
	A Pattern Book for West Des Moines Neighborhoods (focus on residential, 2008)	
	Historic West Des Moines Master Plan (2016)	
	Valley Junction Commercial Historic District – National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (2017)	
Link: https://www.wdm.iowa.gov/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/15754/116?curm=5&cury=2021		
Other Historic Resources	The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation	
	Sample Design Guidelines for Historic Districts	
	• Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia • Durham County, NC • Orange County, CA • Chicago, IL	• Denver, CO • Boise, ID • Restore Oregon
	National Park Service Preservation Briefs	

Basis for determination of 'contributing property' in the Valley Junction Commercial Historic District Registration Form (2017)	
The goal of this historic district is to define a concise and contiguous commercial district that included buildings built for commercial use as well as those residences that had been visibly converted to a commercial use within the district period of significance (1893-1967).	
Areas of Significance for the District	The property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. • Commerce, Community Planning & Development (District focus is on commercial properties only)

	The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural type, period, or method of construction:
	• Architecture (based on eras of significant construction within the district)
	  ○ Late Victorian
	  ○ Late 19th & 20th Century Revivals
	  ○ Modern Movements/Moderne & Art Deco

Non-contributing properties have alterations present at the time of the study that either obstruct or alter the historic integrity of the building, were not constructed during the period of significance or were not a commercial property during the period of significance.	

Defining Historic Properties

The decision on which buildings to protect is best made within the framework of accepted best practices in historic preservation

Public Opinion

Older neighborhoods will have unique and attractive buildings that are near and dear to their owners, neighbors and visitors but may not meet the requirements to achieve a designation as a historic structure

Local Determination of Historic Significance

Local eligibly requirements generally follow the National Register's criteria

Communities may choose to put protections in place for buildings viewed locally as 'historic' that do not have a national designation

National Historic Standards

A national determination of historic significance involves examining the property's age, significance, and integrity. Listing in the National Register of Historic Places provides formal recognition of a property's significance based on national standards used by every state

- Listing on the National Register is an honorary listing. There are generally no regulations attached to the designation that protect the site from demolition or inappropriate modification.
- A local designation is often required to allow a city to regulate building modifications or protect historic structures.

Approaches to Development Within Historic Areas

Preservation & Restoration

Focuses on the protection of the historic fabric with maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and removing improvements from another era

Rehabilitation & Reuse

Recognizes the need to alter a historic property to enable modern uses while still retaining the structure's historic character

Additions

Building additions should not destroy the existing historic materials of the building.
New work should be differentiated from the old and be compatible with the massing, size, scale, and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the building

Infill

New buildings should be identifiable to their period of construction; they should not be so different that they detract from or visually compete with their historic neighbors.

Infill design elements, patterning, texture, and materials should reflect the aesthetic and historic themes of the district.

- Each approach will require different guidelines or regulations
- Flexibility can be achieved by allowing easily reversable improvements that may not be truly historic and putting in place codes that accept alternative means and methods to achieve the intent of the code

Methods of Setting Expectations and Regulation

Advisory

Informational Policies, Educational Documents or Processes, Guidelines

Incentives

Awards Programs, Financial Incentives

Regulatory

Standards, Districts, Ordinances

- These methods are not exclusive
- Advisory methods and incentives can supplement regulatory approaches
- Approach should not be “one size fits all”. Different methods may be more appropriate in different areas including the different blocks of 5th Street and as you move east and west off 5th Street
- Advisory methods and incentives are voluntary compliance and could be appropriate in primarily residential areas or areas that don’t have a strong historic context. Regulatory methods would be more appropriate in commercial areas and areas of significant historic context

Advisory (education or guidance)

Informational Policies

Policy statement by the City that encourages or discourages certain approaches to development within an area in the City

Example: Comprehensive Plan

Educational Documents or Processes

Examples:

Pre-Application Meeting

Technical Assistance

Best Practice Information and Suggested Resources

Design Guidelines

Recommendations or graphic examples on standards, context and appropriate design choices.

Examples:

Pattern Book for West Des Moines Neighborhoods

Grand Avenue Redevelopment Plan

- Advisory approaches are effective <u>if</u> there is a consistent willingness to commit to this approach. This approach is only as strong as its weakest link.
- If the quality of the advice is not clear or correct, if there's an unwillingness to acknowledge advice, or if attitudes or commitments change over time, this approach fails to protect the historic character of the district.
- Any advisory approach has to take place very early in the design process before the owner or development team has become emotionally and financially committed to a particular design.

Incentives (encourage compliance)

Awards Programs

Awards programs have some value in acknowledging successful efforts, but don't necessarily incent those who are not already passionate about preservation

Example: Main Street Iowa Awards

Financial Incentives

Examples:

Grants/loans/tax incentives/infrastructure for preservation or rehabilitation projects

Regulation flexibility in exchange for following preservation standards

Requiring compliance with preservation standards when receiving City funding

- Encouragement helps to entice an owner or development team to meet community expectations for what benefits the district, while not infringing on property rights or the owner's ability to make choices.
- Voluntary approaches are effective tools for encouraging appropriate design in historic districts when implemented in conjunction with appropriate regulation and are reflective of the intent of the district.

Regulatory (required compliance)

Standards

Standards are an effective means to address elements such as height, massing, and setbacks ensure new construction shares attributes typical to a particular area.

Examples:

Zoning, Planned Unit Development
Specific Plan

Districts

Regulations within a district can take the form of specific code-based prescriptive standards, or it can utilize more discretionary design guidelines.

Examples:

Town Center Overlay District
Local Historic District(s)

Ordinances

Regulations that not only set standards for development but can also require identification and assement of historic properties or districts and establish a separate review and approval process.

Example:

Historic Preservation Ordinance

- Care must be taken to provide reasonable regulation that is not burdensome and acknowledges the real constraints of development within older and historic areas of the City.
- Regulation is the most certain and equitable path to a desired design result. It can also provide a certain level of predicably for owners and residents as well as the development community.

CITY OF WEST DES MOINES
MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor Gaer and Members of the City Council

FROM: Linda Schemmel, AIA, Development Coordinator

DATE: 5/3/2021

RE: Workshop – Valley Junction Historic Properties and Context

Staff has received public comment related to the Workshop discussion scheduled after the City Council meeting. Please see the attached correspondence.

cc. Lynne Twedt, Director of Development Services
Tom Hadden, City Manager
Richard Scieszinski, City Attorney

A Main Street Iowa community since 1987

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April 28, 2021

West Des Moines City Council
4200 Mills Civic Parkway
West Des Moines, IA 50265

RE: Historic Valley Junction Foundation input on May 3 Council Workshop

To members of the city council,

The Historic Valley Junction Foundation (HVJF) appreciates the City of West Des Moines' focus on emerging development issues in our neighborhood. As the Council prepares for an important May 3 workshop and looks forward to next steps in Valley Junction, we want to assist. HVJF has been the city's recognized partner to support the economic revitalization of Valley Junction since we entered into a formal program agreement with the city and the Iowa Economic Development Authority in 1987 as part of the Main Street Iowa program. Recently we were proud to help lead the effort to secure national historic district status for the Valley Junction business district in 2017. Promoting and protecting the area's history is part of our mission, and we look forward to important dialogue on our neighborhood's future.

Valley Junction is the historic heart of West Des Moines. These days, much is said about creating sustainable, walkable, "human-scale," mixed use communities, but we were built that way from the start. Valley Junction boasts an eclectic mix of historic buildings that still help generations of residents and visitors feel at home here. To many, we are an Iowa small town in the middle of Greater Des Moines. Historic preservation is an essential part of maintaining what the community loves about this neighborhood. Our shared responsibility is to facilitate growth and change in the neighborhood while respecting our past and maintaining the community's trust.

Design guidelines provide clear "rules of the road" for future development

Because the size, scale, and design of buildings in Valley Junction figures prominently in the experience of being here, the community has long sought to ensure the design of new projects fits with the historic character of the neighborhood. Continued investment and development are essential for building the neighborhood's future. At the same time, the recent increase in construction has prompted concerns from local residents and business and property owners. They wonder whether sufficient attention has been paid to how new projects are changing the neighborhood.

Many communities, including ours in the past, have developed local design guidelines for their downtown districts to provide clear "rules of the road" for development. Unfortunately, current zoning in the Valley Junction business district does not provide sufficient guidance, only broadly stating that "all uses within the [area] should be designed with the historical character of the area in mind and encourage the preservation of significant historical, natural, cultural sites and other unique landmarks."

Establishing more detailed design guidelines would benefit everyone. Guidelines provide confidence in the community that property improvements will align with the area's historic character. Likewise, they help developers and property owners plan projects the community will embrace. HVJF believes it is time to develop a more extensive set of design guidelines for our district in collaboration with the city, residents, and business and property owners. The guidelines could then be used in the review of projects proposed in the area, and the area's zoning code

could be reviewed for alignment with the guidelines. In recent years, through the development of the *Historic West Des Moines Master Plan* and other efforts, people in the area have provided substantial input to help guide development in Valley Junction. The question now is how this feedback can be incorporated into policy, such as the city code, to boost the public's confidence its feedback will be considered in the course of new development projects taking place.

HVJF believes guidelines are best developed through an open, collaborative process so that the result protects the public's interest in historic preservation while not placing undue burdens on property owners seeking to make improvements. We recognize the need to find a balance that best serves our community's unique needs. We are prepared to assist with this process, including by recruiting business and property owners to directly participate in the effort.

Development incentives must be sensitive to our neighborhood's unique character

HVJF is aware that the city's financial investment has long been essential to the continued revitalization of the neighborhood. Most recently the property improvement fund, regulatory compliance fund, and upper story housing program have supported a substantial amount of quality development in the area. While the upper story housing program has contributed to some historic rehabilitation, recently some residents have become concerned about the amount of new construction it is supporting while needs in other historic buildings have not been addressed. In in light of this evolving situation, HVJF advises that as the city considers additional investment in property rehabilitation in Valley Junction, two considerations be taken into account:

1. Financial supports in our neighborhood should be reviewed to ensure, where possible, that they are able to help address capital needs issues in existing historic/landmark buildings such that those buildings can be maintained in a suitable condition to remain in the neighborhood for years to come. We believe thoughtful, historically appropriate rehabilitation of historic buildings should be preferred over demolition and new construction in distributing available funds. Furthermore, in certain situations, such as dealing with properties inside the historic district (or that meet local standards of historic significance), it may be inappropriate to provide any public support which would contribute to property demolition.
2. It is essential that city programs consider the potential impact of development on rents, property taxes, and the ability of small businesses to remain in the neighborhood and thrive. Valley Junction is one of Greater Des Moines' best locations for independent small businesses. Hard work by our local entrepreneurs has long been the driving force that shapes our community's future. We believe investment in our neighborhood must support its small, local business character and entrepreneurial spirit. We desire to remain a neighborhood where independent businesses of modest means can become established, grow, and achieve success.

Parking availability will require additional attention and action

We recognize that recent developments in the neighborhood have raised concerns about the availability of parking. HVJF supports additional study of neighborhood's parking conditions, and we are prepared to assist the city in reviewing available parking and determining next steps.

Going forward

HVJF has reviewed materials the city released in advance of the Council's May 3 workshop and commends city staff for their thoughtful treatment of the issues at hand. We look forward to participating in the workshop as well as future conversations in the weeks and months ahead. We are grateful to all the members of our community who have expressed their views and showed concern that Valley Junction remains the special place we all love.

Sincerely,

Matt Hauge
Executive Director
Historic Valley Junction Foundation

CC: Tom Hadden, Lynne Twedt, Linda Schemmel; City of West Des Moines.