

Heart of the City: Revitalization in Heritage Neighborhoods

Report Two Macon, GA – Davenport, IA

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This report examines the status of heritage neighborhoods in Macon, Georgia, and Davenport, Iowa. The cities are of similar age and size and both have a substantial number of heritage assets. Both Macon and Davenport are facing deteriorating core neighborhoods that reflect higher vacancy rates, a greater percentage of rental properties and a greater instance of poverty than the city overall. Both cities were impacted by events that caused population to drop or growth to slow. By all of these counts, Macon’s issues are more extreme.

In 2014, Macon and Bibb County merged their governments. It is too early to determine the impact of this merger on heritage neighborhoods. For this report, Macon’s population is reported as it was prior to merger.

This report examines the cities’ historic infrastructure, preservation management, its governance as it applies to heritage neighborhoods, financial incentives, and preservation partners and assets.

City	Macon, GA	Davenport, IA
Population 1960-1970-2010	69,784 ¹ /122,423 ² /91,351 ³	88,981/98,469/99,685 ⁴
% Housing stock built before 1960 ⁵	40.3%	48.6%
NR Listed Properties (Est.) ⁶	6,000	1,600+
Total Housing Units/% Vacant ⁷	69,957/18.5%	44,638/7.9%

¹ Population.us, “Population of Macon, GA,” accessed March 13, 2017, at <http://population.us/ga/macon/>.

² Macon population increase 1960-1970 due to annexation. Davenport’s is also shown. “Stories of the Century,” accessed April 14, 2007, at <http://www.mindspring.com/~teeth/caution/macontg100years.htm>.

³ 2010 number is the Macon population prior to the Macon-Bibb County merger. “Macon, GA Population and Races,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.usa.com/macon-ga-population-and-races.htm#PopulationGrowth>.

⁴ Population.us, “Population of Davenport, IA,” accessed March 3, 2017, at <http://population.us/ia/davenport/>. The city’s population peaked at 103,264 in 1980, fell 7.6%, 1980-1990.

⁵ United States Census, Macon, GA, “Selected Housing Characteristics, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates,” *American Factfinder*, accessed March 13, 2017, at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.

⁶ National Register Properties are included so as to give a sense of surveyed historic assets. Getting estimates is challenging. Macon’s estimate comes from the Historic Macon Foundation website, accessed March 17, 2017, at <http://www.historicmacon.org/national-register/>. Davenport’s is an estimate based on historic numbers.

⁷United States Census, Davenport, IA, “Selected Housing Characteristics, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates,” *American Factfinder*, accessed February 20, 2017, at

Macon

Overview

Macon, Georgia, founded in 1833, is located in the center of the state in Bibb County. It gained prosperity through banking, communication, and transportation.⁸ Macon has a rich architectural history and, thanks to early work by volunteers, it boasts 6,000 buildings and sites listed in the National Register.

Unfortunately, the city also faces challenges. The Legacy Cities Partnership identifies Macon as a one of its “legacy cities” that has faced slow population growth, concentrated poverty and a lower than average median income. Many of these cities have also seen dramatic population loss stemming from loss of major employers or industries. Due to a 1961 annexation, Macon’s population increase 1960 to 1970 was more than 175%.⁹ However, its population steadily declined during most of the decades that followed; between 1970 and 2010, it lost 31,072 residents.¹⁰ Between 2000 and 2010, city population fell by 6.07% while the state of Georgia’s grew by 18.34%.¹¹ An estimated 4,000 Macon buildings are abandoned, a relatively high number for a city of just over 90,000 people.¹²

<https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF> and Macon, GA, “General Housing Characteristics: 2010,” accessed March 13, 2017, at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmmk>.

⁸ Josh Rogers, email with author, April 10, 2017. In 1838, the city had the longest passenger rail line the world; the telegraph between Washington, D.C. and New Orleans was Macon-owned.

⁹ “Stories of the Century,” accessed April 14, 2007, at <http://www.mindspring.com/~teeth/caution/macontg100years.htm>. Comparing 1960 census with 1970 census returns an increase of 75.4%.

¹⁰ Anne Carpenter, Emily Mitchell, Shelley Price, “Blight Remediation in the Southeast: Local Approaches to Design and Implementation,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta*, November, 2015, accessed April 14, 2017, at <https://www.frbatlanta.org/-/media/documents/community-development/publications/discussion-papers/2015/05-blight->.

¹¹ “Macon Georgia Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts,” CensusViewer, accessed April 1, 2017, at <http://censusviewer.com/city/GA/Macon> and “Population of Georgia: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts,” CensusViewer, accessed April 1, 2017, at <http://censusviewer.com/state/GA>.

¹² John Baker, in discussion with author, April 3, 2017. Baker is Macon-Bibb’s Building Abatement Manager working in the Property Maintenance Division.

White flight began in the 1960s and 1970s; residents moved out of the city into the rural areas of Bibb or to adjacent counties for lower taxes and new neighborhoods and private schools.¹³ The city has struggled with addressing issues of blight. Macon’s code enforcement effort, a formidable tool in many cities struggling with disinvestment and blight, is hobbled by lack of state enabling legislation and concerns for property rights.

In 2012, in order to reduce the cost of government, residents voted to merge city and county operations; the merger took place in 2014.¹⁴ The area is now known as Macon-Bibb. The old city boundaries of Macon were approximately forty five miles; it was the county seat and by far the largest city in Bibb.

Despite many obstacles, Macon-Bibb has an outstanding number of revitalization assets in the form of not-for-profits, foundations, community stakeholders, and government entities working together to rebuild heritage neighborhoods and the historic downtown and celebrate the city’s history in a way that does not look back but to a future Macon as a vibrant, walkable, and appealing city. Some of these agencies are building local capacity for development and looking outside traditional government funding that they believe can have strings and restrictions. “Government follows, they don’t lead,” states one long-time preservation activist.¹⁵

Historic Infrastructure

Macon has fourteen National Register districts; five districts have local designation as “design review districts.” The city has approximately 6,000 buildings and sites listed in the National Register.

¹³ “Blight Remediation in the Southeast,” 19; and anonymous sources, in discussion with author.

¹⁴ “Consolidation: HB 1171,” signed by the Georgia Governor on April 20, 2012 permitted the restructuring of the governments of Macon, Payne City, and Bibb County; to create and incorporate a new political body corporate under the name Macon-Bibb County. Accessed March 14, 2017, at https://web.archive.org/web/20121030001652/http://www1.legis.ga.gov:80/legis/2011_12/sum/hb1171.htm.

¹⁵ Anonymous source, in discussion with author.

Beginning in the early 1970s, the Middle Georgia Historical Society, using a cadre of volunteers, began an aggressive effort to survey and list the city's historic assets,¹⁶ both districts and individual listed properties. Some of the districts were quite large; the Macon Historic District, listed in 1974 and revised in 1995, includes more than 1200 properties on 688 acres, covering downtown and several neighborhoods.

Historic Preservation Management

The planning and zoning entity in Macon-Bibb, under 1957 legislation, is a separate body from municipal government. Georgia law does not require that historic preservation be included in a city's comprehensive plan. The most current Macon-Bibb comprehensive plan dates to 2006;¹⁷ with consolidation, new planning is now underway. The plan speaks to historic preservation in one brief paragraph that recommends extending design review protection to more districts. It also includes a section on the city's "urban/downtown character," noting reuse of vacant downtown buildings in their "historical context" and preservation of traditional urban neighborhoods.¹⁸ It goes on to address blight and recommends rehabilitation or demolition as well as mapping of all vacant structures.¹⁹

Macon's historic preservation review process-- limited to its design review districts--falls under the independent Planning and Zoning Commission. Applications for rehab, demolition, or new construction within the city's local historic districts are first reviewed by a Design Review Board (DRB) whose function is limited to an advisory role. Their recommendations are reviewed and approved by the Planning and Zoning Commission (P&Z). In 2016, a simplified review process permitted staff to give

¹⁶ Rogers interview.

¹⁷ "Macon-Bibb County Comprehensive Plan 2030 Community Agenda," *Macon-Bibb County Planning & Zoning Commission*, December 2006, accessed April 4, 2017, at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B81E7tc0Z-SpZ1gwTUw2dmtwbjA/view>.

¹⁸ "Macon-Bibb Plan," 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 43.

preliminary recommendations for applications for routine changes. The Planning and Zoning Commission still gives final approval. P&Z decisions are not subject to override by a county commission vote; appeals must be resolved through judicial process.²⁰

Buildings in design review districts are subject to demolition review by the DRB and the P&Z. On average, the boards receive three to four demolition requests per year. The demolition process requires not only a structural report but also plans for what is to be built on the site. Petitioners are not allowed to leave empty lots. Only when the city has issued a permit for the new structure is the petitioner issued a demolition permit. The same basic rules apply for buildings being moved. The two entities also review proposals for new construction which must be compatible with existing buildings streetscape.²¹

Macon's zoning ordinance includes a variety of design review district designations, ranging from districts limited to residential to those with varying degrees of mixed use options. City and not-for-profit staffs was unable to provide a maps showing the location of all historic districts;²² one does not exist on the Macon-Bibb website or that of the Georgia SHPO. Since many of Macon's revitalization initiatives are identified by a neighborhood name rather than an historic district or straddle more than one survey area, correlating revitalization and planning activities with designated districts is a challenge.

²⁰ Sara Dusenberry, in discussion with author, March 22, 2017. Dusenberry is the staff liaison to the Design Review Board.

²¹ Dusenberry interview.

²² Josh Rogers with NewTown shared a map of the large Macon Historic District. He noted that these maps were once available on the city website, but the DRB secretary could not provide one. The author was able to locate maps created for various initiatives, but not one that showed the spatial relationships among designated historic areas.

Governance: Issues Affecting Heritage Neighborhoods

Vacant and Derelict Properties

In 2010, Macon's residential vacancy rate was 18.5%.²³ There are an estimated 4,000 vacant properties within the original Macon city borders. John Baker, Building Abatement Manager with the Property Maintenance Division, ranks buildings by condition on a scale of A, best, to F, worst. He estimates that there are approximated 2,000 in the D to F categories. The budget limits demolitions to about a hundred per year; however, during a 12-month period, an average 120 buildings a year become vacant. There is a backlog of 430 buildings approved for demolition. The city lacks staff to board abandoned properties and does not require private boarding by owners.²⁴

While the city ordinance requires demolition review only for buildings in design review districts, John makes an effort to notify the not-for-profit Historic Macon Foundation of any buildings slated for demolition anywhere in the city that he believes have historic significance.²⁵ Given the number of identified historic assets and the proximity of much of the city's blight to historic districts, it is likely that some of the properties being demolished or on the demo list are National Register listed properties.²⁶ The city has no demolition by neglect ordinance.

Vacant Property Registry/Survey

The city has a vacant property registry, but Georgia law cap fees at a one-time \$100 registration fee; Macon's one-time fee is \$10. Failing to register carries no legal consequences. The consequences of a low fee and lack of legal recourse make the program ineffective in addressing this issue.²⁷

²³ United States Census, Macon, GA, "General Housing Characteristics: 2010," *American FactFinder*, accessed March 13, 2017, at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

²⁴Baker interview.

²⁵Baker interview.

²⁶ As of this research, no one interviewed knows the status of the many abandoned buildings, but several agreed that it was possible that they were listed in the Register.

²⁷ Baker Interview.

In 2015, Macon-Bibb commissioners issued \$14 million in blight bonds with an eye to addressing the backlog of 425 buildings already designated for demolition. Each of the nine commissioners were allocated \$1 million for their wards. However, since bonds must legally be used to benefit the public good, use of the funding for spot demolition of vacant buildings is not considered a legal use. Commissioners are unclear of the actual condition of buildings in their districts.²⁸

To gain a broad understanding of the actual number of vacant buildings and to develop a more strategic approach, Macon-Bibb used some of the blight funding and recently contracted with Loveland Technologies to undertake a “blexting” survey of the most blighted areas.

“Blexting” is a process developed by Loveland for work it did in Detroit in the Motor City Mapping initiative. It combines the use of tablets or smart phones with observers who visit each site to ascertain the appropriate level of deterioration of abandoned properties. Their data, combined with the parcel’s history of sale, tax liens or other liabilities allowed Detroit to begin to develop a picture of blight.²⁹ Because the locations also appear on a high tech map, staff can begin to see pockets of blight or opportunity. Macon is hoping to use the data to help it visualize and strategize its abandoned property inventory.

²⁸ Alison Goldey, in discussion with author, April 4, 2017. Goldey is the Executive Director of the Macon-Bibb County Land Bank Authority, a position she has held for twenty years.

²⁹ Loveland was founded in Detroit in 2009. After Detroit’s mapping process was completed, the data was uploaded so that the public could view it and make comments and offer corrections; citizen engagement is part of the process. Later, Loveland co-founder Jerry Paffendorf dispatched crews to map the locations of building fires across the city. Quinn Klinefelter, “Battling Blight: Detroit Maps Entire City To Find Bad Buildings,” *NPR*, February 18, 2014, accessed at <http://www.npr.org/2014/02/14/277058384/battling-blight-detroit-maps-entire-city-to-find-bad-buildings>, and Bill Bradley, “The Blight-Fighting Solution for Saving 40,000 Detroiters From Eviction,” *Next City*, November 9, 2015, accessed at <https://nextcity.org/features/view/detroit-foreclosures-tax-auction-loveland-technologies-jerry-paffendorf>. Ben Austen, “The Post-Post-Apocalyptic Detroit,” *New York Times Magazine*, July 11, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/13/magazine/the-post-post-apocalyptic-detroit.html?_r=0.

Code Enforcement

As of September, 2015, the Macon-Bibb Property Maintenance Division had a list of 3,000 open cases of code violations; 1,200 were for unsafe buildings which may require demolition.³⁰ Compared to many municipalities,³¹ the powers accorded to code enforcement in Macon are limited even with recent changes that occurred two years ago.

Prior to 2015, officials were forced to take property owners with even simple violations to court before a fine could be imposed. In March, 2015, new regulations permitted inspectors to ticket and re-inspect without a court order for thirty five different issues, violations defined as those taking ten days or less to correct and impose a \$35.00 re-inspection fee. The office is still required to send violation notices by personal service or certified mail to the last known address of the owner. Vacant properties with violations present more issues; many are “heir” properties, those left empty when an owner/occupant dies and inheriting family members live out of town; or zombie foreclosures, arising from the mortgage crisis make it difficult to locate owners.³² Repeat offenders cannot be prosecuted civilly. Officials can go to municipal court, but judges will not impose a sentence with a defendant present.³³

The city does not have the staff to keep grass cut or debris under control. Exceptions are made for abandoned lots next to businesses such as daycare centers.³⁴ In 2014, Macon-Bibb introduced a “SeeClickFix” mobile app that allows individuals to report blight anonymously.³⁵

³⁰ Debbie Blankenship, “New Property Inspection Process Helping Ease Crowds in Macon-Bibb Municipal Court,” *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2015, accessed March 28, 2017, at Read more here: <http://www.macon.com/news/special-reports/house-next-door/article35865426.html#storylink=cpy>.

³¹ Based on author’s experience researching this report and others over the past three years, many cities have stepped up code enforcement approaches to help them deal with blighted properties.

³² Debbie Blankenship, “New Property Inspection Process.”

³³ Baker interview.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Report Blight Issues with See Click Fix,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.maconbibb.us/macon->

Rental Registry

46.7% of Macon’s residents are renters, almost half its population. Seventy percent of all housing units are one-unit detached homes and eighty percent fall into the four-unit or less category.³⁶ Despite the high level of renters in Macon-Bibb, there is no rental registry or rental inspection program.

Financial Incentives

State Historic Tax Credits

Georgia offers a state historic tax credit for both residential and commercial properties. Terms differ based on the use of the building and the level of rehabilitation. Residential properties in targeted areas, low income census tracts, return a 30% tax credit and require expenditures of as little as \$5,000 to enter the plan. Homes in non-target areas receive a 25% tax credit and must be performing rehab work either \$25,000 or half the adjusted basis of the property. Only owner-occupied buildings qualify in this category. The tax credit reduces state tax liability for up to ten years.

Foundations

Macon preservation efforts have received strong support from two foundations. The Peyton Anderson Foundation (PAF) is named in honor of its founder who was the longtime owner of the *Macon Telegraph* and *Macon News* who donated much of his considerable estate to efforts bettering Macon and central Georgia. Since its beginnings in 1989, the Foundation has invested more than \$86,000,000 in the middle Georgia area.³⁷ NewTown Macon, focused on revitalizing the city’s historic commercial district, was founded on PAF funding.³⁸ PAF also helped establish the Community

bibb-makes-it-easier-to-report-residential-code-violations-address-blight-issues/.

³⁶ United State Census, “Selected Housing Characteristics, 2015-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates,” *American FactFinder*, accessed March 15, 2017, at <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.

³⁷ “Welcome to the Peyton Anderson Foundation,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.peytonanderson.org/>.

³⁸ “History and Mission,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.newtownmacon.com/powering->

Foundation of Central Georgia, Inc (CFCG). In turn, grants from PAF funneled through CFCG are underwriting grants funding “transformational ideas” to help implement the Macon Action Plan focused on Macon’s downtown area.³⁹

The Knight Foundation invests in communities where brothers John S. and James L. Knight once published newspapers; Peyton Anderson sold the Macon papers to the company. In Macon, the foundation focuses on urban renewal. Examples of its contributions include assistance with Mercer University’s down payment program as well as underwriting of the College Hill Corridor plan and the Macon Action Plan.⁴⁰

These initiatives are discussed further in the “Preservation Assets” section of this report.

Preservation Partners and Assets

Historic Macon Foundation

The Historic Macon Foundation (HMF) evolved from the efforts of two historic preservation organizations operating since the 1970s, an historic society focused on listing properties in the National Register and a neighborhood association bent on saving buildings and whose members personally interceded to buy properties at risk for demolition.⁴¹

From these two original groups, the Macon Heritage Foundation (MHF) emerged, focused on saving historic infrastructure. It worked with the city’s housing authority, accessing historic and low income tax credits as well as Section 8 certificates to rehab a group of shotgun houses. Unable to access traditional mortgage funds, it applied for grants and loans, including one from the National Trust, and

newtown/history-mission/.

³⁹ “Downtown Challenge Revitalizing Macon,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.cfcga.org/DowntownChallenge>.

⁴⁰ “Macon,” accessed April 8, 2017, at <https://www.knightfoundation.org/communities/macon>.

⁴¹ Maryel Battin, in discussion with author, March 19, 2017. Maryel was a founder of the original neighborhood group and headed the Macon Heritage Foundation during much of the 1980s. She continued to write tax credit applications after leaving HMF.

reached out to Mercer University for its support and partnership for ongoing revitalization in the Huguenin Heights neighborhood. The sale of one property provided the funding to rehab the next. Their expertise in writing tax credit applications through their own projects expanded to writing them for others, creating an additional funding stream.⁴²

In 2003, MHF and The Middle Georgia Historical Society merged to form today's Historic Macon Foundation (HMF). HMF's mission is to revitalization its community by preserving architecture and sharing history. Since the founding of its parent organization, HMF has effected the purchase, rehab or sale of almost 150 buildings.⁴³ HMF began its work in the neighborhoods of Beall's Hill, Huguenin Heights and Tatnall Place, all part of the large Macon Historic District. More

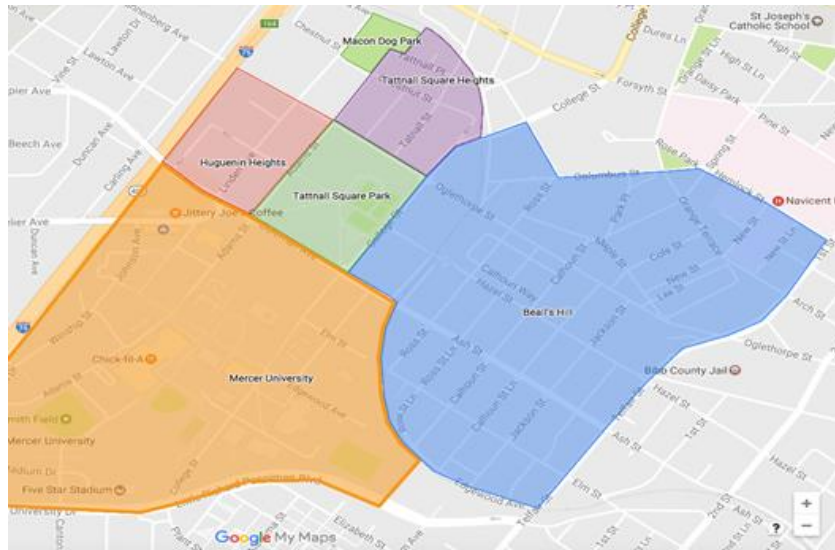


Fig. 1. Historic neighborhoods near Mercer University where HMF is currently working. Source: "Preservation through Revitalization: Economic Impact of the Historic Macon Foundation on the Neighborhood of Beall's Hill." Emailed to author by HMF.

recently, efforts have focused on Beall's Hill. Their partners in this effort included nearby Mercer University, the James L. Knight Foundation and the Macon-Bibb Land Bank Authority.

HMF, taking advantage of its not-for-profit status and the transferability of state historic tax credits, applies for the credits during rehabilitation, ensuring that the work meets the Secretary of Interior standards. Once the work is completed, the tax credit benefit is transferred to the new owner. The homes, are eligible for a property tax freeze for eight years. Mercer University and the Knight Foundation fund a Mercer employer down payment assistance program; the land bank's role is acquisition of property,

⁴² Maryel Battin interview.

⁴³ "About," accessed March 10, 2017, at <http://www.historicmacon.org/who-we-are/>.

clearing the title and any encumbrances and delivering it to HMF who then transfers it to the new homeowner.⁴⁴

Working in a focus area of one neighborhood had created an opportunity for HMF to begin to control sales comparatives; each new rehabilitation has added value, making it easier for homeowners to access mortgage dollars.

Mercer University

Mercer University and its related programs are located adjacent to some of the city's most challenged historic neighborhoods. After working with Macon Heritage in Huguenin Heights, in 1998, it entered a partnership with the city to revitalize the Beall's Hill neighborhood in an effort to reinvent the dilapidated area into a "model 'New Urbanist' mixed-income, mixed-use, walkable community." The school engaged in clean up and fix up campaigns, tutoring and training programs, performed surveys and market analyses, and applied for grant funds to support its activities. In 2003, it joined with the city, the Housing Authority, the land bank and Historic Macon to form a group called the "Beall's Hill Development Corporation."⁴⁵

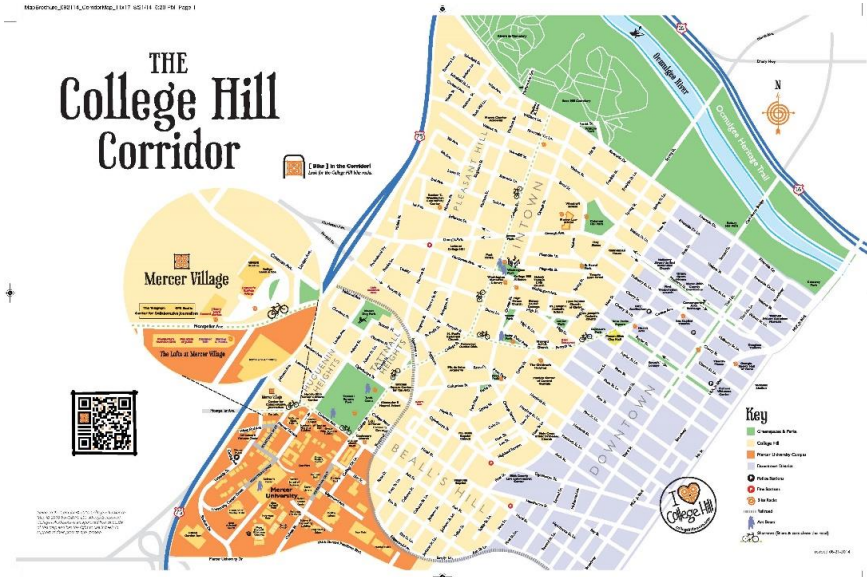
Mercer offers down payment assistance to full time staff and faculty interested in buying a home in Beall's Hill, paying up to 17% or \$20,000; the university pays half and a Knight Foundation grant covers the rest. Homes purchased can be new construction, new rehabilitated historic residences, bank-owned or foreclosed homes, or houses needing substantial rehabilitation that the new home owner agrees to invest a substantial amount in home improvements within two years.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kim Campbell, in discussion with author, March 15, 2017. Campbell is HMF's Preservation and Education Coordinator.

⁴⁵ "Beall's Hill Neighborhood Revitalization Project," accessed March 25, 2017, at <https://community.mercer.edu/partnerships/beall/>.

⁴⁶ "Mercer University Down Payment Assistance Program," accessed March 25, 2017, at <http://dpa.mercer.edu/www/mu-dpa/upload/Mercer-DPA-Final-2015-2.pdf>.

Community efforts expanded in 2009, when Mercer became part of the “College Hill Corridor Project.” What began as a Senior Capstone project evolved into a plan to revitalize the two miles between the Mercer campus and the city’s historic downtown. This larger area encompassed the Intown



Macon, Beall’s Hill, Tattnell Heights and Huguenin Heights historic neighborhoods.

Between 2009 and 2015, a College Hill Alliance oversaw implementation of the plan.

With more than 90% completed, it turned the initiative over to a volunteer commission.⁴⁷

Fig. 2. Mercer University campus on left and downtown on right; between are historic neighborhoods. Source College Hill Corridor website at http://collegehillmacon.com/images/CH_mapBrochure_082114_MAP_tp%20copy.pdf

Macon-Bibb Land Bank Authority (MBLBA)

The MBLBA was established in 1996, the second land bank to open in Georgia. Georgia land banks are independent of city or county governments, but MBLBA originally operated from offices and accounting services provided by the Macon Housing Authority. At the time it was established, inner city neighborhoods were losing population as city residents moved into adjacent suburbs or contiguous counties. MBLBA acquires properties subject to tax foreclosure with the county, auction sales, donations, or by purchase; the agency is legally able to extinguish delinquent taxes. MBLBA does not construction homes; rather, it collaborates with other housing entities.

Due to high levels of poverty—the overall percentage of people below the poverty level is 27.4%

⁴⁷ “College Hill. Project History,” accessed March 25, 2017, at <http://collegehillmacon.com/index.php/about/project-history>, and “College Hill. Master Plan,” accessed March 25, 2017, at <http://collegehillmacon.com/index.php/about/master-plan>.

with a number of census tracts exceeding 50%⁴⁸-- Macon is an entitlement community. Acquisitions that support affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization are key components of the land bank's strategy. In the case of the Beall's Hill initiative, MBLBA is the entity acquiring properties, holding them until they were ready for transfer to the Historic Macon Foundation. MBLBA owned properties remain tax exempt until transferred, helping keep costs low for their partners.⁴⁹

When the land bank opened, local government wanted the Land Bank to take all properties acquired through sheriff sales. Since Georgia law does not enable municipalities to easily clear titles, MBLBA opted for a more targeted approach. It prefers to strategically acquire parcels, not in volume, but in cases when there is clearly funding or a willing transferee available;⁵⁰ 95% of MBLBA's acquisitions are of this type. By 2016, MBLBA had assumed title to about 500 properties, equaling about three properties per month.

The agency has also assembled adjacent parcels in order to create redevelopment area for market rate builder-developers⁵¹ who typically need multiple parcels order to achieve sufficient economy of scale.⁵² With the softer real estate landscape after the mortgage crisis, commercial developers were

⁴⁸ United States Census, "Macon-Bibb County, Georgia," *American FactFinder*, accessed March 15, 2017, at https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml#. And United States Census, "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates," *American FactFinder*, accessed March 15, 2017, at https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_S1701&prodType=table. In Macon-Bibb census tract 105, 74.9% of the population lives below the poverty level.

⁴⁹ Payton Heins and Tarik Abdelazim, "Take It to the Bank: How Land Banks Are Strengthening America's Neighborhoods," *Center for Community Progress*, 2014. Pp. 52-57.

⁵⁰ Goldey interview.

⁵¹ "Take it to the Bank."

⁵² This is the feedback offered in Davenport.

unable to take advantage of the site. Instead, a state agency constructed thirty eight residences for homeless people suffering from mental health and substance abuse issues.⁵³

NewTown Macon

NewTown is a local economic development agency focused on revitalization of downtown Macon as a social, economic and cultural center by increasing the number residents, growing businesses and jobs, and creating a sense of place. Macon's commercial downtown is part of the large Macon Historic District. The agency was founded in 1996 by the Peyton Anderson Foundation. NewTown CEO Josh Rogers notes that local philanthropy is part of the city's culture; its social scene is driven by not-for-profit fundraisers.

NewTown leverages public/private partnerships. Except for availing itself of historic tax credits, it avoids using government funding. Its operations are not open to the public and are not subject to public hearings. According to CEO Josh Rogers, a thirty-one person board of private individuals is able to negotiate and close deals and operate very effectively.⁵⁴

NewTown facilitates rehab as well as new construction. Macon's downtown housing grew from one low-income 1980s era senior housing project to include twenty eight lofts by 2000. Today there are 453 market rate rental lofts and twelve owner-occupied market rate lofts.⁵⁵ In 2015, loft occupancy was 99%.⁵⁶ Downtown parcel occupancy was 60% in 2012 and storefront occupancy was 50%. In 2017, parcel occupancy stands at 80% and 70% of storefronts are occupied.⁵⁷

⁵³ "Take It to the Bank," 56-57.

⁵⁴ Rogers Interview.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "History and Mission," accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://www.newtownmacon.com/powering-newtown/history-mission/>.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

NewTown offers loans to start, grow or move businesses and is willing to hold an equity partnership position for some companies. It holds annual economic development workshops to recruit new developers and investors. It also assists people in syndication of tax credits. Tax credit syndication costs are often too high to make use of tax credits economically feasible for smaller projects; many tax credit syndication companies are not interested in this market sector. NewTown has assisted small local projects by finding local investors for the credits. Keeping everything local, from tax credit investors to developers tends to keep more dollars in Macon. Rogers also believes that local developers and investors make more responsible decisions due to hometown pride.⁵⁸

Planning

The Macon-Bibb Urban Development Authority, taking its power from state-enabling legislation, works with public and private partners to develop commercially viable developments in Macon’s “Urban Core,” defined as downtown and in-town neighborhoods. It is able to offer tax abatements, financing, low interest loans and technical assistance for businesses operating in the target area.⁵⁹

It spearheaded efforts to create a Macon Action Plan, published in 2015 and focused on four goals: Stronger economic development, enhanced physical environment and housing, and better connectivity throughout the area. The need to recognize history and historic neighborhoods was noted. Several design review districts and National Register districts are located in this urban core. The plan focused on

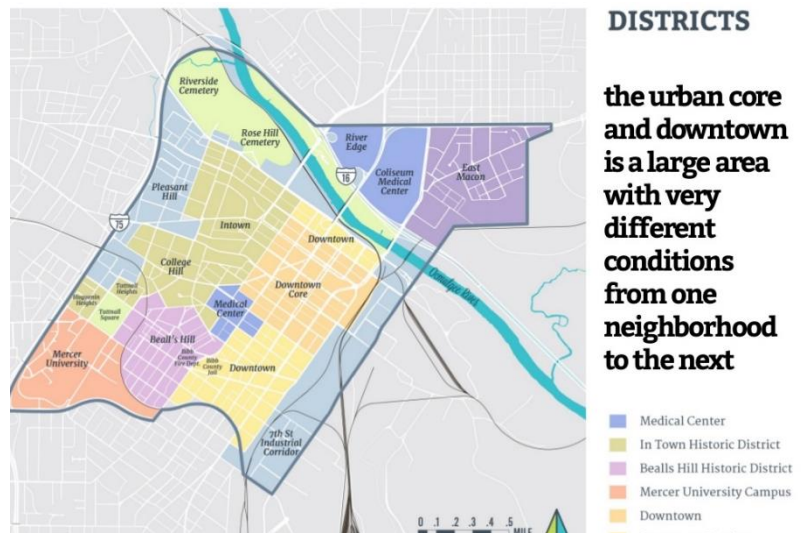


Fig. 3. The Macon Action Plan urban core revitalization efforts, connection heritage neighborhoods to the river.
Source: “Macon Action Plan,” <http://www.maconactionplan.com/#section-urban-core>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ “Home,” accessed April 4, 2017, at <http://maconbibbuda.com/>.

proposed demolition of dilapidated “F” buildings, rehab of others, and new construction leading to creation of attractive and walkable neighborhoods. Committee stakeholders included Historic Macon and NewTown Macon.⁶⁰ The plan recommended streamlining the approval process for buildings in design review districts, suggested tax credit application training for members of the Design Review Board, and supported creation of a Preservation Commission to better emphasize the importance of retaining Macon’s historic buildings.⁶¹

Summary

Macon’s heritage neighborhoods have powerful allies including legacy preservation and economic development groups; Mercer University, a strong institutional partner; local and national funders support revitalization. Several entities have focused major planning efforts on enhancing the city’s core neighborhoods.

Macon is hampered by weak state enabling legislation that reduces its ability to manage blight and code enforcement. The sheer number of abandoned properties in a relatively small city stretches both its available financial resources and its ability to cope with the situation. The proposed mapping initiative to determine both the location and condition of abandoned properties could be an important next step in allowing Macon to develop long term plans and approaches to addressing this issue.

⁶⁰ “Final Macon Action Plan Announced!” Accessed April 5, 2017, at <http://www.maconactionplan.com/#section-urban-core>.

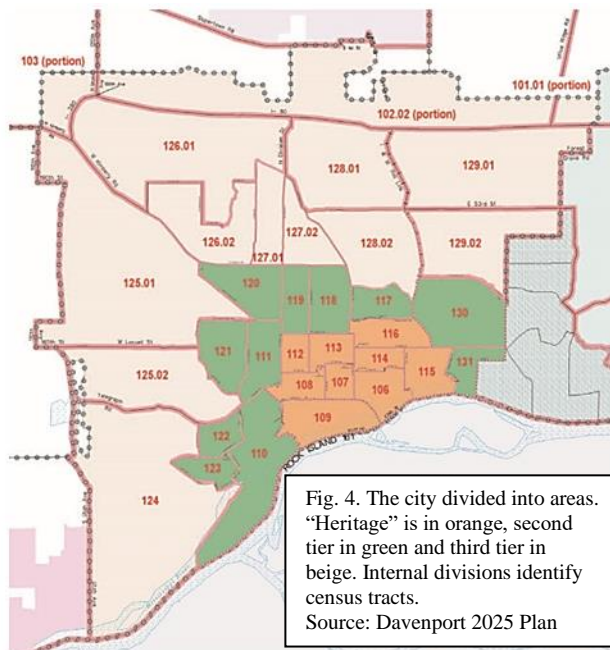
⁶¹ Ibid, 99.

Davenport, Iowa

Overview

Davenport, Iowa, is the state’s third largest city. It is part of a tightly packed Iowa/Illinois metropolitan area that straddles the Mississippi River known familiarly as the Quad Cities and formally as the Davenport-Moline-Rock Island IA-IL MSA.

The city, located in Scott County, was founded in 1836. The first bridge along the entire span of the Mississippi River crossed from Rock Island to Davenport in 1856.⁶² Davenport and its sister cities prospered and became a combined 19th and 20th century industrial powerhouse. By 1900, Davenport was a compact city of 38,000 people living in a footprint that included its original central business district as well as outlying neighborhoods and shopping areas.



This area is what I am choosing to call Davenport’s “Heritage” neighborhoods. While some are officially designated as historic and others are not, taken as a whole, they clearly show the development of the city from the last half of the 19th through the early decades of the 20th century.

By 1980, Davenport had become a much less dense city of 103,000 people living across sixty five square miles. Outward migration from heritage neighborhoods to newly developed areas had begun in the 1930s and continued rapidly after World War II. While projections for city growth were still rosy in the 1960s, fallout from the farm crisis

⁶² Iowa Department of Transportation, “Approaching the Turn of the Century. Discovering Historic Iowa Transportation Milestones,” February, 1999, 1, 3, 8. <http://www.iowadot.gov/histbook.pdf>.

of the 1970s and 1980s hit the Quad Cities hard. Davenport lost more than 8,000 residents; it would take thirty five years for it to pass the 100,000 mark again. During this decade of severe economic challenge, heritage neighborhoods suffered most, losing 20% of their population and 25% of their infrastructure.⁶³

Davenport’s economy rebounded and the city has continued to experience slow but steady growth. Her heritage neighborhoods continue to struggle; residents, politicians and staff continue to search for the best path back to vitality.

Historic Infrastructure

Davenport has over 1600 properties listed in the National Register, either individually listed or contributing in one of its seventeen National Register Districts. Two of the districts are located in the city’s central business district; two are a combination of residential and

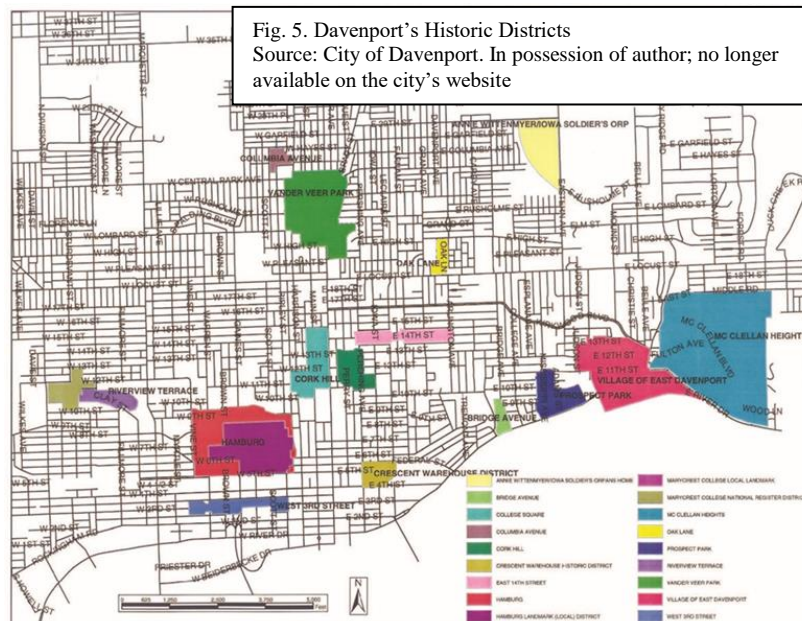


Fig. 5. Davenport’s Historic Districts
Source: City of Davenport. In possession of author; no longer available on the city’s website

small scale commercial areas; two others are historic campuses. The remaining eleven are primarily residential areas. The city has two combination National Register and Local historic districts. One is a portion of the National Register Hamburg Historic District which became a local district after a majority vote of residents; the other is the Annie Wittenmeyer Soldiers Orphans Home, a 19th Century institutional campus that is today houses a number of not for profit organizations.

⁶³ “Population History for Iowa’s 25 Largest Cities 1850-2010,” accessed April 20, 2016, at <http://urbandale.org/DocumentCenter/Home/View/1008> and “Davenport 2025: Comprehensive Plan for the City,” [Long Version], August 10, 2005, 91. Accessed January 12, 2016, at http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/egov/documents/1392134374_41965.pdf.

Davenport's historic preservation initiative began in the 1970s, fueled in part by interest in the Bicentennial. The city was the first in the state to hire a full time historic planner. When she had finished her work, Davenport had more structures listed in the National Register than any other city in Iowa.⁶⁴

Historic Preservation Management

In late 1991, amid some controversy, the city passed its Historic Preservation Ordinance. A Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) and formal CLG status soon followed.⁶⁵ It also established a local register.

The Davenport HPC is appointed by the mayor and guided by its Historic Preservation Ordinance.⁶⁶ The ordinance's goals include surveying and protecting architectural heritage, educating the public, encouraging rehab and reuse of historic structures, and strengthening neighborhoods by preventing needless demolition and encouraging rehabilitation. The ordinance recommends commissioners who bring expertise or knowledge of historic preservation; no training is provided.

Unlike a number of Iowa HPCs,⁶⁷ Davenport's HPC has the authority to grant or deny demolition requests for any local landmark or property listed in the National Register.⁶⁸ It approves certificates of appropriateness for exterior work for contributing structures in local historic districts and local landmarks

⁶⁴ Marlys Svendsen, in discussion and emails with author, September 16, 2014. Svendsen headed the 1979-1985 National Register process.

⁶⁵ "Historic Preservation," 162, and Michelle Landrum, "Aldermen Refuse to Rush Preservation Ordina[n]ce [sic] Passage," *The Leader*, June 19, 1991, and Catherine Guy, "Some Davenport Residents Rap Amendments To Pending Historic Preservation Ordinance," *The Leader*, December 18, 1991.

⁶⁶ "Davenport Municipal Code," accessed March 10, 2016, at <http://clerkshq.com/default.ashx?clientsite=davenport-ia>.

⁶⁷ Based on earlier research done by the author.

⁶⁸ In doing research for another paper, the author interviewed a number of people involved in preservation in Iowa cities. She found Davenport's HP ordinance unusual in that it gives its Commission authority to rule on demolition requests for any building listed in the National Register. Many cities surveyed limited this authority to only buildings in local districts or local landmarks.

as well as exterior work or signage in historic parks. The Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation provide the framework for approvals. The HPC also offers technical advice through informal work sessions.

The commission's lack of oversight for the vast majority of activity relating to National Register properties, but its participation in the decision making part of what is a critical point in a building's life—its demolition—has created continuing confusion and controversy. Adding fuel to that fire is a further stipulation that the commission must follow: If it refuses to issue a demolition permit for a building, then it must, at the same time, begin proceedings to locally landmark the structure.⁶⁹ Demolition denial can be overridden by the City Council. The assumed intent was to force HPC members to think long and hard before denying demolition requests. The reality is that many simple buildings that contributed to the fabric of historic districts but not as architectural masterpieces have been lost when put to the “local landmark” test. This has led the commission into controversy with the city council who, with a supermajority, many override HPC decisions.

The HPC ordinance includes a hardship waiver for both certificates of appropriateness and demolition permits. Ordinarily, owner permission is required for landmarking.

Staff, Budget, Preservation Planning

The city staff liaison to the Davenport Historic Preservation Commission is one of four planners located in the Community Planning/Economic Development Department. Historic preservation is only one of his duties. He estimates that, on average, about twenty to thirty percent of his time is dedicated to HPC or preservation business.⁷⁰

Since 2014, the city has allocated no dollars in its “historic preservation fund” line. While there has been no budgeted historic preservation funding for several years, city funds and staff time have been allocated for preservation related planning on a project basis. In 2013, the city paid 90% of a \$121,600

⁶⁹ Davenport, Iowa Municipal Code, “Historic Preservation- 17.23.120 Historic Structure Demolition Review Process,” accessed March 10, 2016, at <http://clerkshq.com/default.ashx?clientsite=Davenport-ia>.

⁷⁰ Ryan Rusnak, in discussion with author, March 2, 2016. Rusnak is a Planner with the city of Davenport and the HPC liaison.

expense for a master plan for the commercial core of the Village of East Davenport, a mixed-use National Register historic district; the Village SCHMID and a community not-for-profit picked up the balance.⁷¹

The city's historic riverfront has been the subject of two extensive planning initiatives, a "2004 RiverVision" plan and a 2014 "RiverVision 2014 Update," both spurred by proposed developments in LeClaire Park, the city's downtown riverfront park.⁷²

In 2015, Davenport obtained a limited CLG grant to fund a National Register re-survey of the Hamburg Historic District. The grant funding a professional to write and submit the nomination and required many staff and volunteer hours to complete. In 2016, the city hosted the Iowa Preservation Summit; it allocated staff time and waived rental fees for city-owned facilities.

The city has also allocated staff planning resources to several initiatives; one focused on a recognition program to encourage neighborhoods to create formal associations and another on transportation routes both in and out of designated historic areas. Some of these groups overlap the city's historic districts;⁷³ some associations are very active while others are not. However, with continuous cuts to planning personnel—planners in the city have been reduced from twelve to four-- staff ability to continue these initiatives has been reduced.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Matt Flynn, email with author, March 2, 2016. Flynn is Senior Planning Manager for the city of Davenport.

⁷² "RiverVision Final Report," July 2004, accessed January 23, 2016, at http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/egov/documents/1180045217_757019.pdf, and "Davenport RiverVision 2014 Update," August 2014, accessed January 23, 2016, at http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/egov/documents/1407854342_5268.pdf. The author participated in the public comment portion of both plans.

⁷³ "Current Recognized Neighborhoods," accessed March 10, 2016, at <http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/departments/division.php?structureid=485>.

⁷⁴ Matt Flynn, in discussion with author, Flynn is Senior Planning Manager for the city of Davenport, January 21, 2016.

City Partnerships Impacting Heritage Neighborhoods

The Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has a formal agreement with the Davenport Parks and Recreation Department that requires HPC approval of any exterior changes to permanent structures or fixtures; the list ranges from buildings to signs to pathways in eleven different city-owned parks or historic properties.⁷⁵ The HPC also approves any changes to important historic brick streets.⁷⁶

A commission unrelated to the HPC but with potentially powerful impact to the city's heritage neighborhoods and downtown area, is the Design Review Board; its membership includes an architectural historian. This eleven-member panel reviews proposed new construction and substantive exterior changes to existing buildings in an area that covers most of the city's older neighborhoods, including buildings in most National Register historic districts and individually listed properties.⁷⁷

Another commission without a formal relationship with the HPC but charged with oversight of an important historic asset is the city's Levee Commission which, established in 1911, has overseen the city-owned Mississippi riverfront. Since its founding, the Levee Commission has worked to change a site of heavy industrial use to one that is more recreational. The area's most prominent feature is LeClaire Park, the southern edge of the city's downtown area. The park includes several local landmarks and an historic riverside baseball park, train depot and a railroad freight house.⁷⁸ The park itself is not locally landmarked and only changes to local landmarks within it are subject to review by the HPC.

⁷⁵ "Historic Preservation Review Agreement," September 13, 2005. Copy in possession of author.

⁷⁶ Davenport Municipal Code, Chapter 12.32.190 and John Frueh, email to author, March 9, 2016. Frueh chairs the city's HPC.

⁷⁷ In residential review areas, cost of changes must equal 25% of the assessed value or the square footage of the building being altered. "Design Review Board," accessed March 12, 2016, at <http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/departments/board.php?structureid=106>.

⁷⁸ Steve Ahrens, in discussion with author, March 10, 2016. Ahrens is the Levee Commission's Executive Officer and its only employee. The board is comprised of volunteer members, and has historically been appointed by the mayor. Recent ordinance changes allow council members to appoint members from their wards.

Governance: Issues Affecting Heritage Neighborhoods

Vacant and Abandoned Properties

Davenport's overall residential vacancy rate of 7.9% is higher than that of the overall Quad Cities rate of 3%.⁷⁹ Within the city's heritage neighborhoods, that figure rises to 13.5%.⁸⁰

The city does not require registration of vacant or foreclosed buildings. It does maintain an informal "suspected vacant" list. In 2015, that city list included 233 properties. 201 of those buildings were in heritage neighborhoods.⁸¹ Since 2015, Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), a Community Development Corporation, and city staff have been refining vacant property lists. In January, NHS reported that its list had grown to 550.⁸² In March, a new city list put the figure at 780; approximately 480 are buildings in heritage neighborhoods.⁸³ The list does not note building condition but does include ownership information. The increase does not likely reflect an increase in vacant properties but, instead, better reporting. In the past year, a newly elected alderman has made focusing on vacant properties a priority.

Even strong neighborhoods are affected. The newly surveyed Hamburg Historic District, arguably the city's most active historic district and neighborhood association, has approximately thirty vacant buildings among a total of 225, returning a 13.3% vacancy rate.

⁷⁹"Quad Cities Region Community & Economic Highlights," accessed April 6, 2017, at <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5685a7e8a12f44306f7879bf/t/57681eb103596eeee8eadd2f/1466441393668/DIA+Quad+Cities+Summary.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Davenport figures taken from 2014 Census numbers; heritage neighborhood figure reflects vacancy rate in related census tracts.

⁸¹ Davenport Public Works Department, "Suspected Vacant" spreadsheet. Received by author December 1, 2015.

⁸² Brook Hayes Upton, in discussion with author, January, 23, 2017. Hays Upton is the Finance Director/MLO for Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), a community development corporation (CDC) who rehabilitates home in Davenport's Core. She has tracked vacancy rates for a number of years.

⁸³"Copy of Newest Vacant Property and Demo Data Newest 3 23 17," City of Davenport. In possession of author. Number of vacancies in heritage neighborhoods based on a sorting and rough count of addresses.

City code defines both “Vacant” and “Abandoned” buildings. It requires all unoccupied buildings to be secured and any abandoned buildings to have all openings secured. It goes on to require boarding of unsecured buildings and defines materials which are to generally match the color of the structure. Code also permits the city to inspect such buildings. In reality, such buildings are rarely entered and inspected.⁸⁴

Demolition Review

Davenport has no demolition by neglect ordinance. City demolitions tend to run in cycles. In 2015, the city proposed a list of thirty three properties. The 2017 list includes nineteen properties; eighteen are within heritage neighborhoods and two are relisted National Register properties from the 2015 group.

Davenport uses its police powers to initiate demolition, allocating city dollars and placing a lien on the vacated parcel. It is not city policy to make internal inspections of buildings slated for demolition even in instances where they appear safe on the exterior.⁸⁵ Rarely is money recouped; additionally, since the city does not take possession of the parcel, it has no future control over its use except through zoning regulations and permit requirements. Vacated parcels in heritage neighborhoods typically do not see new construction except for Habitat for Humanity homes and one recent city initiative.

Citing lack of political will and property ownership rights, Davenport has not used state code that permits municipalities to petition the court to be given properties deemed abandoned. This legislation can greatly shorten the time a building stands vacant and thus reduce deterioration. Other Iowa cities have used the code to great effect.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ “Securing of Abandoned Buildings” and “Abatement of Dangerous Buildings,” Davenport, Iowa Municipal Code, accessed April 7, 2017, at <http://clerkshq.com/default.ashx?clientsite=davenport-ia>.

⁸⁵ Based on author’s experience and confirmed in 2015 by Public Works employees meeting with the HPC to discuss National Register properties slated for demolition.

⁸⁶ Tom Warner, in discussion with author, October 19, 2015. Warner is Davenport’s city attorney and drafted the legislation. As of December 2015, Burlington, Iowa, had used the code, 657A.10A, 100 times. Properties were either demolished or auctioned for rehab. Scott Power, in discussion with author, October 5, 2015. Attorney Power is in private practice but has worked with the city of Burlington’s city attorney for 30 years and handles the legal aspects of the city’s 657A.10A filings.

Other than the city, the most significant demolition pressure comes from institutions located in heritage neighborhoods. For example, Palmer College of Chiropractic is located near the Cork Hill Historic District. Its policy is to purchase houses near its campus and demolish them. Most recently, it has requested a demolition permit for nine properties located near its campus; eight are single family homes and one is a locally landmarked 19th Century-early 20th Century hospital. All are listed in the National Register. The college recently presented a long-range Planned Institutional Use plan that would require removal of additional residential properties. It is in the process of demolishing two other houses that are not historically designated.⁸⁷

Code Enforcement

Davenport's ordinances speak clearly to property maintenance expectations in Chapter 8 of the municipal code. The city is not required to serve notice of violations and bills owners for services performed after the fact. Residents can report violations online, via smart phone or tablet or by calling Public Works and the department sends out inspectors to investigate issues. Unpaid fines are assessed against the property.⁸⁸ At times, compliance can be lax and follow up enforcement by city staff can seem inconsistent. Complaints by residents wanting to see stricter code compliance are not uncommon.⁸⁹

Rental Registry

Historically, Davenport's heritage neighborhoods have a higher rental to owner-occupied ratio than found elsewhere in the city,⁹⁰ making good oversight of these properties important. Many heritage neighborhood rentals are conversions of single family homes. Davenport's rental code is one of the city's

⁸⁷ The PID plan was presented to the Davenport HPC on April 11, 2017; the author was present at the meeting.

⁸⁸ "Neighborhood Enhancement," Davenport, Iowa Municipal Code, accessed April 7, 2017, at <http://clerkshq.com/default.ashx?clientsite=davenport-ia>.

⁸⁹ The subject came up during two SWOT analysis meetings held by the author as part of preparation for a Preservation Plan assignment. Parenthetically, it came up randomly in two conversations with residents in April, 2017.

⁹⁰"Davenport 2025," 116. Davenport's low housing costs make it an affordable place to buy a home.

strengths. Maintenance for both owner-occupied and rental properties is spelled out in Chapter 8 of the city code. It requires all rentals to be licensed and registered annually and for all landlords to attend a training session. Rentals are subject to inspections. In college/university zones, the code restricts the number of unrelated adults living in a single family home to five.

Rentals are subject to nuisance abatement proceedings should code violations or founded police calls reach certain levels.⁹¹ Nuisance abatement can go so far as to require landlords to shut down properties for a period of months. Some of the nuisance abatement procedures, added after 2000, had a positive impact on badly managed rentals, especially ones where criminal activity was an issue. In other cases, such abatement action has the potential of creating long term, uninhabitable vacant properties that do not meet city code and whose owners are unable or unwilling to bring them into compliance.⁹²

Zoning

Davenport was laid out on a grid pattern, its heritage neighborhoods featured mixed use development with single and multi-family residences in various styles complemented with nearby shops, churches and parks. The city introduced zoning in 1925, evolving over the next fifty years to favor single-use zoning which separated residential areas from commercial and retail spaces. After the 1970s, conventional subdivision single use style development has characterized most growth, with multi-family and commercial areas set apart.⁹³ The last major update to the zoning code was in the 1970s.

Davenport recently announced that it would rewrite its outdated zoning ordinance which was last overhauled in the 1970s. It has hired a national firm to lead it through an eighteen-month process. One of the project's stated goals is spurring development in older areas of the city.⁹⁴

⁹¹ "Chapter 8.15 Neighborhood Enhancement Nuisance Abatement," Davenport, Iowa Municipal Code, accessed April 7, 2017, at <http://clerkshq.com/default.ashx?clientsite=davenport-ia>.

⁹² Based on conversations author has had with city enforcement staff who recognizes that owners may be operating on very thin margins, particularly rentals in single family conversions.

⁹³ "Davenport 2025," 93-94.

⁹⁴ Devan Patel, "Zoning Ordinance Rewrite Brings Davenport into 21st Century," Quad City Times, March 7, 2017, accessed March 28, 2017, at <http://qctimes.com/news/local/government-and->

Financial Incentives

State incentives and several initiatives within the city’s urban core neighborhood have had a positive impact on historic preservation efforts in recent years.

State Historic Tax Credits (SHTC)

Iowa is one of more than thirty states that has implemented an historic tax credit program.⁹⁵ Iowa’s incentive, introduced in 2000, includes some flexible terms that include what the state calls a “fully refundable” option, allowing recipients to take the tax credit as a cash payment in lieu of state taxes owed. This factor makes rehabilitation of Iowa properties attractive to out-of-state investors who no longer need to syndicate credits as well as residents or not-for-profits with small or zero tax liability. Iowa also set aside a portion of its \$45 million-per-year appropriation for what it calls a “small projects fund” for rehabs of \$750,000 or less. Owners of historic residential properties and churches as well as commercial buildings are eligible to apply for funding which returns 25% of qualified rehabilitation expenses (QREs).⁹⁶

The credits have been used very effectively in the city’s old central business district that abuts the southern edge of Davenport’s heritage neighborhoods. An historic hotel that closed after a methamphetamine lab caught fire in 2006 reopened after a \$35 million renovation.⁹⁷ Vacant downtown

[politics/zoning-ordinance-rewrite-brings-davenport-into-st-century/article_260f8a10-f8af-5ce7-9c68-0e453ec81178.html](http://www.preservationnation.org/politics/zoning-ordinance-rewrite-brings-davenport-into-st-century/article_260f8a10-f8af-5ce7-9c68-0e453ec81178.html).

⁹⁵ “State Tax Credits for Historic Preservation,” accessed March 8, 2016, at http://www.preservationnation.org/information-center/economics-of-revitalization/rehabilitation-tax-credits/additional-resources/nthp_state_tax_credits_model_policy.pdf. The number of states with these programs is a moving target, since some programs are subject to sunset provisions, subject to renewal by state legislators. The author of this 2013 National Trust article noted that thirty one states had adopted these laws.

⁹⁶ “State Tax Credit,” accessed March 9, 2016, at <https://iowaculture.gov/history/preservation/tax-incentives/state-tax-credit>.

⁹⁷ Jennifer Dewitt, “Hotel Blackhawk Reopens Today, Unveiling Four-Year \$35 million Restoration,” *Quad City Times*, accessed March 9, 2016, at http://qctimes.com/news/local/hotel-blackhawk-opens-today-unveiling--year-million-restoration/article_581cea96-0811-11e0-b03e-001cc4c002e0.html.

buildings and have been rehabilitated as apartments, most at market rate. Downtown Davenport is the fastest growing residential area in the city with an estimated 1,500 new apartments housing over 2,000 residents when all existing buildings are rehabbed.⁹⁸ Restaurants and shops have reopened in empty store fronts. There is talk of developing more downtown historic districts to spur further redevelopment.

There has been use by homeowners as well. In the Hamburg Historic District, owners have accessed the state credit program for twenty one projects. Approved Part 2 applications will return over \$500,000 in QREs once the work is completed. The overall investment by homeowners is more than \$2 million.⁹⁹

Unfortunately, today's political and economic environment is threatening this powerful tool. After years of prosperity, Iowa is facing a budget shortfall. The dim financial forecast, coupled with a majority Republican legislature elected in 2016 whose focus is trimming government, has put all of Iowa's tax credit programs under the microscope. On April 13, 2017, a house study bill was introduced that proposed reduction in a number of state tax credit programs beginning July 1, 2017; it would cut the SHTC program to an annual appropriation of \$35 million per year and the percentage of QREs returned to developers to 15%. Advocates have mounted a campaign to persuade legislators to retain the credit in its current form.¹⁰⁰

Property Tax Relief

State enabling legislation also allows Davenport to offer an Urban Revitalization Tax Incentive (URTE) program for both commercial and residential properties in low-to-moderate income census

⁹⁸ Doug Schorpp, "Davenport's Downtown Continues to Draw New Residents," The Des Moines Register, April 26, 2015, accessed January 23, 2016 at <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/2015/04/26/downtown-davenport-growth/26363109/>.

⁹⁹ Calculations based on an informal survey done by the author in early 2016, based on financial figures shared by owners.

¹⁰⁰ "House Study Bill 187 Introduced," accessed April 15, 2017, at <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=87&ba=HSB187>, and Smart Growth Coalition, emails and phone calls. The author is participating with this group.

tracks, many located in the city’s heritage neighborhoods. Property owners are offered a variety of timetables that permit them to delay property tax increases generated by improvements to their buildings.¹⁰¹

Workforce Tax Credits

The Iowa Department of Revenue’s “Workforce Development Housing Tax Credits,” includes incentives for rehabilitation of dilapidated housing stock. The program, similar to a now defunct “Enterprise Zone” initiative can be used in conjunction with other state and federal programs in targeted city areas.¹⁰² The program has sometimes been used for rehab of historic buildings. Like the SHTC program, this incentive is also currently under review.

Preservation Partners and Assets

Within the city of Davenport, recent activity has the potential for both complementing and enhancing the city’s urban core historic districts.

In 2009, Hilltop Campus Village (HCV) was named a Main Street Iowa Urban District. The district includes historic shops and homes that begin three blocks north of Locust and run south along Harrison and Brady Streets, major one- way corridors connecting to downtown Davenport. HCV’s north, east, and west borders co-mingle with four of the city’s historic districts, the Vander Veer Park, College Square, Cork Hill, and Hamburg Historic Districts. It also encompasses the campuses of two educational institutions, St. Ambrose University, a Catholic four-year college, and the private Palmer College of Chiropractic.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “Urban Revitalization Tax Exemption,” accessed March 8, 2016, at <http://www.cityofdavenportiowa.com/eGov/apps/services/index.egov?view=detail;id=539>.

¹⁰² “Workforce Housing Tax Credits,” accessed March 8, 2016, at <http://www.iowaeconomicdevelopment.com/Community/WHTC>.

¹⁰³ “Our Identity,” accessed March 9, 2016, at http://www.palmer.edu/about-us/identity/#Identity_Statement. Chiropractic care was invented in Davenport in 1895 by D. D. Palmer.

HCV's emergence revitalized a slumbering neighborhood commercial district and has begun to infuse it with new life and identity. The district's residential areas are a combination of multi-family rentals, small historic apartment buildings, and single family homes. Also included within its borders are several historic churches organized under their own social networking organization.¹⁰⁴

Not for Profit Activity

For a number of years, Scott County, the entity that manages tax lien sales and clears titles for tax sale auctions has transferred properties to not-for-profits for the purpose of rehabilitation.

Two rehabilitation partners work in the city's urban core neighborhoods and historic districts.

Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS) is a not-for-profit agency that began restoring homes in 1981. Since then, it has rehabilitated more than 180 homes, almost all south of Locust. It provides a range of other services including mortgage lending, homebuyer education, lead abatement, and an exterior grant loan fund. Many but not all of its homes target low-to-moderate income buyers.¹⁰⁵ At times, the dollars it has used for rehabilitation require abatement procedures that run counter to historic preservation practices, such as removal or covering of original materials. Despite these restrictions, the NHS staff takes pains to observe good preservation practices whenever possible. More recently, it has sought more

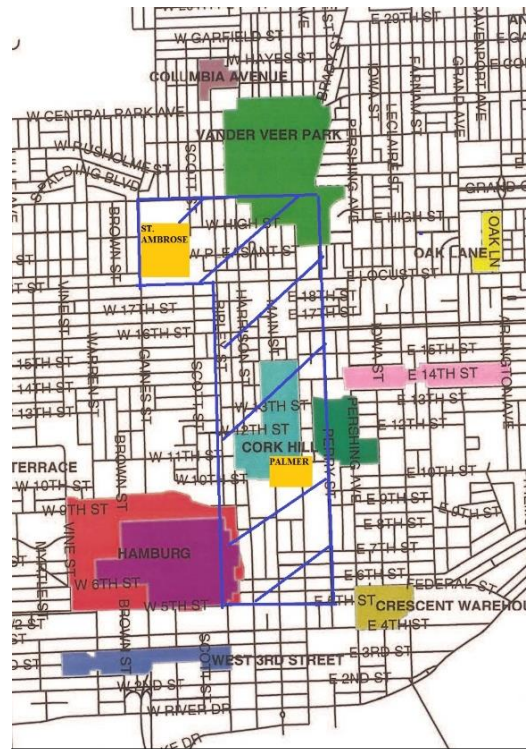


Fig 6. The Hilltop Campus Village boundaries in blue, overlaid over historic districts and institutional partners. Source: City map, no longer available online and author's overlay of HCV.

¹⁰⁴ P.U.N.C.H., or "People Uniting Neighborhoods and Churches" is comprised of Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, AME, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Christian/Disciples of Christ congregations located within or near the borders of Hilltop Campus Village. They offer a variety of individual social outreach programs and, as PUNCH members, joint events for families throughout the year.

¹⁰⁵ Neighborhood Housing Services website, accessed March 9, 2016, at http://mvnhs.org/index_files/Page796.htm.

flexible funding sources.

Gateway Redevelopment Group (GRG) is a very small all-volunteer grass-roots organization whose goal is saving abandoned historic buildings in the Hamburg Historic District. Since 2004, the group has intervened by fully rehabilitating two demolition-bound properties, facilitating new ownership for four abandoned or foreclosed neighborhood buildings from the county and from banks. In 2016, the group took possession of seventh deteriorated building; rehabilitation is underway. In 2017, it will take ownership of another property to mothball for future redevelopment. Costs are funded through a combination of grants, state historic tax credits and sales of salvaged architectural materials sold through its Architectural Rescue Shop; the store is housed in one of the buildings it restored.¹⁰⁶

Summary

Despite Davenport's early and aggressive National Register survey and listing strategy that identified many historic assets, the city's heritage neighborhoods struggle with disinvestment and blight despite powerful state legislation and incentives. Without a demolition by neglect ordinance or resources tracking these neighborhood issues, actions tend to be reactive rather than proactive.

There are points of light. Plans are underway to revise an outdated zoning code. The central business district is coming alive with new housing and residents and a nearby neighborhood shopping district has been designated an Urban Main Street community. With the city in reasonable financial condition and continuing to experience slow but steady growth it is time to focus its attention to its heritage neighborhoods.

¹⁰⁶ Gateway Redevelopment Group website, accessed March 8, 2016, at <http://www.grgdavenport.info/>. The author is a GRG officer.

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