

CREATING A DESIGN OVERLAY DISTRICT FOR URBANA'S HISTORIC DOWNTOWN

—
Preserving Downtown for Future Generations



Urbana Historic Preservation Commission Presentation

– Dennis Roberts –



THE IMPORTANCE OF URBANA'S HISTORIC DOWNTOWN

Urbana's downtown is the heart of our community. Here a visitor catches their first impression of Urbana. Its character and economic vitality may be gauged through a quick assessment of the appearance of downtown—its commercial storefronts, the cleanliness of its streets and sidewalks, its pedestrian and automotive activity, and its over-all tempo.

A community's downtown creates a sense of place. Capitalizing on the qualities which are unique and set the downtown apart from neighboring communities creates a statement about the community which is absorbed at a glance and speaks of the pride and potential which the community has for itself and shares with the world.

A community with an indifferent downtown is a community in decline.



EARLY PROPOSAL TO CREATE PROTECTION FOR OUR HISTORIC DOWNTOWN

A strong interest in creating a Downtown Design Overlay District to protect the historic features of Urbana's downtown was discussed by the Historic Preservation Commission, as recorded in their meeting minutes of March, 2016:

(HPC minutes March 2016)

. . . Whereas the historic importance of the area of Downtown, Urbana broadly defined as the blocks of Main Street from 200 West to 200 East and the blocks of Race and Broadway from 200 North to 200 South, cannot be over emphasized; and

Whereas recent modifications to buildings in this area compromised the historic representativeness of this area, and

Whereas the City has no Design Review board overseeing development of the area above.

We the members of the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission signify the importance of and request the City Council expedite the protection of and creation of a Design Review Board for this area.

2012 DOWNTOWN URBANA PLAN

The *2012 Downtown Urbana Plan*, adopted April 16, 2012, Ordinance 2012-04-041, addresses development in an area from Park Street on the North to California Street on the South, and Central Avenue on the West and Anderson on the East (see Map #2).

The document includes the following goals (pg. 10):

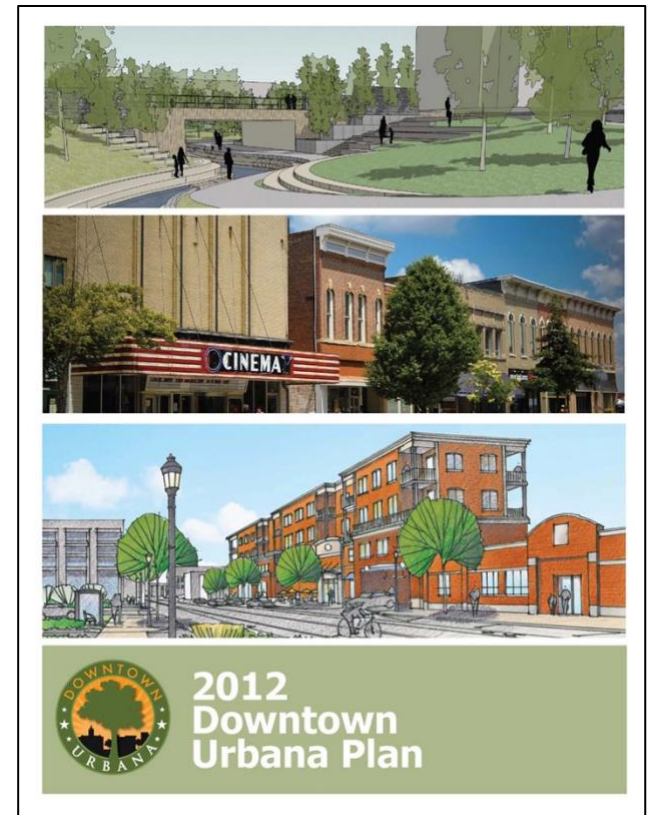
Seven Key Goals

Seven key goals emerged from many hundreds of comments and ideas submitted by the community for moving Downtown forward, from which:

- *Promote context-appropriate urban-style infill development to extend downtown's core character.*
- *Protect and enhance the character of downtown.*

Urban Design Standards Overlay District

The Downtown Plan promotes extension of the traditional "Main Street" style urban core to adjoining blocks as new development occurs over time. To this end, the Downtown Plan calls for adoption of urban design standards. Some of the benefits of adopting design standards will be to ensure that new multi-storied buildings are positioned close to sidewalks with display windows at the sidewalk edge. Parking would be encouraged to be located behind or within enclosed buildings.



The *2012 Downtown Urbana Plan* devotes an entire page to preservation of the historic character of the downtown (Pgs. 58-59):

Character and Historic Architecture

Public input gathered throughout the downtown planning process indicates that its traditional design character is one of the favorite aspects of downtown for area residents. Residents appreciate the historic architecture, the pedestrian scale of buildings, and the walkable nature of the downtown core.

. . .

One of the most distinctive aspects of downtown Urbana is its historic architecture. Many buildings along Main Street, Race Street, and Broadway Avenue were built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Several of these properties are designated as local landmarks. Landmark designation offers protection for Urbana’s historic buildings through review of proposed alterations.



CREATION OF THE DOWNTOWN URBANA HISTORIC DISTRICT

In August 2019 the first level of recognition and protection was accorded the historic downtown by the creation of the *Downtown Urbana Historic District*.

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places is a great distinction, ***but it does not in itself prevent the alteration or even the demolition of a property and it does not automatically lead to historic zoning.***

Properties within an historic district receive protection *only when the federal government or federal funds are involved.* . .

Protection and oversight is left to the city to establish.

NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Urbana Downtown Historic District

other names/site number N/A

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

street & number Roughly bounded by Illinois, Walnut, Water, Goose Alley, and Cedar Sts. not for publication

city or town Urbana vicinity

state Illinois county Champaign zip code 61801

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Illinois Department of Natural Resources - SHPO
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register

 other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

1

The creation of the *Downtown Urbana Historic District* offers basic protections to specific buildings and provides benefits to property owners of designated structures as well as certain tax benefits offered through inclusion in the *National Register of Historic Places*, but one must also consider what the *National Register* **does** and **does not** cover.

As stated in the Urbana Historic Preservation Plan, July 6, 1998 (pg. 32):

*What the National Register **Does Not Do**:*

- **Does not** prevent a property from being demolished or insensitively renovated;
- **Does not** mandate a property be restored to its original appearance;
- **Does not** require a property to be open to the public or to periodically be placed on tour;
- **Does not** require property maintenance;
- **Does not** allow a property owner to be eligible for the 10% federal tax credit for the rehabilitation of properties built before 1936;
- **Does not** prevent future changes to a property.

It is therefore up to local ordinances to offer legal protections to historically-significant properties within districts when these benefits are not sought by the property owner.

I believe the City can and *should* adopt a *Design Overlay District*, which would complement the Downtown Urbana Historic District by creating a **guide** to promote context-appropriate urban infill development in the historic area, as has been done in numerous other communities.

PRINCIPLES ADDRESSED BY DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines address massing, scale, proportion, height, and harmonious relationships with adjacent structures. It is of great importance to be aware of the building's architectural style, as it is expressed through façade, design elements, and construction materials. Typical architectural elements commonly included by other communities in their criteria for requiring review for new or altered construction include:

- ***Massing and Scale and Relationship to Adjacent Structures***

The three-dimensional bulk of a structure, including height, width, and depth. The perceived height and bulk of a building relative to that of neighboring buildings

- ***Building Height***

Building Height should remain consistent with other buildings in the district. Buildings towering above the block are out of place in the downtown historic district

- ***Building Façade***

The face of the building to the street, the façade, should reflect the general style while maintaining a sense of proportion and harmony with the rest of the block. New construction and renovation should harmonize with the existing historic block. New construction adjacent to the Historic District, which visually is an extension of the downtown, must also adhere to these basic provisions.

In an established Historic District identifying important functional or decorative features is vital to maintain the historic compatibility of these structures.

Using appropriate renovation materials is required in the historic district. The removal of inappropriate, non-historic cladding, pitched roofs, awnings, and other later alterations can help reveal the true historic character of a storefront.

SUMMARY

Urbana's Main Street is the heart of the downtown. Its buildings and monuments reflect its historic importance and role in Urbana's early growth.

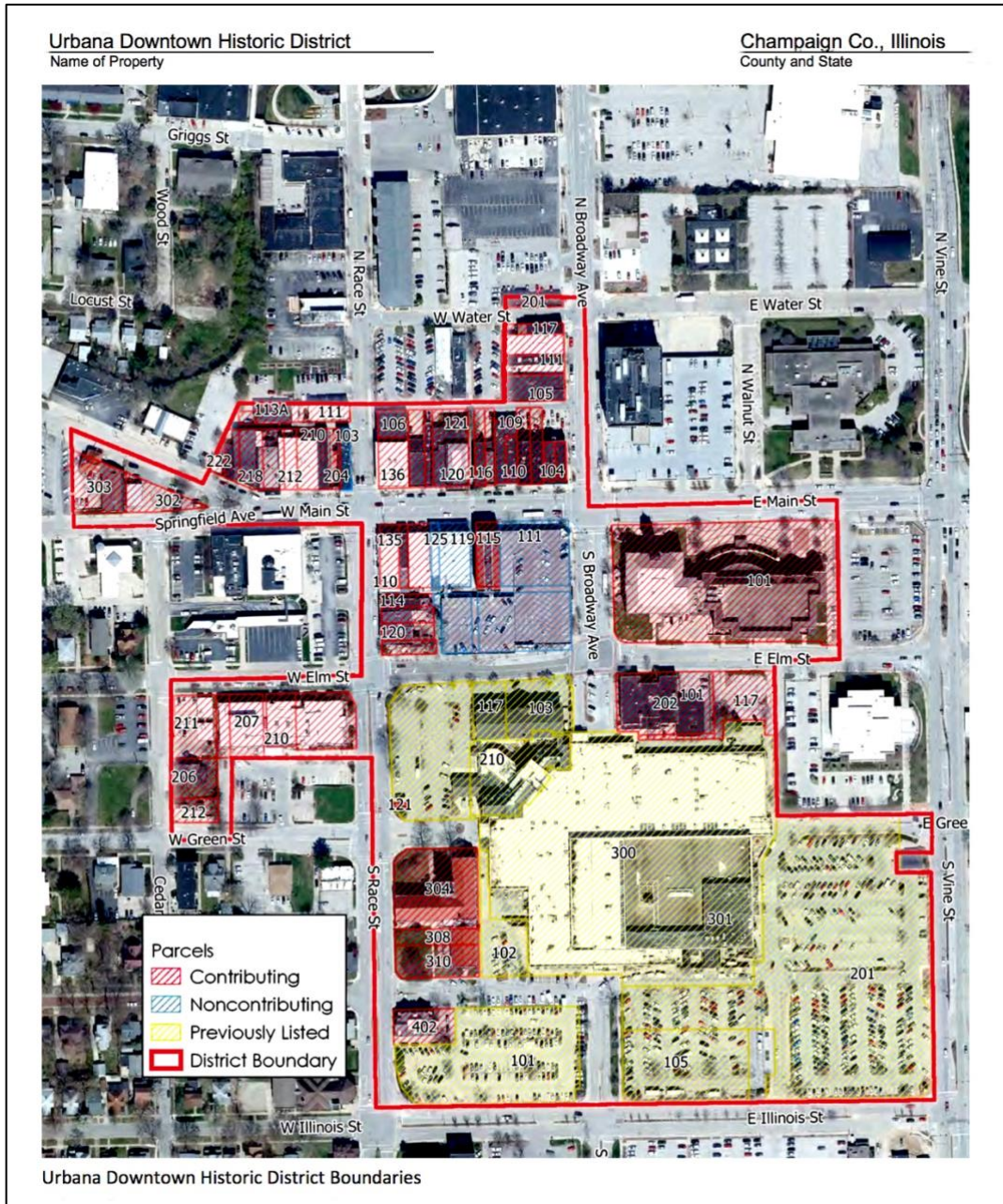
Celebrating the memory of Urbana's pioneer settlers, community leaders, statesmen, and artists, and the accomplishments they achieved, is part of our written history. Urbana's historic buildings and places can likewise provide a tangible connection with our past. Our public buildings and commercial storefronts are part of the historic visual tapestry in which we live, which enriches our communal understanding of our place in time.

GOALS

1. Establish a set of Design Guidelines for properties within the *Downtown Urbana Historic District*, providing a review process for proposed remodeling and new construction, to assure compatibility with the over-all integrity of the District.
2. Establish a Buffer Zone with Design Guidelines to guide future development of properties surrounding the *Downtown Urbana Historic District*, to ensure that these properties will be compatible with and extend the over-all integrity of the *Historic District*.

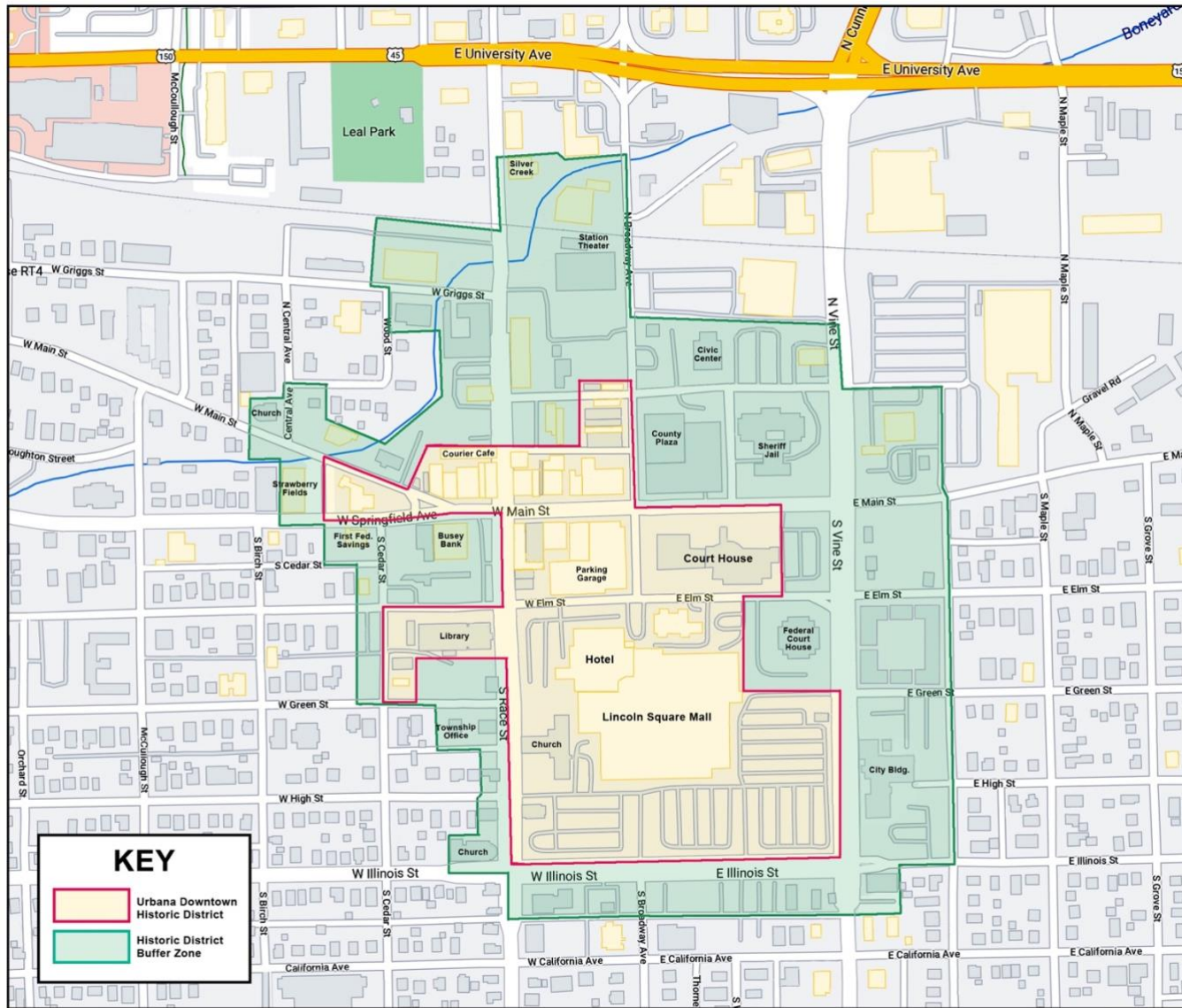
These goals will guide and maintain the unique character of the community's historic center—for today and on into the future.

Urbana Downtown Historic District Boundaries (Established in August 2019)



Proposed Buffer Zone to the Design Guideline Overlay Area

Urbana Downtown Historic District and Proposed Buffer Zone
 — Design Guidelines Overlay Area —



Dennis Roberts 2022

LIST OF COMMUNITIES WHICH HAVE HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGN GUIDELINES

Illinois

- Urbana: East Urbana Design Review District / Lincoln-Busey Corridor Design Guidelines / Mixed-Office Residential (MOR) Design Guidelines
- Chicago IL Chicago River Design Guidelines
- City of Carbondale IL, Historic Preservation Plan
- DeWitt County IL, Historic Preservation Ordinance
- Geneva IL, Strategic Preservation Master Plan
- Naperville IL, Historic District
- Village of Oak Park IL, Historic Preservation Commission, Guidelines, Appendices C: Requirements and F: Historic Preservation Ordinance
- Etc.

Other Communities

- Asheville, North Carolina Historic Districts: Albemarle Park / Biltmore Village / Chestnut Hill / Montford / St. Dunstan's . . . and 9 others
- Baltimore City, Maryland, Historic Preservation Design Guidelines
- Cleveland Heights, Ohio, Historic Preservation Design Guidelines (109 pgs.)
- Dodge City, Kansas, Heritage District Overlay Guidelines
- Holland, Michigan, City of Holland Historic District Commission Design Guidelines
- Lee's Summit, Missouri, Historic Preservation Plan (pp. 114-115)
- Loudoun County, Virginia Heritage Preservation Plan (Chapter 10)
- Park City, Utah, Historic District Design Guidelines/ Municipal Code / Section 15-13, 1 through 9
- San Antonio, Texas, Mission Historic District Design Guidelines
- Sarasota Florida, Sarasota County Design Guidelines for Historic Properties
- Etc.

The Michigan Historical Center, Department of History, Arts, and Libraries document, Creating Design Guidelines for the Historic Commercial District, could be a useful tool as an example in shaping guidelines for the **Urbana Downtown Historic District Design Overlay** document.

