

United States Department of the Interior  
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# National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

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This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

### A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

The City Beautiful Movement and City Planning in Des Moines, Iowa 1892-1938

### B. Associated Historic Contexts

The City Beautiful Movement and City Planning in Iowa

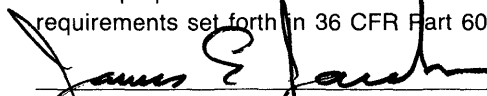
### C. Geographical Data

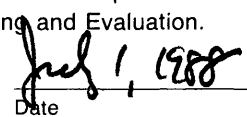
The resources associated with this context are located within the municipal limits of the City of Des Moines, Iowa.

See continuation sheet

### D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

 OSHPD



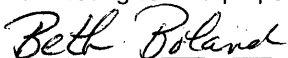
Signature of certifying official

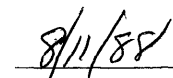
Date

Bureau of Historic Preservation, State Historical Society of Iowa

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.





Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

Date

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**E. Statement of Historic Contexts**

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

Refer to Continuation Sheet E-2+

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**Context**

**Introduction.** The period from the 1890s and continuing, with gathering momentum, into the 1920s, was a time of change and reform in America. Progressive reformers representing a broad spectrum of society believed that change was possible and desirable--and acted upon that belief. Their motives and roles often overlapped and inter-related. Reform efforts affected the appearance of a city as well as the structure of society. Facets of the progressive movement included planning for city improvement and development, belief in hiring outside experts, joining national organizations committed to the same goals that local residents were, and working together to effect change. Reforms--fundamental change in social and economic structures--continued into the New Deal years of the 1930s when substantial infusions of federal dollars made local public works projects affordable.

One of the most important national groups in stimulating interest in urban design and planning was the American Park and Outdoor Art Association.<sup>1</sup> Des Moines planning efforts reflect principles the group promulgated, and the city benefited from association with this influential group. A Des Moines Park Board member is known to have attended the 1898 meeting of the group. And two of the city's early and influential consultants, Warren H. Manning and Charles Mulford Robinson, were both prominent spokesmen for the organization.

In crafting this version of the City Beautiful Movement (one suited for small- and medium-sized cities), the American Park and Outdoor Art Association emphasized beautification projects accomplished in piecemeal fashion, believing this to be a more practical approach than monumental plans with visionary goals. Des Moines residents applied this tenet of the City Beautiful Movement. The progress toward creation of the river front Civic Center<sup>2</sup> of public buildings reflects, by the piecemeal construction (1900-1937), the project-by-project approach that characterized urban development in medium-sized American communities (a parallel occurrence contrasting with comprehensive monumental city planning in large cities such as Washington, D.C.). The Des Moines experience shows the advisability of prior planning, of retaining while refining initial concepts, and of adopting manageable goals.

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<sup>1</sup>John A. Peterson, "The City Beautiful Movement. Forgotten Origins and Lost Meanings," Journal of Urban History 2 (August 1976): 415-434 provides a useful discussion of the City Beautiful Movement and the role of this organization and its leaders.

<sup>2</sup>The term was used as early as 1909.

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While seeking variously to adopt systematic improvement plans, landscape parks, commission statuary, adorn buildings, and create boulevard systems, national groups such as the American Park and Outdoor Art Association and American Civic Association (and local groups as well) collectively adopted the slogan of the City Beautiful to portray their goals. The term encompassed all manner of planned civic improvement around the turn of the century. At first the emphasis was on beautification, although practical matters also received consideration. By the 1900s beautification was increasingly allied with utility, efficiency, and usefulness--watchwords of the progressive era--until by the 1930s, difficult financial years, utility was stressed more than beauty. Thus, a reform movement that began with beautification projects evolved into planning citywide improvements of both beautiful and useful merit and then brought modern urban planning to city government.

River front improvements--river walls, bridges, and a series of public buildings--epitomize the City Beautiful Movement and urban planning in Des Moines, Iowa. As the best and most prominent representation of this national movement in the city, the relatively unaltered and impressive appearance these buildings and structures present along the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers illustrates design principles formulated at the turn of the century and refined through the 1930s. Their combination of beauty and utility dovetails with the transition between City Beautiful principles and the development of modern city planning.

River front improvements represented more than the effect of city planning in Des Moines' physical development. James B. Weaver, Jr., prominent lawyer and active participant in planning in Des Moines, singled out the river front in a 1925 article in the nationally important journal, The American City:

The physical change wrought [by river front improvements] has made a powerful appeal to the pride of Des Moines. It has stimulated other plans. The Civic Center has had a definite spiritual reaction, the unification of the city, through the transformation of a disgraceful dumping ground and sinister dividing line into a central area of great beauty and practical utility.

The architecture of the buildings and structures arrayed along and over the river, with its emphasis on restrained classical styles, reflects the influence of the White City of Chicago's 1893 Columbian Exposition, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and European urban design in general. The various river front plans and the actual construction also call attention to the role of local architects in both building and plan design. More important, the plans and reports by such eminent experts as Warren H. Manning

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and Charles Mulford Robinson influenced Des Moines civic improvements, especially the Civic Center.

From an ugly duckling of haphazard development, garbage-strewn and eroding riverbanks, deteriorating iron bridges, and cheap buildings, the river front emerged as an orderly combination of natural and manmade beauty. The six extant public buildings forming the Civic Center display uniformity of color, height, and placement. With the exception of the Art Deco Style Armory at the north end of the district, all display similar restrained variations of the classical vocabulary. Civic Center construction dates from the progressive period in Des Moines and is directly related to efforts to bring about change in a variety of sectors.

In the political sphere, these buildings and structures--especially the Municipal Building and the Municipal Court Building--are tied to the nationally known political reform, the Des Moines Plan of government. Construction was approved for the Municipal Building at the same election that approved adoption of the Des Moines Plan in 1907. It was "clearly intended as the architectural symbol of the new government," William Lebovich concluded in America's City Halls. The role of women's groups as well as businessmen's booster organizations and local, state, and federal government representatives in working together is an integral part of the story as well.

Another political theme played a role in city planning progress in Des Moines. Repeated delays in river front and parks development was due to the need to seek legislative approval for improvements. The piecemeal approach was a necessity when cities lacked home rule. Changes in governmental structure can indeed affect the appearance and physical development of a place.

**Legal Entanglements Ensure Delay.** Efforts to bring planning improvements to Des Moines were marked by solid citizen approval on the one hand and lawsuits, injunctions, and property condemnations on the other. And in the years before home rule gave cities more powers, each change--creating a park board, building a municipal court building, issuing bonds--required state legislative approval, a time-consuming process.

Legislation was required in 1900 just to allow the city to build bridges connecting parks and to have control of the river channel. This legislation was a necessary step in carrying on a general scheme of river front improvement. Still other measures were required to authorize tax levies. Court battles, several of which ended at the Iowa Supreme Court, further delayed the Park Board from acquiring parts of the river front in the first decade of the twentieth century. In another instance, lawsuits and

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legislation barred construction of part of the proposed boulevard system until 1911.

A subsequent layer of obstacles came from the federal government. For example, it required fourteen years of planning, politicking, and bureaucratic delay before the U.S. Court House was built along the river front. And during the Depression of the 1930s, plans were drawn and repeatedly discussed for a large addition to the U.S. Post Office for a number of years before approval was received.

**The Participants.** Throughout the history of the City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines, an unusual degree of cooperation characterized the attempts to plan for change. Indeed, in light of various controversies--especially from property owners along proposed improvements--such teamwork was a critical factor in achieving change. As James B. Weaver, Jr. pointed out in 1925, Des Moines benefited from a "special measure of unity of effort." Averring that "Des Moines has always believed in planning," John D. Adams, longtime secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, in 1937 listed four key groups as having "taken a prominent part in the last half-century of planning for the city." They were the Town Planning Commission, City Engineer's office, Federation of Women's Clubs, and the Chamber of Commerce. Adams' list contains the key representatives in Des Moines planning and beautification efforts: government, special boards and commissions, women's organizations, and booster groups.

Beginning in 1892 and extending through the 1930s, a collection of groups climbed aboard the boat favoring beautification efforts and city planning generally, and river front development in particular. Their actions were part of the larger picture of reform, change, and improvement that characterized turn-of-the-century Des Moines. The Board of Park Commissioners, Des Moines Boat Club, Des Moines Driving Club were all interested in recreational facilities. The Park Commission was also interested in providing open space for downtown visitors. The Women's Club strongly believed in planning for river front beautification. The Commercial Exchange promoted Des Moines as a convention city and favored parks, especially along the river front, for visitors. Economics aside, this group of businessmen favored political and social reforms, beautification programs, progressive city planning, and a more responsive form of government. Still other reformers wanted to clean up graft and corruption, such as that which flourished on East Court Avenue by the river. River front improvements--replacing houses of prostitution with public buildings--could accomplish just that.

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Board of Park Commissioners. The commitment of the Park Board--and Des Moines--to planning dated from two pivotal events in 1892. The first was passage of legislation creating the Des Moines Board of Park Commissioners. Virtually no land had been set aside in the city for parks prior to the Board's establishment. Their efforts to create a system of parks, a connecting system of parkways or boulevards, and improve the downtown river front dated from 1892.

Also in 1892 lawsuits regarding ownership of the Des Moines River and its banks were settled, so that the City of Des Moines gained legal ownership of that part of the disputed river front. (Subsequent lawsuits were over other portions of land.)

Among the important initial goals of the Board was improving the river front. Sidney Foster, insurance company founder and an early and influential Board member,<sup>3</sup> frequently called for beautifying the river front, both for the intrinsic merit of the project and also as a means for drawing together the competing east and west sides of town. During the turmoil surrounding site selection for a new library, Foster went on "record as emphatically championing the thought of making an attractive park and breathing place within easy reach of the people down town."

An important outside influence upon the Park Board was the American Park and Outdoor Art Association. In 1898 a member of the Des Moines Park Board is known to have attended their annual meeting. That a representative from Des Moines attended the meeting is evidence of rather sophisticated local interest in municipal improvement and beautification, one dating from the early period of the City Beautiful Movement.

By the 1890s the river front had become, in Weaver's words:

veritably a dumping-ground, a location for junk dealers, livery stables, dilapidated shacks, willow thickets, sand-bars, billboards and rickety old-time bridges. It was admittedly a disgrace--just a dividing line between practically two separate cities, each with its commercial, social, and political orientation, operating in keen rivalry.

It was not difficult to conclude that this was not a desirable situation, especially for a city that prided itself in being a convention city. (The Commercial Exchange boasted that over one hundred conventions were held in Des Moines in 1904.)

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<sup>3</sup>In 1892 Foster coined a once-famous phrase, "In all that is good, Iowa affords the best."

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Faced with virtually no park land, the nascent Park Board concentrated, quite naturally, on acquisition, especially of large tracts. Primary concerns of the Board included landscaping, recreational uses, scenic drives or boulevards, and athletic fields. Along the Des Moines River they initially devoted time and expense to improving Union Park just north of downtown.

Much of the Board's progress came early, and by 1894 they had acquired the basis of today's park system, some 600 acres in four large parks (Greenwood, Waveland, Union, and Grand View). None of the park land was donated; all was acquired by purchase or condemnation. In most cases, additional parcels were added to these parks over time, and changes in lay-out, use, and amount of parkland have been considerable.

The Park Board early on believed in hiring outside experts to suggest, assess, or design park plans, and it was through their efforts that the first landscape architects visited the city. In 1900 the Board hired Boston landscape architect Warren H. Manning. Manning had prepared many planting plans during his eight years with Frederick Law Olmsted's office, then the pre-eminent landscape architectural firm in the country. And he was familiar with City Beautiful concepts from his work on the plan for the Columbian Exposition. Among his major recommendations for Des Moines (see plans section below) was creation of river front boulevards which would connect with city parks. Manning concurred that the downtown river front was a clear and obvious location for a collection of public buildings. (The library was under construction at the time of his visit, and a river front site for a new courthouse was under debate during this period.)

The Park Board also brought in Seymour Nelson (also known as Nelson Brothers and Swaim Nelson & Sons), a Chicago landscape architectural firm. Nelson visited the city in 1901 and 1907. Consultants such as Manning were hired to prepare recommendations, while the Nelsons (and later, Ray F. Weirick) provided specific plans. The Nelsons are known to have prepared plans for the following small municipally owned spaces by 1908: Franklin Square, Hoyt Sherman Place, and around the Public Library. It does not appear that even remnants of these plans remain; some were never implemented.

Lawsuits, a sometimes recalcitrant City Council, the need for additional legislation, and constant money shortages slowed progress for the Park Board but did nothing to dampen interest. The Iowa Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Park Board in 1901, but it took the City Council another year to decide to convey ownership of the disputed river banks to the Park Board.

By 1905 changes along the river front only longed for in the 1890s had occurred. In its 1905 annual report the Park Board



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favorably addressed the concept of public buildings along the river front. It advocated placement of an art building just north of the library and termed the proposed new Post Office (construction was approved in 1902), Library (site selected in 1898), and Art Building site (never built) "a very proper grouping." The Board envisioned the river front as a most fitting place, according to City Beautiful Movement principles, for a series of public buildings within an impeccably landscaped setting.

The year 1908 was the last year of operation for the original Park Board after conversion to the Des Moines Plan changed the structure of government. Under the commission form of government, a Department of Parks and Public Property and an elected Commissioner assumed Park Board responsibilities. By then the Board had acquired 676 acres in five large and thirteen small parks and begun to make some improvements in them. No mention was made in their final report of progress on boulevards or parkways, and it does not appear that there was any progress on this feature of their plans.

In addition to advocating development of the river front into a civic center of public buildings, the Park Board made recommendations or approved others' suggestions that had an impact on future developments. In their 1908 report they agreed with earlier suggestions on the advisability of a dam south of Court Avenue. The dam would (and did) maintain a suitable water level for the river in front of the Civic Center. The Park Board also envisioned a recreational use for filled land just beyond the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers. This project, eventually undertaken using federal CWA and WPA funds, carried on the balustraded river walls of the Civic Center, covered over an old dump, and provided a recreational spot (present site of a baseball stadium).

The principle accomplishments of the Park Board were (1) to acquire the foundation of the present parks, (2) to make the topics of beautification and development of open space key issues among Des Moines leaders, and (3) to cross the legal hurdles toward acquisition of river front properties.

Polk County Board of Supervisors. Other groups also eyed the river front. The year 1896 was the first time the area was openly discussed as a suitable site for a new courthouse. This sounded the opening bell for a protracted debate on both sides of the river, including (of course) lawsuits. Sidney Foster favored a site north of Locust "to aid in our plan of beautifying the river front." It is significant that in the 1890s there was substantial and broad-based interest in the river front as a site for public buildings. In the end, the courthouse was completed

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in 1906 near the site of the earlier version, four blocks from the river. Politics, not planning principles, selected the site.

Library Board. The Library Board was more successful than courthouse proponents in achieving river front status. But the site was not without controversy. At special meetings some members of the Women's Club opposed the west bank "arsenal location" at Locust Street and the river. Not only did they feel the place was too far from residential and commercial areas and some streetcar connections, the river front was deemed an unsafe, undesirable area, a situation they felt was unlikely to change.

The Women's Club took this stand despite their avowed support of river front improvement efforts. Mrs. D.H. Reichard, president of the club, felt that "the city has no immediate intention of improving the river front." Perhaps using the library controversy as a means to force City commitment, she called for "some definite statements with regard to what improvements will be made," noting the high cost of dam and river wall construction. Mrs. Cora Hillis was more positive, however, and presented a resolution to the club favoring the river site. The measure passed at the special April 21, 1898 meeting of the Women's Club.

The fate of the library site was linked to two other important public projects, construction of a state historical building and a new arsenal. The State was willing to sell the river front arsenal site to Des Moines for \$15,000. The money, in turn, would be used to purchase a site for a state historical building near the Capitol. A site already purchased for it would then be used for a new arsenal or armory, according to the plan. By selecting the river front site, the City of Des Moines stood to gain three new buildings.

The river front advocates prevailed, and on April 29, 1898 library trustees voted six-to-three for the arsenal site, lots 7 and 8 of block 33. On October 26, 1898, the City Council vacated additional ground along First and Locust Streets for the library building, the first public building since the state arsenal of the 1860s and Fort Des Moines No. 2 in the 1840s to grace the waterfront. Like the Park Commissioners, the Library Board expressed hopes for unification when it chose a river site for the library.

Commercial Clubs, East and West. Beginning in 1901 the Commercial Exchange, the principal businessmen's booster organization in Des Moines,<sup>4</sup> made river front development a major project. In addition to supporting Park Board plans, they also petitioned the

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<sup>4</sup>Predecessor of the Commercial Club and the present Chamber of Commerce.

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federal government for a new federal building (the Post Office) and appointed a committee of forty to investigate the feasibility of making the Des Moines River navigable through construction of a canal.

Also during this period, but beginning in earnest in 1905, the Commercial Exchange launched a vigorous and successful campaign to clean up city government and make it more responsive to businessmen. The centerpiece of the plan was the adoption of the nationally known Des Moines Plan--the commission form of government. In 1907 voters approved the change in government as well as authorizing construction of the Municipal Building on the river front, the first city hall built specifically to house the new, more open style of government.

East side businessmen were also active during this period. In the fall of 1906 the East Des Moines Commercial Club unveiled a plan for the river front. Fundamental to it was construction of a new city hall between Walnut and Locust Streets on the east bank. The club's idea had the backing of Alderman Wilbur S. Fraley. Local architect Charles E. Eastman put their ideas to paper and enthusiastically endorsed the proposals (see plans section). A notable feature was a bandstand on a barge moored off the Grand Avenue bridge.

The Commercial Clubs worked with the City Council and the Park Board to further their goals for the river front. In 1908 local architect Frank E. Wetherell prepared plans for the Civic Improvement Committee of the Greater Des Moines Committee of the Commercial Club. The plan, which featured a bridge north of Grand Avenue and five public buildings, was submitted to the City Council (see plans section). It is clear from the volunteer committees and the commissioning of various plans that Des Moines businessmen were deeply involved in river front development.

Further evidence of the Commercial Club's interest in the river front was its decision to build the Coliseum there. Built on land F.M. Hubbell owned north of the Public Library, the Coliseum (burned 1949) opened with great fanfare in 1910. It superceded the smaller Auditorium at 4th and Grand which had been built just ten years earlier. The Coliseum was built with funds raised through public subscription as part of the Commercial Club's commitment to selling Des Moines as a good place for conventions. The Coliseum had the backing of the Commercial Club, its Greater Des Moines Committee, and the East Des Moines Commercial Club.

The businessmen's organizations also worked in concert with Des Moines women. After Charles Mulford Robinson made his report (at the behest of the Des Moines Women's Club) on city beautification plans in 1909, the Commercial Club provided funds for the hiring of Ray F. Weirick, a landscape architect from Kansas City.

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Weirick was hired to make a survey for one of the boulevards Robinson advocated. He later prepared other park plans. Not only did the Commercial Club foot the bill to hire a professional (apparently marking the beginning of professional City staff) but they also backed the Robinson plan at the expense of earlier plans they had commissioned from Wetherell.

Des Moines Women's Club. With the involvement of the Des Moines Women's Club, an additional influential segment of Des Moines society weighed in behind city planning and beautification, especially of the river front. Their commitment dates from at least 1898 when the library site was selected and probably went back to early Park Board work beginning in 1892. Working with such business organizations as the East and West Side Commercial Clubs, the Greater Des Moines Committee, and the Real Estate Exchange, the Women's Club secured the blessing of the City Council to hire the nationally known city planning expert Charles Mulford Robinson. But the women assumed responsibility for the expense of his visit and report (see plans section below).

The Civic Improvement Committee, working with the City Council, had proposed a plan in 1908. Why then did the women add yet another plan to the river brew? The reasons behind their decision to hire Robinson were not specifically stated. However, the 1908 plan by Frank E. Wetherell is notably lacking in careful consideration of land use. It is possible the women felt that an expert in city planning and beautification could provide a better plan. They may also have felt that the weight of a nationally known expert would improve the chances of acceptance--and lessen tinkering with the design. In addition, the design of retaining walls seems to have met with general dismay in 1909, prompting a four-week campaign that resulted in the Robinson visit.

City Government. The Des Moines City Council, especially prior to the 1908 conversion to the commission form of government, was alternately receptive to and wary of beautification plans. By postponing turning ownership of the river banks over to the Park Board in 1901, they delayed that board's ability to make improvements. In 1900 they refused to approve a levy to build the city library.

But they also authorized substantial construction projects. In 1907 bids were let for the \$124,800 Locust Street bridge. As early as 1906, City Engineer John Budd prepared extensive river improvement plans. The estimated \$277,644 project (not implemented all at once) was to eliminate island sand bars, straighten the channel, and provide extended retaining walls along the river. Preparation of plans set a precedent in city government, and the city was prepared when grants or other allocations became available, notably in the 1930s.

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Reform of municipal government was a facet of a general reform movement that swept the nation around the turn of the century. In general, reformers favored efficiency, beauty and cleanliness, orderly planning, their interpretation of morality, and the imposition of business standards and practices upon government. Accepted in 1907, the Des Moines Plan of government was an attempt by businessmen to apply these progressive reform principles to the operation of their municipality. In June of 1907, voters approved the change as well as construction of a new city hall. The vote followed a two-year campaign involving enabling legislation, lawsuits, and lengthy debate in the newspapers.

Like most American cities, Des Moines city government before 1908 consisted of a mayor and elected aldermen. Under the Des Moines Plan, the mayor and four commissioners were all elected at-large in non-partisan elections. The electorate had other political tools at their disposal--typical progressive-era reforms--including the initiative, referendum, and recall.

Each elected commissioner (and the mayor) was responsible for a particular city department: streets and public improvements, parks and public property, public affairs, public safety, and accounts and finance.<sup>5</sup> The first commissioner to serve over the Parks and Public Property Department was Commissioner J. Wesley Ash. In 1908 he announced plans to work with the Civic Improvement Committee regarding the Wetherell plan, termed the River Front Civic Center Plan.

Commissioner John L. Hamery, newspaperman Harvey Ingham, the Reverends C.S. Medbury and Finis S. Idleman, and a number of women's groups led a reform crusade in strenuous efforts to rid the city of vice. In the 1890s a district of saloons, gambling houses, and brothels had been allowed to flourish in the area around East First and Court Avenue. Crusades in 1908 and 1910 in particular resulted in the closing of some of these operations by the river at Court Avenue. The Municipal Court and Public Safety Building (first stop for those arrested) was built in 1918-19, with no little irony, at the head of this formerly infamous district. Efforts at moral reform thus overlapped with plans for river front improvement.

The circumstances behind adoption of the Des Moines Plan of government had many affects on municipal government in the city,

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<sup>5</sup>While a major goal of these reforms was to eliminate graft and corruption, illegal practices did occur. In the early 1920s four-term parks commissioner Harry B. Frase and others were convicted of padding payrolls. It does not appear that these activities seriously harmed improvements in the parks and public property department.

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not the least of which was considerable nation-wide attention. The most lasting physical achievement of the reformers was the creation of the Civic Center of public buildings, bridges, and other improvements along the river front.

By 1919 the city had settled into political life under the Des Moines Plan of government. Superintendent of Parks Harry Frase reported that the city had spent over \$4,000,000 in improvements between 1914 and 1919. Among them were the Municipal Court Building (\$600,000), University Avenue bridge (\$400,000), Grand Avenue bridge (\$180,000), Court Avenue bridge (\$220,000), and \$1,600,000 in various paving projects.

Local Architects. As landscape architecture, municipal art, and city planning gained increasing favor nationally and in Des Moines, local architects also turned to matters of site planning. If architect Daniel Burnham could "make no small plans" in his monumental city plans for Chicago, local architects could also design open space, they reasoned. Eastman was the first, in 1906, to offer his (and the East Des Moines Commercial Club's) version of "how the river front problem can be solved" (see plans section below). By this time, the library was in place and construction was slated to begin soon for the Post Office.

At the behest of the Civic Improvement Committee of the Greater Des Moines Committee (connected with the Commercial Clubs), Frank E. Wetherell prepared the "Plan of Improvement of River Front" in 1908. Wetherell and fellow architect Ralph Sawyer later served on the Boulevard Committee, with landscape architect Ray F. Weirick. And architects Amos Emery, Clark Souers, and John Brooks prepared an incredibly ambitious plan at the request of the Federation of Women's Clubs in 1929-32.

Wetherell in particular was active in town planning, especially in his connection with the Civic Improvement Committee. He was secretary of the Town Planning Committee, and he served as City Planner around 1919. In addition, Wetherell was a founder and first president of the Iowa Town Planning Association founded in 1920. Under his leadership the organization successfully gained passage, by 1924, of legislation allowing zoning in Iowa.

Local architects also prepared designs for buildings associated with beautification and city planning. The most notable example which was not built was the Natatorium. Designed in 1917 by Frank E. Wetherell, it was to be located north of the Municipal Building. But World War I-related restrictions on public construction apparently doomed the ambitious plans. Before war-related emergencies intruded, however, the city razed buildings on the site. Local architects also worked in collusion to force the City to hire groups of architects for major public works--the

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Municipal Building and Municipal Court and Public Safety Building.

State of Iowa. State officials were also infected with a zeal for improving public grounds. Beginning with William Larrabee in 1890, Iowa Governors regularly called for "improvement of the capitol grounds." Larrabee was primarily referring to grading immediately around the Capitol. Biennial Messages from five more governors between 1900 and 1913 repeated and expanded the call. In his January 1913 Message to the General Assembly, outgoing Governor Beryl F. Carroll called for a "comprehensive scheme for enlarging the Capitol grounds."

The State chose an indirect route for gaining a comprehensive plan. Legislation passed in 1909 authorized erection of a "pedestal for a monument to be erected in memory of William B. Allison."<sup>6</sup> The Allison Memorial Commission used their pledge to plan for and provide a memorial as a means to improve the entire grounds around the Capitol and the Historical Building. Among those serving on the Commission were Edgar R. Harlan, Curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, and General Grenville M. Dodge, chairman of the Commission and renowned railroad builder. Establishment of the Commission also coincided with introduction of the Charles Mulford Robinson plan for Des Moines.

In cooperation with the National Sculpture Society, the Allison Memorial Commission hired Emmanuel L. Masqueray, a New York City architect, and Charles Grafly, a sculptor, to advise them. Grafly had received numerous medals and prizes for his work and since 1892 had been an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. French-born Masqueray was a prize-winning graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He immigrated to America in 1887. In 1904 he was chief of design for the Lewis and Clark Exposition in St. Louis.

When Masqueray and Grafly visited the Capitol around 1910, inexpensive wood frame housing, much of it in disrepair, lay cheek by jowl with the jewel of state government. The contrast between virtual squalor and the magnificence of the Capitol and State Historical Building created a highly discordant effect. In addition, state government needed expanded quarters--Carroll recommended construction of a governor's mansion and a judicial building. The state's plans released in 1913 emphasized beautification, the provision of a suitable setting for the Capitol (see plans below). The chief results of the report included demolition of the tawdry housing, expansion of the Capitol

<sup>6</sup>Allison was a highly respected Republican politician who served in the U.S. Senate between 1873 and 1908 and held Iowa elective office beginning in 1863.

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grounds to some 70 acres, and construction of several curving Beaux-Arts roadways.

Town Planning Commission. The creation of the Town Planning Committee in 1915, a subcommittee of the Chamber of Commerce (as it was renamed in 1913) Civic Improvement Committee, marked a significant step toward integrating planning into city government. Two years later this private group became the Town Planning Commission under the auspices of the City Council. And city planning formally became part of city government.

The new commission authorized reports on aspects of city planning. In 1917, for example, they received a report from the Boulevard Committee (Ray F. Weirick, Frank E. Wetherell, Ralph Sawyer) on a proposed boulevard system. Lawsuits had delayed completion of earlier plans until 1917, and revisions were prudent. The Commission also directed architect Ralph Sawyer to prepare plans for widening East Court Avenue from the river to the Capitol, an example of the attempted coordination between Capitol improvement plans and planning in Des Moines. Also in 1917 the Town Planning Commission received plans from Frank E. Wetherell for a \$200,000 Natatorium.

The Town Planning Commission was active in river front development. They advocated a municipal natatorium in 1917 and 1919 for the site north of the Municipal Building. But by 1921 they had shifted to favor a memorial hall to World War I veterans on that site (present Armory site).

The Town Planning Commission fostered creation of the Zoning Commission in 1923. The two groups were eventually combined to form the Plan & Zoning Commission. Under the influence of Town Planning Commission and the Zoning Commission, the City initiated contact with another nationally known urban planner, Harland Bartholomew. In the spring of 1925 the City Council and the Commission sponsored a series of public meetings with Bartholomew. One of the hotly debated topics was the desirability of zoning, then a new concept. Bartholomew's consulting business delivered the various sections of the city's first modern comprehensive plan<sup>7</sup> from 1924 to 1927 (see plans section below).

In 1929 the City formally adopted the Bartholomew city plan. An editorial singled out for discussion Bartholomew's suggestions regarding the Civic Center and noted the current difficulties in financing. (During the 1920s the Iowa economy, tied to agriculture and plummeting postwar prices, suffered.)

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<sup>7</sup>Earlier plans, including Charles Mulford Robinson's 1909 report, did not cover all aspects of public works in the same detail as Bartholomew's comprehensive city plan.



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The City called on Bartholomew repeatedly, in 1927, 1929, and 1939 for park landscaping plans, and in 1938 to revise the 1924-27 comprehensive plan. During a visit in 1941, Bartholomew contended that Des Moines citizens lacked the spirit and pride to improve the city. In a stunning turnaround from previous decades, Bartholomew concluded:

there seems to be no body interested in making it a good city and in preserving values. There is less public spirit here than in almost any city I have ever been in.

Des Moines Federation of Women's Clubs. Women remained involved and continued to play a role in fostering river front. In 1929 J.N. (Ding) Darling, the Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist and conservationist, asked the Women's Club to sponsor specific plans for Civic Center development. Darling was then chairman of the Civic Art, Parks and Recreation Committee of the City Plan Commission. Johnson Brigham, State Librarian and author of a 1911 history of Polk County, donated \$2,000 to the project, and the Women's Club raised \$3,000 plus another \$1,500 for a railroad survey (tied to acquiring a new Union Station).

The money was used for supplies and to pay draftsmen, and the architects donated their time. The result was another plan by local architects for the Civic Center. Loosely based on Bartholomew's recommendations, the plan was formally presented in 1933 (see plans section below).

Federal Government. With its approval in 1902 of local requests to locate the proposed Post Office on the river front, the federal government became a participant in river front development in Des Moines. This association lasted into the 1930s (and continues today through various programs). Federal projects along the river included the Post Office in 1909-10, U.S. Court House in 1928, 1930s Depression-era public works projects--replacement and expanded river walls, a dam, bridges, sewer interceptors--and the Armory in 1934 (all are extant).

Local residents, including then-Streets Commissioner John MacVicar and Chamber of Commerce secretary John D. Adams, frequently cited the presence of a body of existing plans as the most important ingredient that resulted in early and substantial federal aid. Adams noted in 1937 that river front improvements have "been held the number one project of the city" under all the federal relief programs. He pointed out that plans dated from the 1890s to confine the river within concrete walls and to maintain a more uniform water level by constructing a dam. To that end the City Engineer's office maintained up-to-date plans, ready should the occasion arise.

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Federal relief projects across the country began with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) in May 1933, followed by the larger (\$3 billion) Public Works Administration (PWA) in June. Congress approved the CWA in November 1933 and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1934. These programs funded construction of highways, schools, public buildings, water systems, sewer systems, hospitals, flood control, water power and reclamation projects, electric power systems, ships, housing projects, and railroads.

MacVicar contended that the first Civil Works Administration (CWA) aid went to a Des Moines project, and the presence of plans prompted that early approval. By November 26, 1933 the CWA had approved plans for dredging the river and constructing river walls and interceptor sewers. And by December workers were on the job. In February 1934 MacVicar announced that 2,000 CWA workers would begin work on the river walls as well as continue dredging and levee work.

A 1934 editorial reflected local sentiment about the significance of CWA programs in realizing these decades-long river front plans:

When in years to come it is desired to point to lasting monuments of the Civil Works administration in Des Moines, the improvements constructed along the banks of the Des Moines river through the civic center will stand as an excellent citation.

In 1936 the City received approval for more river front improvements under the WPA. These included the Scott Avenue bridge and dam, Riverside Drive, altering the course of the Raccoon River, and construction of sewer systems. (Another federal project, the Federal Artists' Project, provided a birdseye painting of how these proposed changes would change the river front. It is significant that the river front was chosen as the centerpiece of the artwork.)

Special flood control programs affecting the Des Moines River also date from the 1930s. The Flood Control Act of 1938 was aimed at controlling Mississippi River flooding by regulating the waters of its tributaries, and the act included authorization of Red Rock Dam and Lake Red Rock south of Des Moines on the Des Moines River. Legislation passed in 1958 authorized Saylorville Lake, north of Des Moines on the Des Moines River, to supplement Red Rock flood control measures. Both projects were built by the Army Corps of Engineers.

**Plans Bold and Varied.** Beginning in 1896, assorted public uses for the then-shabby river front were put forward by various

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public bodies and interested citizens. Some suggestions--locating public buildings along the river front, landscaping, a second dam, better bridges, river walls, and cleaning up the river front--remained constant throughout the nearly four decades of discussion. Although the proper height was sometimes contended, river walls were consistently included in plans, whether from the Park Board, landscape architectural consultants, or the Library Board. That the river front should be landscaped and used for public buildings, sculpture, and monuments was also a consistent theme.

Two plans by nationally prominent experts (Warren H. Manning and Charles Mulford Robinson) were the most influential. Both were active in the American Park and Outdoor Art Association, a key organization in early beautification efforts. Manning, the first expert to advise Des Moines residents, offered general recommendations on river front and boulevard plans. He was the first expert to give his stamp of approval upon the locally-conceived civic center concept. Robinson provided the city's first comprehensive plan and contained more specific recommendations.

By producing revised plans, local architects serving on or for various commissions and groups played an important role in keeping discussion of the river front and parkway development on the front burner. They also produced plans for four of the buildings along the Des Moines River.

Philip Kell Plan. In 1896 Philip S. Kell, manager of the Iowa Turf Publishing Company in Des Moines, proposed a "riverside boulevard." In an article printed in the magazine he edited, Spirit of the West, Kell outlined a plan for a tree-lined drive with a center bicycle lane along the river levee north of the Center Street dam extending to the city bath house. The drive was intended to connect with parks under development. It was part of the Board of Park Commissioners early plans under development and was reproduced in the their 1899 annual report.

The area north of the dam was deemed a good choice for the boulevard since it was the only remaining portion of the west bank near downtown that was unimproved and unused. The plan thus took advantage of an existing situation. Kell may have concentrated on this area at the expense of sites farther south on the river since the Park Board then lacked sufficient funds or even legal ownership of these areas.

Refinements to the Kell Plan were announced, probably by the Park Board, in 1899. A river boulevard or "speedway" for carriage travel was proposed for a 70-acre park on the west side of the river. Envisioned was a chain of river front parks with beautiful lagoons and groves that would connect with Union Park by a new bridge at Washington Street. Even in 1899 a system of

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connected parks was envisioned. It does not appear that any progress was made on the Kell plan or its 1899 refinement. But these early efforts are evidence of the early and initial commitment to river front improvements.

Warren H. Manning Plan. Manning (1860-1938) received a solid grounding in horticulture from his father, noted New England nurseryman Jacob Manning. In addition, he spent eight years (1888-96) in the office of Frederick Law Olmsted (often termed the father of landscape architecture in America). Manning began preparing planting plans but progressed to supervising and designing projects as well for the prestigious landscape architectural firm. He supervised over one hundred projects for Olmsted in twenty-two states and was responsible for parts of parks plans for Milwaukee, Buffalo, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., and the extensive grounds of the Vanderbilt estate, Biltmore, in Asheville, North Carolina. He provided the planting designs for the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Manning represented the Olmsted firm in extensive travels across the country.

In 1896 (Olmsted died 1903) Manning set out on his own. Despite a lack of formal training (like many pioneer landscape architects), Manning was highly regarded and a leader in national organizations. In 1897 he was instrumental in establishing the American Park and Outdoor Art Association and served as its secretary. Two years later he was among the eleven charter fellows of the American Society of Landscape Architects and was elected its president in 1914.

Manning's independent planning experience included over 1,600 projects in forty-two states. He designed park plans for Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Louisville. From 1908 to 1913, he prepared campus master plans and planting plans for Cornell University, the University of Virginia, and Johns Hopkins University. Manning's career and influence have only recently become the subject of scholarly investigation.

At the behest of the Des Moines Park Board Manning visited Des Moines in September of 1900. His report, dated October 23, 1900, discussed park development and their advantages--especially Union Park along the river--city squares and playgrounds, the river front ("the connecting link in your boulevard system"), and boulevards. He favored a park system (not just a collection of parks), small playgrounds for the poor, and a boulevard system connecting the parks. The latter was deemed essential, to provide "safe and attractive passageways." The backbone of that system would be river drives in Manning's approach.

Manning noted (as would later experts) that "the principal topographical and landscape feature of the city is the Des Moines river." He recommended construction of river front boulevards on

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both sides of the river and stretching from the north and south city limits. Riverbanks would be increased using fill from sand bars or islands that then dotted the river front. The river would, under this plan, be some 100 feet narrower with the addition of land for the boulevards and promenades. Both the Kell and Manning plans featured riverside drives, unlike later ones.

The Library was already under construction when Manning's plan was put forward, although debate over a courthouse site on the river continued. The plan concentrated on landscaping and the boulevards rather than placement of public buildings. But he also noted that the river front "will be a splendid foreground for the important group of buildings that such an open space will draw to this place, of which the public library is the forerunner."

Thus, even this early plan for city parks development called for a civic center of public buildings along the river and addressed river front improvements as a significant feature of civic beautification efforts. At this early date, however, Park Board ownership of the river front was far from settled.

Charles E. Eastman Plan. Conceived at the behest of the East Des Moines Commercial Club and Alderman Wilbur Fraley, Eastman's river front plan of 1906 was meant to stimulate interest in placing the proposed city hall on the east bank (but between Locust and Walnut Streets) and to show the "possibilities of the river becoming the beauty spot of the great city which will be the Des Moines of the next decade," according to Eastman.

Eastman's proposals--actually little more than a sketch--were more symbolic than substantive and seem to have been aimed primarily at focusing attention on the river front and assuring that the city hall was located on the east bank. At this point the Library was in place and a river site for the Post Office was assured, but it had been decided that the county courthouse was not to be on the river.

The principal innovation was also symbolic. In addressing the traditional strife between residents of the east and west side, Eastman placed a bandstand on a barge off the center of the Grand Avenue bridge. That way, he explained:

The gray haired old patriots who now are discussing East Des Moines and West Des Moines instead of Greater Des Moines can pick out the parks on their respective sides of the river and think they are still inside of their own bailiwicks. But with the new Des Moines patriot the Great Des Moines spirit will prevail the most....

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Eastman envisioned that the proposed parks, on both banks between Locust Street and Grand Avenue, would be donated. Given the lack of private generosity that had heretofore characterized owners of river front property, this suggestion was less than realistic. Millionaire businessman F.M. Hubbell owned the west side site and Jacob Gilcrest, of the pioneer lumber company, the east. Hubbell did not amass his fortune by giving away land. In 1902 he had offered to sell the site for \$125,000 to the federal government for its new Post Office and eventually he leased the site to the Commercial Club for the Coliseum.

Frank E. Wetherell Plan. At the request of the Chamber of Commerce's Civic Improvement Committee, architect Frank E. Wetherell prepared a plan in 1908. Many of the features emanated from the Civic Improvement Committee. In recognition of evolving principles in city planning and urban beautification, the committee noted that "the proposed improvements...combine[d] utility with beauty."

Among the practical suggestions were an interurban station at Second and Des Moines Streets and new bridges over the Raccoon River and north of Grand Avenue near Des Moines Street. Another new feature was the "subway." The low drive ran south beneath Court Avenue, then along the water level (site of present Riverside Drive) to the confluence of the rivers.

Beautification recommendations centered on creating parking--small landscaped parks--along the river from the Center Street dam nearly to the Raccoon River. The landscaping included rows of trees, flower beds, fountains, and perhaps statuary as small, formal focal points.

The river front park of the Municipal Building was depicted with treatment similar to that of the Library, including a fountain and steps leading to the river. River wall plans called for pillars with electric light fixtures and flower urns on them. The architect's plan is notable for its lack of sensitivity toward landscaping and land forms. Parallel rows of trees march along the river; when mature, they would obscure views from and to the buildings.

Much of the district of public river front buildings had been constructed by this time--the Library, Post Office, a new Locust Street bridge, and some river walls. Proposed and included in the Wetherell plan were the Municipal Building and the Coliseum. A "prospective building" was also shown in the block beyond the Coliseum.

Charles Mulford Robinson Plan. Described in a Landscape Architecture obituary as "pioneer and widely known advisor in city planning, author, and Professor of Civic Design in the University

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of Illinois," Robinson brought together in his 1909 report the various suggestions for urban improvement in Des Moines and gave them the stamp of his expertise. He (and his influential books from 1901 and 1903) ignited and combined interest in municipal art, civic improvement, outdoor art, European influences, beautification, and planning.

Robinson was in considerable demand for his civic plans until his death in 1917. Beginning with Buffalo, New York, in 1902, Robinson provided some twenty-five plans and reports for communities across the nation, including Detroit, Denver, Oakland, Honolulu, Dubuque (1907), Cedar Rapids (1908), San Jose, Los Angeles, Waterloo (1910), and Council Bluffs (1913).

Robinson's 1909 ninety-five-page typed report, "City Planning Report for Des Moines, Ia." (subtitled "Suggestions for the Beautifying of the City of Des Moines on a Comprehensive Plan") was the city's first comprehensive city plan, the first report to cover a variety of topics (albeit rather briefly) from the new field of city planning. It gave both legitimacy and cohesiveness to ideas and suggestions that had been bandied about for years. Robinson's plans for the river front Civic Center incorporated principles of the City Beautiful Movement, Romantic or natural landscape architecture, and practical city planning. The report, as reflected in the title and the text, was on beautification throughout the city. But, as had been the case with earlier plans, two topics received considerable treatment: the river front and creation of parkway and boulevard systems.

Chapters covered topographical conditions, streets, railroads and industries, the Civic Center and Capitol approach, parks and playgrounds, and boulevards, parkways and new parks. Like any good planner, Robinson inspected the visual and topographic realities that affected urban development. He noted that the rivers affected development and created a "very diverse topography" within three river-defined areas, the south, east, and west sides of town.

Robinson's recommendations included progressive planning principles, a step beyond emphasis on beautification. Among them were limiting downtown building height to lessen congestion, and construction of public comfort stations (especially near the river), a public market, and a new union station. Many of these suggestions were not dealt with in detail; in some cases--such as recommending specific zones for industry, a new concept--he laid out the justification or reasons for such a practice. Robinson advocated creation of a local City Plan Commission to deal with street problems, a smoke emission ordinance, improving school grounds, and avoiding grid patterns for streets. He hoped that all freight traffic could be routed south of the city and ap-

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proved of the suggestion that the Raccoon River be diverted to control flooding.

Robinson summed up progress on the river front:

The people of Des Moines have done a rather fine and unusual thing. Without expert instruction and admonition, they have made up their minds that they are going to possess a Civic Center, and that they are going to have it take the river as its dominant feature.

Robinson went on to point out that the Library, Post Office, and nearly completed Coliseum were already in place, and the Municipal Building was under strong consideration. Also, that river front property had at last been secured and contracts let for an 800' retaining wall. In short, he concluded that more had been accomplished in creating a "real and imposing Civic Center than in almost any other American city."

Robinson's treatment of river front landscaping was more informal, even Romantic in concept, than some early plans (notably the 1908 Wetherell plan). Rather formal arrangements--centered fountains or statues, symmetric walks--dominated near buildings. But in the parked areas irregularly curving paths at water's level, masses of low-growing shrubs, occasional clumps of iris, and irregular land forms dominated. Such an arrangement had several benefits in Robinson's estimation. It provided a downtown park with "moral and hygienic" properties. The effect would be "harmonious, unified and beautiful," and of "practical park value." When viewed from across the river, Robinson noted, the landscaping would be beautiful yet would pose no barrier "to detract from the stateliness of the buildings above." Had Manning prepared more detailed plans, they would undoubtedly have had much in common with Robinson's approach.

In the plan, east side buildings were placed to balance the existing ones. And behind the Soldier and Sailor's Monument (proposed to be relocated there), on the east side of East First Street, Robinson envisioned an art building. The final piece of the Robinson Civic Center was an armory between Walnut Street and Court Avenue on the east side (site of the present U.S. Court House). Other features of Civic Center improvement included bridge construction, which Robinson noted was "now well advanced," cleaning up the riverbed--including burying water and gas pipes laid across the river and protected by piles--and permanently raising the water level with a dam.

Robinson appears to have been the first to tie the river front district of public buildings with the Capitol complex seven blocks east. Locust Street, despite its narrowness, was the best



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approach to the Capitol, and Robinson proposed widening it by 30' to total 96'.

Robinson linked river front improvement with a Transportation Plaza (a new union station and an interurban station he envisioned) near the County Courthouse. And he wrapped all these plans together with ribbons of boulevards and parkways. He summarized this approach:

...an indication of how the plan for Des Moines unfolds--an entirely natural but very effective and convenient transportation center, about the plaza west of the Court House, West Side; a broad and stately avenue [Court Avenue], leading from this to the Des Moines river. There a row of public buildings on either side, and park-encompassed, will create - almost is creating - a Civic Center of extraordinary excellence. Leading straight from this, a broad and handsome street, which is crowned at its summit by the State House....

The Transportation Plaza was never built; discussions of suitable Union Station sites continued through later plans without resolution, as did talk of a boulevard system.

Robinson's chapter on Boulevards, Parkways and New Parks covered creation of boulevard and parkway systems in considerable detail. Robinson felt that sufficient expanses of large parks had been acquired, but that the parks needed development and well-planned improvement and that small neighborhood parks were also needed. The proposed boulevard system included the river front as well as already existing boulevards (Polk Boulevard, Kingman Boulevard). It connected the existing parks (Greenwood, Waveland, Union, Grand View, and MacRae), the State Fairgrounds, Laurel Hill Cemetery, and Fort Des Moines No. 3. Under Robinson's scheme, major streets would serve as "attractive radii" leading from the Civic Center and tying it all together.

Capitol Improvement. Emmanuel L. Masqueray, a nationally known New York architect, designed plans for the Capitol Park which the General Assembly adopted in 1913. The plan featured sweeping Beaux-Arts Style formal streets with statuary as focal points. The proposed Allison Monument was to be the focus of a formally landscaped area south of the Capitol and extending some two blocks south of Walnut Street. The existing Soldier and Sailor's Monument was to be moved from the proposed Allison Monument site to a spot east of the Capitol and given its own role as a focal point. (Robinson said that as it now stood, this monument was "so lamentably misplaced as almost to be an insult to the men whom it would honor.") However, it was never moved.

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In addition to the Soldier and Sailor's and Allison Monuments, the area south of the Capitol has become a haven for statuary and assorted memorials as well as wide bands of flower gardens and a parking lot. Executed features of the plan include construction of two broadly curved streets between Walnut Street and Court Avenue, which meet at an underpass. The most significant feature of the project was expansion of state-owned ground to seventy-seven acres. Houses and other buildings--many of them decrepit--were moved (30) or razed (75). Locust Street was widened just west of the Capitol to provide the beginnings of a "connecting link for the Civic Center on the river front seven blocks away," according to a report in The American City. (This section, once a grassy respite with mature trees has recently been converted to a large parking lot for legislators.)

Boulevard Committee Civic Center Plan. The Town Planning Committee or Commission commissioned an undated broadside (dating from between 1917 and 1928) featuring three elements: (1) the Capitol Extension Plan, (2) Park, Boulevard and Traffic Way System, and (3) the Civic Center. This plan by the Boulevard Committee for the most part refined or repeated earlier suggestions and, again, combined beauty with utility. The Capitol Extension Plan was simply the Allison Memorial Commission's Capitol Park by E.L. Masqueray and adopted in 1913.

There were also plans made to extend the river walls north to and possibly beyond the Center Street dam. It was proposed that all existing walls were to be made three feet higher to give a uniform height from Court Avenue to the dam. Ornamental balustrades such as those now in place and electroliers were to be featured. The river wall plans from 1917 show the flexible nature of river front improvement plans and that balustrades were planned as early as 1917. Earlier attempts to provide suitable river walls at the Library had not been completely successful, although, as the Park Board noted, they had survived the heavy flooding of 1903.

The proposed boulevard system gave flesh to the bones of the 1909 Robinson report. Now some parkways<sup>8</sup> had Indian names (Pa-ha-waukon, Mahaska, Rant-che-wai-me). But the "system" consisted of simply designating existing streets as boulevards, identifying important "traffic ways," and outlining new parkways, few of which were built. In addition, it appears that some boulevards (Polk and Kingman) were the product of independent developers, not any planning body.

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<sup>8</sup>To Robinson these were boulevards--he would not have approved of the term, "parkway," which he reserved for roads in parks.

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Although the essence of the Robinson Civic Center remained, this later plan shows several departures, especially on the then-undeveloped east side. These new building types reflect further development in local efforts to achieve a fully developed Civic Center. A Natatorium is shown north of the Municipal Building where Robinson simply had parkland. Although the proposed Art Institute remained in the same place, south of it (in Robinson's Armory position) was a Federal Court House, followed by the Municipal Court Building in the next block. And the proposed Union Station was now shown on the west bank south of Court Avenue and across from the Municipal Court Building.

A "beauty dam" to maintain a good water level was still located at the south end of the Civic Center. There is no reference to widening Locust Street to the Capitol, and it appears that this commendable but costly goal was considered impractical. The more formal focal points and formal paths had returned. Little attention appears to have been accorded landscaping details, although the treatment shown in this plan for the Municipal Building river front was either followed or (more likely) in place at the time of this plan. Two symmetrically placed small pools are on this plan and are shown on a 1925 aerial view of the Civic Center (and elsewhere).

The date of this plan is probably after 1918 when construction of the Municipal Court Building began but before 1928 when the U.S. Court House was built. The latter is shown on this plan with a different outline than the actual building has. The natatorium was not built; it was discussed until at least 1917.

Expanded Civic Center. Ambitious plans for a "\$1,500,000 Civic Center" that would transform the river front and extend the Civic Center substantially were announced c. 1928.<sup>9</sup> The "great municipal center" would extend from the Center Street dam north to the University Avenue bridge, some on reclaimed land. An immense multi-purpose recreation and convention hall, probably on the west bank, was the centerpiece of the proposal. Also included were a municipal boathouse, bathing beach, a nine- or eighteen-hole golf course, a large block of tennis courts, croquet lawns, picnic area, several baseball diamonds, and a playground complete with wading pool and supervising matron.

A two-story 300x200-foot dance hall was to include a restaurant, an auditorium, and a series of scenic terraces. The convention hall was intended to be large enough (seating 20,000) to accom-

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<sup>9</sup>The date is suggested from the location of the clipping nearby others dated 1928 in Planning & Zoning scrapbooks and the possibility that the nationwide financial depression of the 1930s ended these ambitious plans.

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moderate a Democratic or Republican national convention. Backers boasted that the hall, which would extend one-half mile along the river, would be superior to Madison Square Garden in New York City! Space for veteran's organizations and civic groups would be available in the hall. The Chamber of Commerce was among the sponsors of the ambitious but never constructed plan.

Harland Bartholomew Plan. Harland Bartholomew operated a large consulting business, Bartholomew & Associates, out of St. Louis. His company was responsible for preparation of comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances in at least fifty cities around the country. Among them were St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Rochester, Memphis, New Orleans, Omaha, and Minneapolis. Des Moines used the firm on five occasions, in 1924-27 to prepare the comprehensive plan adopted in 1929; in 1927, 1929, and 1939 to prepare park landscaping plans; and in 1938 to revise their earlier comprehensive plan.

With the onset of the Bartholomew period, Des Moines city planning firmly entered the modern phase. Chapters in the 300-page typed report covered major streets, mass transit, the railroads, recreation facilities, zoning, and civic art. The report thus concentrated considerable energy on transportation networks and problems with some discussion of parks, recreation, and beautification, including the river front Civic Center. Planning had become an accepted proposition, one that concentrated on the practical aspects of public works.

Bartholomew noted that while the Civic Center was not yet complete, what remained to be done was inconsequential compared to the effort that went into undertaking the project. He delineated the following projects to accomplish: an art museum south of the Municipal Building; a plan for the present playground north of the Municipal Building, perhaps with a natatorium and recreation building; and river front improvements by continuing the river walls, building dams, and adding more landscaping (especially to screen railroad bridges and the gas plant). He suggested replacing the two railroad bridges as needed with concrete bridges similar to existing vehicular bridges, and monuments, fountains, or statuary to "add a little more life, color and diversity to the scene." Bartholomew thus affirmed earlier plans for the river front. In a departure from earlier plans, Bartholomew envisioned two more public buildings and located them east of the Municipal Building and the proposed Natatorium. Also new was an obelisk was placed at East First and Locust Streets for traffic to drive around.

A drawing of the "Proposed Plan for Completion of the Civic Center" shows a more monumental effect than other plans had emphasized. Bartholomew made a rather optimistic assumption: that the power plant just north of the Coliseum would somehow

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disappear to be replaced with a small park. Curving paths and bands of vegetation provide the only natural design element in an otherwise formal, Beaux-Arts Style plan. Formal stairs lead straight to the river; fountains or places for statuary are likewise centrally placed between a public building and the river front.

Except for the optimistic removal of the light plant, the west bank simply showed the Coliseum, Library, and Post Office. A variation to earlier plans was an additional bridge over the Center Street dam. Another dam is shown just south of Court Avenue.

Bartholomew also addressed the Locust Street approach to the Capitol. Just as Robinson had noted, Bartholomew saw the need to tie together the Civic Center which he said "gives Des Moines distinction throughout the country" and the Capitol grounds. Three options were offered, including limiting building height, widening Locust by 150' by cutting off building facades, or the most drastic measure--removing all property in the half block on either side of Locust Street. Bartholomew seemed to favor widening by cutting off and also limiting height. He commended the State for having reclaimed land around the Capitol, although he would have preferred less asphalt. The proposal to move the Soldiers and Sailor's Monument was still around, and Bartholomew concurred that it should be moved. He recommended that, if a Union Station were built, it should be placed near the Capitol grounds, a departure from previous west side sites.

Women's Clubs Civic Center. Although work began on this plan in 1929, it was not formally presented until 1933. Another trio of architects, Amos Emery, Clark Souers, John Brooks, was responsible for these ambitious plans. Tentative plans were discussed and printed in the newspapers in 1929 and 1931 before the final presentation in 1933, but only minor changes were made. The principal result of the work was a large 6x8' rendering of the proposed Civic Center and nine smaller 31"x42" posters depicting possible details of new buildings and bridge decoration.

On May 11, 1933, the Des Moines Federation of Women's Clubs formally presented the plans to the City Plan Commission and the City Council. Spokesmen for the "new Civic Center Plans" in 1933 stated that the plans were "an elaboration of the Bartholomew plans now in use." And, in something less than whole-hearted approval, that the City Plan Commission approved of the "general scope and purpose" of the plans, as "showing progress and in general outline the objectives toward which the energies of the Federation, the Commission and our citizens generally may work through the years," according to a Planning Commission Resolution of Acceptance. Yet the latest plan was billed as being a detailed amplification of the Bartholomew approach.

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The 1929-33 Civic Center plan was the most ambitious and the least realistic--in terms of practicality, necessity and cost--of all the plans. Presented in the midst of a severe nationwide financial depression and related federal assistance programs, the plan may have been a "wish list" from which local residents hoped the federal government would select many projects to fund.

No less than eleven new structures were envisioned. On the east bank were a coliseum or public meeting hall, municipal art museum, the existing Municipal Building, a war memorial statue, a building for patriotic organizations, followed by the present U.S. Court House (but with a large addition) and the present Municipal Court Building. Also on the east bank, behind the Municipal Court Building, a union railroad station was shown (this would be an amplification of Bartholomew).

On the west was an improved power station combined with a union bus depot, massive colonnades across Locust Street linking a school administration building/civic clinic and new public library, followed by the present Post Office (with a large addition). Another of Bartholomew's recommendations, a Center Street bridge at the dam, was also part of this plan.

Like the Bartholomew and Robinson plans, the 1929-33 scheme envisioned a suitably widened Locust Street approach linking the Civic Center and the Capitol. But where earlier planners had hoped to broaden the street somewhat, here Locust has become five lanes leading to the Capitol. Also shown are state buildings at the foot of Locust Street, not up on Capitol Hill.

The arrangement was monumental, featuring large plazas, massive statuary, and ceremonial entrances. An "airplane view" (no old-fashioned birdseye views here) drawing of the plans gave a Beaux-Arts, classical impression to the arrangement. But details showing possible decorative bridge heads and buildings are considerably more modern. The flat surfaces, stylized and geometric ornament, and streamlined lines of the Art Deco Style dominate. None of the grandiose plans the architects put forth (except the Post Office addition) came to fruition.

**National and Statewide Awareness of Des Moines Civic Center.** In the Civic Art Report of his comprehensive city plan for Des Moines, Harland Bartholomew noted that

The Civic Center is one of the distinctive features of the city. The reclamation of the river and its improvement as a part of the public building group plan is an achievement that has brot [sic] Des Moines widespread recognition. Many cities have taken inspiration from

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this achievement. Few can show equal progress in carrying out such an ambitious plan.

Charles Mulford Robinson also commented in 1909 of the influence of Des Moines river front improvements upon other communities.

The Des Moines Civic Center district is one of a handful of civic centers completed across the country, although many communities were interested in acquiring a well-planned grouping of public buildings. At least a dozen American cities created an extant civic center of two or more public buildings set in a deliberately planned environment. Some, such as those in San Francisco and Cleveland, are eminently successful accomplishments based on City Beautiful Movement principles. Others, such as Houston and Yonkers, New York, are simply a collection of public buildings.<sup>10</sup>

As an example of a river front civic center, the Des Moines experience was notable. In Iowa, Cedar Rapids and Waterloo, which also had rivers bisecting them, also sought to make civic centers of public buildings. They also hired Charles Mulford Robinson during the same period that Des Moines was developing its river front. Although Cedar Rapids also made early plans (beginning in 1900 and 1908), actual construction of riverside public buildings did not begin until 1923. By 1933 there were five public buildings (extant) on May's Island or the river bank. Like Des Moines, Cedar Rapids began to build river walls and new bridges in the early years of the twentieth century. Waterloo met with considerably less success, although new river walls (not extant) were built in the 1910s. Memorial Hall (1917, extant) was the only semi-public building to grace Waterloo's river front.

With substantial work (five buildings, including the Coliseum and two bridges) completed by 1911, the Des Moines Civic Center was an early and influential example for other medium-sized cities to seek to emulate. The adoption of the nationally known Des Moines Plan of government and the construction of the first Municipal Building specifically designed to house the new, more open and responsive form of government increased this influence.

Accounts of Des Moines' sterling progress in developing the Civic Center and the Des Moines Plan appeared during this period in such influential journals as The American City, Chautauquan, National Municipal Review, Bulletin for the League of American Municipalities (Des Moines reformer John MacVicar was its secretary for a time), Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Municipal Engineering, and McClure's Magazine.

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<sup>10</sup>See William Lebovich, America's City Halls.

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Library.<sup>11</sup> Contracts were awarded in June of 1899 for the building's foundation, and the cornerstone was laid on May 19, 1900. The four-story salmon pink limestone edifice (extant) was ready for occupancy in October of 1903.

By April of 1901 the Park Board was able to announce that it had acquired and made improvements such as grading and construction of retaining walls (totaling \$22,648) to six acres along the west bank. Christened West River Front Park, the area extended along the west bank of the Des Moines River from Locust Street south to the Raccoon River. The Park Board also made its first acquisition of part of the east bank in 1901.

It is clear that by 1902 the river front was considered an obvious site for public use. Sidney Foster recommended that the Soldier and Sailor's Monument be moved their from its ignoble location by the Capitol. F.M. Hubbell proposed a site he owned--later home of the Coliseum--for the Post Office. And in 1906 serious talk developed for a public building on the east bank, the Municipal Building.

Also in 1902 a 371'-deep artesian well with an ornamental fountain over it (not extant) was in place between the Library and the river. According to Park Board reports, it was "visited by thousands of people, and the waters are found to be very healthful." By the end of 1903 the street railway had removed tracks that had run in front of the new library. A row of elms was planted from Locust Street to the Raccoon River (but many died in the serious 1903 floods). Work on retaining walls with cement and stone balustrades near the Library continued through 1905.

In 1907 work began on a new Locust Street bridge, and bonds were sold to finance construction of a new city hall. Two years later, when Charles Mulford Robinson visited the city, contracts had been let for 800' of retaining wall, and construction was about to begin on the river front for both the Post Office (extant) and the Coliseum (destroyed by fire 1949). (The federal government acceded to local requests and accepted the river front site in 1902 following a Commercial Exchange-led campaign.)

Despite these efforts, work remained to create a river front district. The east side bank remained a problem--its wretched appearance and the inability to gain ownership thorns in the side of the Park Board. In 1905 the block between East Walnut and East Locust Streets was described as containing "billboards rising to the height of three stories, tin cans and old iron

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<sup>11</sup>Discussion of a river front site for a new county courthouse dated from 1896 but came to naught. The present courthouse was built on the old site in 1906.



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heaped promiscuously along the sandy bank; and in the river a foreground of dirty river front filled with rows of ancient piling and tow heads." But by 1908 East River Front Park had been acquired though still unimproved.

But in 1910, newspaper accounts declared (as they had in nearly identical terms in previous years) that the "city beautiful is now assured." Their enthusiasm was well placed this time, for the City Council authorized a \$50,000 bond issue which allowed east bank buildings to be removed. By late January five structures had been sold, their removal underway. All things seemed possible; an art gallery<sup>12</sup> on the east bank was proposed. In June the cornerstone was laid for the Municipal Building (extant), the first public building to go up on the east bank. The following year construction began on a new Walnut Street bridge.

Beginning in 1914, the Chamber of Commerce began efforts to secure a United States Court House (extant) for the river front. Three years later, an east bank site just south of Walnut Street was all but assured; in 1919 it was official. However, World War I-related restrictions upon constructing federal buildings apparently delayed construction until 1928.

Other public projects were able to continue in Des Moines, however. In 1917 the ornate Court Avenue bridge (extant) was built, with details similar to the river walls and the Municipal Building. The Grand Avenue bridge (extant) went up in 1918. And the Municipal Court and Public Safety Building (extant) was built in 1918-20.

Discussion of uses for the river front parcel north of the Municipal Building dated from at least 1917. Until World War I intruded, followed by financial doldrums in the state, a large natatorium seemed a certainty. But it was never built. In 1934 the City received aid from the federal government to build an Armory (extant) on the site. An armory or other war memorial had been part of several proposals for the river front over the years.

In 1933 construction commenced on portions of river walls and an interceptor sewer system. Two years later more river walls, sewers, the Riverside Drive bridge, and the Scott Avenue bridge and dam were added. These federal projects had a pronounced

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<sup>12</sup>Funds for a city art museum did not become available until 1933 when James D. Edmundson died. Under terms of his estate, money he left for an art museum could not be used for ten years and the building could not be located downtown (for fear of air pollution damage to paintings). In 1946 construction began at the site in Greenwood Park.

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effect upon the appearance of the river front. For the first time, a relatively stable water level could be maintained by the long-discussed dam. And a continuous balustraded river wall extended from Center Street south to the confluence of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers, and beyond along the Raccoon River to the S.W. 5th Street bridge.

As part of these improvements the channel at the confluence was altered. Originally the Raccoon River had flowed north into the Des Moines River in a divergent pattern rather than emptying south in the preferable convergent pattern. The changes involved adding perhaps six feet of fill over the former city dump at the forks and creating a made-land extension. Although there was mention of a stadium for this site as early as 1937, using WPA funds, the present Sec Taylor Stadium dates from 1947.

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**F. Associated Property Types**

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I. **Name of Property Type** Buildings, structures and landforms  
Refer to Continuation Sheet F-I-2+

II. **Description**

Refer to Continuation Sheet F-II-2+

III. **Significance**

Refer to Continuation Sheet F-III-2+

IV. **Registration Requirements**

Refer to Continuation Sheet F-IV-2+

See continuation sheet as per above

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See continuation sheet for additional property types

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**G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

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Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

Refer to Continuation Sheet G-2+

See continuation sheet

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**H. Major Bibliographical References**

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Refer to Continuation sheet H-2+

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State historic preservation office | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency                            | <input type="checkbox"/> University                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                       |

Specify repository: Bureau of Historic Preservation, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA

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**I. Form Prepared By** Text and research by Ms. Barbara Beving Long, Midwest Research

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name/title	<u>James E. Jacobsen, Chief, Bureau of Historic Preservation</u>	date	<u>July 1, 1988</u>
organization	<u>State Historical Society of Iowa</u>	telephone	<u>515-281-5111</u>
street & number	<u>600 E. Locust</u>	state	<u>IA</u>
city or town	<u>Des Moines</u>	zip code	<u>50309</u>

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**Property Type:** Buildings, Structures, and Land Forms of the City Beautiful Movement and City Planning in Des Moines, Iowa

**Significance.** Significant properties call attention to the City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines. They were designed, located, and constructed according to specific plans for urban development; they reflect design principles of the period.

The district along the river front best illustrates turn-of-the-century planning principles in Des Moines (although there are also other extant examples relating to the theme). River front public buildings, structures, and land forms illustrate piecemeal progress within the context of a planned entirety. River front improvements are a powerful symbol of the unification of formerly contentious east and west side interests in the common goal of urban development. More than other half-completed or less significant projects, the district provides evidence of the influence of nonlocal expert planners (especially Warren Manning and Charles Mulford Robinson) in planning decisions in Des Moines. Finally, the district shows the role of federal public works projects in achieving long-held but expensive planning goals (such as dam construction) in Des Moines.

Collectively, examples of this property type call attention to the role of various individuals and public and private groups in bringing about change during the progressive period. They are thus associated with the roles of and interaction between the Des Moines Women's Club and Commercial Exchange, and local, state, and federal governments in the City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines. Individually, some examples from the Civic Center also illustrate, even symbolize, the Des Moines Plan of government and other urban reform programs. Others are directly related to environmental factors such as crafting solutions to chronic episodes of serious flooding along the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers.

The Civic Center district is the best and most prominent representation in the city of the national movement toward urban development through planning. Their combination of beauty and utility dovetails with the transition between City Beautiful Movement principles and the development of modern city planning. The relatively unaltered and impressive appearance these property types present along the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers illustrates design principles and engineering concepts formulated at the turn of the century and refined through the 1930s.

With substantial work (five buildings, including the Coliseum, and two bridges) completed by 1911, the Des Moines Civic Center was an early and influential example for other medium-sized cities to seek to emulate. The adoption of the nationally known

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Des Moines Plan of government and the construction of the first Municipal Building specifically designed to house the new, more open and responsive form of government increased this influence.

Accounts of Des Moines' sterling progress in developing a civic center and the Des Moines Plan appeared during this period in such influential journals as The American City, Chautauquan, National Municipal Review, Bulletin for the League of American Municipalities, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Municipal Engineering, and McClure's Magazine. Requests for information about Des Moines city planning efforts were received from London, England, Los Angeles, and Toronto. Local residents spoke at national meetings on Des Moines' progressive policies. For example, James B. Weaver, Jr. delivered a paper on comprehensive city planning in Des Moines for the National Conference on City Planning in 1925.

## Description.

Civic Center District. The Civic Center district of river front buildings, structures, and land forms is unique in the city. No other group of buildings and landscape combine to illustrate as strongly and directly the important themes outlined here. The buildings and structures are distinguished by their river front location and by their harmonious design, style, scale, use, siting, and materials. River front improvements--river walls, bridges, dams, specialized sewer systems--marry environmental and manmade considerations. They show the effect of a major, flood-prone river upon urban development and the steps taken to diminish flood damage.

The present district consists of six public buildings, eight bridges, 11,617 linear feet of river walls (which includes a system of interceptor sewers), two small dams, Riverside Drive, and West River Front Park and East River Front Park along the Des Moines River. Significant properties well represent the stylistic period in which they were constructed.

Properties in the Civic Center district date from the City Beautiful/city planning era in Des Moines; known extant examples date from 1900 to 1938. Construction plans date from the progressive period in Des Moines and are directly related to efforts to bring about orderly change.

Other Properties. Some properties related to the themes of this document no longer stand. Perhaps the most notable deletion from the river front Civic Center is the Coliseum, which was north of the Library. Built in 1909-10, it was the third Civic Center building. It remained in use until 1949 when it burned, but there had been calls for a larger convention facility for dec-

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ades. Veterans' Memorial Auditorium, located some four blocks from the Civic Center, filled that need; its spacious site offered substantial parking for vehicles, an important consideration by the 1950s.

The Capitol complex improvements are less representative of the themes, if only because of the degree of alteration. At least five statues or commemorative spots now occupy, in rather haphazard arrangement, the formerly symmetric, formal area south of the Capitol. And the Soldier and Sailor's Monument was never moved, a key recommendation of the Masqueray plan. It continues to loom over the smaller Allison Monument. When chunks fell to the pavement, the Court Avenue underpass was unattractively stuccoed, and the former green space at the foot of the Capitol is now a parking lot. The Beaux-Arts Style street plan is not of sufficient merit by itself to rate highly.

Other public and semi-public buildings were considered in the course of this study for their relationship to beautification and planning. Some are gone, including Union Station, the Auditorium on 4th Street, the old City Hall, and the old Federal Building. These and some extant examples such as the present Polk County Court House, the Municipal Observatory, and cemetery improvements, were not part of the City Beautiful Movement and specific city plans. Some public improvements and buildings (Veterans' Auditorium, Art Center, Botanical Center, Science Center, Civic Center<sup>1</sup>) are too recent for consideration. Still other projects accomplished during the period of significance were either typical public works projects (paving a street or extending sewer lines) or anomalies not part of a comprehensive plan (Municipal Observatory, horse trough, water tower at 48th and Hickman).

Homes and meeting places of those intimately involved with the City Beautiful Movement in Des Moines go far toward calling attention to the important roles that local residents played in affecting change. Homes from the period of significance no longer stand for such key participants as Mrs. Cora Hillis, John MacVicar and Ray F. Weirick. The homes of Sidney Foster<sup>2</sup> and Johnson Brigham have been substantially altered. Headquarters for the Commercial Club--often rooms in an office building--changed so frequently (six times between 1901 and 1917) that no one site is properly or strongly associated with this group.

Hoyt Sherman Place was (and remains) headquarters for the Women's Clubs during its involvement with city planning efforts; it is

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<sup>1</sup>An auditorium just west of the Public Library.

<sup>2</sup>Slated for demolition.

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listed on the National Register. Also extant and in good condition are the homes of James B. Weaver, Jr. and Frank Wetherell.

Creation of a park system and a parkway or boulevard system were important recommendations of Des Moines City Beautiful proposals and subsequent city plans. But the proposed boulevard system was not carried out to the same degree of completeness that characterized the quest for improving the river front. And the parks were acquired, often piecemeal fashion, with no clear development of a system linked by boulevards. The early parks (Grand View, Greenwood, Union, and South or MacRae) have all received considerable alterations. Creation of Des Moines parks in the 1890s was not unlike park-making activities of other American cities that established parks late in their histories.

**Registration Requirements.** Based on an analysis of the property type and known examples, the following are requirements for properties to meet National Register eligibility:

1. Areas of Significance.
  - a. Buildings, structures, land forms directly illustrating City Beautiful and city planning efforts in Des Moines, Iowa from 1892-1937.
  - b. May be related to Des Moines Plan of government.
  - c. May call attention to role of influential groups or individuals involved in planning.
  - d. May combine beauty and utility.
  - e. Date from City Beautiful era through era of modern planning in Des Moines, 1892-1937.
2. Characteristics and Qualities (Criteria A and C).
  - a. Use: public or semi-public.
  - b. Materials: durable--including stone, concrete, brick, terra cotta, stucco.
  - c. Stylistic influences.
    - (1) styles associated with public buildings and structures during the period: classical--including Beaux-Arts, Neoclassical, Classical Revival--and Art Deco.
    - (2) styles associated with landscaping and planning during the period: Beaux-Arts and "natural" or Romantic.
  - d. Scale: appropriate to surroundings.
  - e. Workmanship: well-crafted.
2. Characteristics and Qualities (Criteria A and B).
  - a. Use: public, semi-public, private.
  - b. Materials: from the period of significance, 1892-1937.
  - c. Strongly and directly related to key participants (groups or individuals) in City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines.
3. Exceptions.
  - a. Buildings should not have been moved, since setting is also a significant feature of plans.



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- b. Commemorative statuary, etc. are eligible provided they are part of a beautification plan specifically related to the themes outlined in this document.
- c. Eligible properties should have achieved significance more than fifty years ago.
- 4. Integrity Considerations.
  - a. Many public buildings have received new windows, doors, etc. in the interests of increasing energy efficiency, and this is to be expected.
  - b. Interiors may have been altered, especially if the present use is different from the original use.
  - c. Buildings should retain considerable original exterior elements, including wall surfaces and ornamentation.
  - d. Additions should not be intrusive; well-designed additions to serve public better are acceptable.
  - e. Bridges require periodic rebuilding, especially of deteriorating decking and piers; such reconstruction should retain as much of original ornamental details as possible.
  - f. Land forms along a steep riverbank are prone to erosion, levee formation to control flooding, and flooding. Landscaping, by its nature, is likely to be changed. As technological advances occur, it is reasonable to expect changes in engineering responses to flooding, including construction of interceptor sewers, new types of levees, improved flood walls.
  - g. Private and semi-public buildings may have received substantial interior alterations but should retain significant exterior features and materials.
- 5. Known Examples.

**Individually Eligible in Civic Center district:**

- a. Public Library of Des Moines; 1900-03; first of the river front buildings; distinctive salmon pink stone; good example of Beaux-Arts Style as applied to library; interior restored; east steps, acroteria removed, west steps altered; on National Register.
- b. Former U.S. Post Office, now Polk County Annex; 1909-10 with 1935-6 addition; second river front building and first federal participation; good example of Beaux-Arts Style; most of interior except main public hallway changed when county took over; new conforming south facade added; on National Register.
- c. Municipal Building; 1910-11; fourth building (third extant) along river front; first (only?) building in nation built specifically to house Des Moines Plan of government; design, especially Counting Room, symbolizes and allows new openness of Des Moines Plan; Counting Room renovated and closely resembles the original; well-executed example of

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Beaux-Arts Style; exterior alterations minimal; on National Register.

d. Court Avenue bridge; 1917; reconstructed in 1982, but original ornamentation retained or replicated; best example of the bridges in the district.

e. Municipal Court and Public Safety Building; 1918-20; fifth (fourth extant) building along river front; strongly associated with reform programs in Des Moines; replaced houses of ill repute as part of reform campaign; fine example of restrained Beaux-Arts Style; exterior alterations minimal: windows not original, basement garage opening enclosed, additional staircase added at rear (covered in matching stone); large main hallways intact on two floors, other areas altered.

f. River Walls; 1933-37; key feature of river front improvements; ornamental balustrade a unifying element seen on other buildings and structures in the district; essentially unaltered: one section collapsed and not rebuilt; combination beauty and utility: ornamental features plus interceptor sewer system (not visible).

g. Armory and World War Memorial Building; 1934; seventh (sixth extant) and final river front building; directly related to federal assistance programs during 1930s Depression; one of best examples of Art Deco Style in Des Moines; materials, siting, massing like others in district; minimal exterior alteration: windows, light fixtures, west entry; interior completely changed when converted to city and county offices.

h. Scott Avenue bridge and dam; 1937; key element of river front improvements: dam long sought to maintain water level; dam is unusual: includes sanitary and storm sewer systems, latter linked with interceptor sewers of river walls; deck rebuilt in 1980s and railing not original; retains original open spans; popular for fishing.

(end of district examples)

k. Hoyt Sherman Place; 1501 Woodland; best calls attention to pivotal role Des Moines Women's Club played in fostering City Beautiful projects in Des Moines, especially along the river front; alterations (large art gallery and auditorium) date from Women's Club leasing the City-owned property; on National Register.

l. Frank Wetherell house, 2805 Brattleboro; c. 1908; appears unaltered; stucco; architect's own home; Wetherell occupied

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at least 1908-1917, during period of significance; associated with plans prepared for City Beautiful improvements.

m. James B. Weaver, Jr. house, 331 28th Street; c. 1902 using suggestions from House Beautiful; one of key leaders in City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines; articulate spokesmen for the movement; appears unaltered although some sort of repairs at entrance.

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**Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods.** The focus of the research and survey was to determine those structures, buildings, people, and spaces that best illustrate the City Beautiful Movement and city planning in Des Moines, Iowa in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. The principal investigator for the project, Barbara Beving Long of Midwest Research, conducted an earlier survey, "Des Moines, Center of Iowa. Survey of Historic Sites," in 1982-83. In addition to the Long survey, an earlier architectural survey also noted the significance of the Des Moines river front. Based on a limited windshield survey, the 1976 report by John Maves recommended study of the public buildings and landscaping along the Des Moines River for consideration as an historic district.

The topic was viewed within the framework of city planning in the nation at the turn of the century, the onset of the City Beautiful Movement. Books and articles by recent scholars as well as actual participants and contemporary comments of the City Beautiful Movement, early city planning, federal assistance programs, and the Des Moines Plan of government were consulted.

These sources were useful to obtain a degree of perspective regarding Des Moines events. As a result of this research, it was determined that the year 1892 was a meaningful starting date and 1937 the appropriate closing date for the period of significance. The scope of services for the project directed that research be centered on a specific time (1890-1930) in the city limits of Des Moines, Iowa.

Consideration of the various city plans and those responsible for them led to biographical research on such noted landscape architectural pioneers as Warren H. Manning and Charles Mulford Robinson. The former is only now receiving scholarly attention; a display of his plans was recently shown at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and many of his papers are housed at Iowa State University. Architectural styles and architects and planners of the period were also considered. Study of the actual construction undertaken led to consultation with engineers in the City Engineer's Office, a landscape architect at the Parks Department, and other knowledgeable City employees. Primary sources included Park Board reports, blueprints, and the city plans.

The research and survey work was conducted with reference to federal guidelines regarding Multiple Property Analysis of themes and structures potentially eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Possible examples of the various themes developed in the course of the research were sought throughout the city. It was not assumed that the Civic Center district was the only significant example in the city related to these themes, although its importance offered an early avenue for research. To merit further consideration, potentially sig-

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nificant examples had to relate to planned change in the city during the period of significance or call attention to the pivotal roles certain local groups and individuals played in the story. The typology of significant property types was based on use, style, association, and placement. Significant examples of property types relate directly to the events, planning principles, associations, and physical qualities outlined in the Context. (See property types section of this document.)

In considering the architectural and physical aspects of the themes the following areas were covered: principal types, styles, time period, and methods of construction; important architects, engineers, landscape architects, and city planners involved in the riverfront improvements; key participants and groups in bringing about planned change; the importance of such architectural characteristics as scale, proportion, placement, materials, details, and aesthetic qualities; and the relationship of environmental influences such as topography to the course of events. The effect of the Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers and other environmental conditions was weighed. The project offered the opportunity to compare the various city and riverfront plans presented to the city and to trace changes--and similarities--in approach and emphasis over time.

Questions of the degree of integrity eligible properties should possess were addressed. The degree of change to the site as well as to the building or structure was a consideration. Given the avowedly piecemeal manner that planning projects occurred, an evolution in plans was expected. It was concluded that some change in landforms along river fronts was to be expected, especially in response to attempts to control such environmental influences as flooding.

Holdings at the Historical Library (including maps and photographs), State Library, Des Moines Public Library, Drake University Library, Iowa State University, and other repositories were used. In addition, records or collections of the Des Moines Plan & Zoning Department, Parks Department, Police Department, City Engineering Department, federal repositories, Office of Historic Preservation (National Register files), the Des Moines Women's Club, and the Des Moines Pioneer Club were useful. The full range of primary and secondary sources was consulted.

Field survey of significant buildings and locations associated with the Context followed initial research and analysis. Extant properties were evaluated for their relationship to the important themes and their ability to call attention and illustrate them; an Iowa Site Inventory form was completed for all extant relevant properties (31). Also considered in weighing significance was architectural quality and degree of alteration.

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