

Downtown Joliet National Register Historic District

F.A.Q.

Background

- This project is a joint City of Joliet and City Center Partnership economic development initiative.
- The purpose of the project was to add another economic development tool for the downtown.
- The City's Downtown Special Service Area account (Org: 23020240; Obj: 523300) is funding this project. Total project costs are: \$25,975
- There are three physical deliverables of this project:
 - The Downtown Joliet National Register Historic District Nomination document, which is a concise history of the downtown's historical development and architectural history.
 - Downtown Joliet Historic Resources Survey Report, which is a summary report of a much broader area of the downtown
 - Downtown Joliet historic resources inventory forms. These forms will be web-based and accessible to tourists and residents who want to know more about individual buildings.

Downtown Joliet National Register Historic District

Encompassing over 150 years of history and development, the Downtown Joliet National Register Historic District (NRHD) endures as a significant commercial district and the heart of Joliet and Will County government, society, and community culture. The period of significance for the Downtown Joliet NRHD is from 1858, the construction date of the oldest building in the district, to 1973, the fifty-year cutoff for the National Register of Historic Places.

- The State of Illinois Historic Preservation Office determined the final boundaries of the Downtown Joliet NRHD, applying federal (Department of the Interior) National Register of Historic Places boundary standards.
- The boundaries of the Downtown Joliet NRHD include the largest concentration of contiguous contributing buildings in the city's historic commercial and governmental center, largely concentrated between the area just south of Liberty Avenue; the Des Plaines River; Jefferson Street; the railroad tracks, the commercial corridor on Cass Street, and Scott Avenue (see attached map).
- The Downtown Joliet NRHD encompasses eighty-two acres with 110 contributing buildings, four contributing structures, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Cass and Clinton Street Bridges and the Jackson Street and Jefferson Street bridges over the Des Plaines River, four contributing parking lots, and one contributing

object, the Louis Joliet Statue, located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Ottawa and Clinton Streets.

- There are thirty-one non-contributing buildings, twelve non-contributing sites, all of which are parking lots, and two non-contributing structures which are both parking garages.
- There are four vacant sites, identified as non-contributing, that are excluded from the building count per the National Register of Historic Places requirements.

Benefits of National Register Historic District Designation

Designation as a National Register Historic District provides formal recognition of an area's historical, and architectural significance based on national standards used by every state.

Benefits to establishing a national register historic district include:

- Provides an opportunity for property owners or developers to receive state and federal historic tax credits (45% in total!)
 - Federal - A 20% tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings
 - State - A 25% tax credit for the rehabilitation of historic, income-producing buildings
- Eliminates a lengthy process of certifying an individual historic structure for a developer seeking to participate in historic tax credit programs
- Attracts developers that specialize utilizing historic tax credits
- May provide for international building code fire and life safety code alternatives
- Stabilizes or increases property values

Common Misconceptions About National Register Historic Districts

National register historic district designation does not:

- Require private property owners to obtain prior approval to change their property when using private, city or county funds
- Require private property owners to preserve or restore their property
- Block state or federally funded / permitted / licensed projects when these are desired by the owner and shown to be in the public interest

Only local landmark designation or local historic district designation requires conformance to preservation standards and review through the Joliet Historic Preservation Commission.

National Register designation merely offers a developer the option of maintaining a structure's historic elements in exchange for receiving tax credits.

Other Communities with NRHD's

Almost all major villages and cities in Illinois have downtown / commercial national register historic districts to encourage the rehabilitation of deteriorated properties while preserving building heritage. Here are a few of them:

- Lockport
- Plainfield
- Lemont
- Morris
- Aurora
- Elgin
- Rockford
- Springfield
- Peoria
- Moline
- Rock Island
- Kankakee
- Jacksonville
- Decatur
- Rochelle
- LaSalle
- Dixon
- Glen Ellyn
- Hinsdale
- Urbana
- Champaign
- Quincy

Aurora Example

In Aurora, Illinois a developer utilized federal and state historic tax credits to redevelop a 126-year-old building which has been vacant for more than 30 years. The final product will be a mixed-use development including 31 apartment units. The total project costs are approximately \$13 million. The project has received state historic tax credits valued at \$2.7 million. The state tax credits were made possible because the building is located in a Rivers Edge Redevelopment Zone which allows the sale of state historic tax credits. The City of Aurora also contributed a \$1.5 million forgivable loan toward the project.

Next Steps for the Downtown National Register Historic District Project

- The City of Joliet will hold a public meeting on the pending nomination to answer any questions and to feature the downtown's unique and interesting history on September 27, 2023.
- Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council will conduct a formal review at their October 27, 2023 meeting
- The Nomination will then move to the National Park Service for their final review and approval.

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