


COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

 CITY OF DES MOINES OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER	Number:	26-014	Meeting:	January 26, 2026
	Agenda Item:	37	Roll Call:	26-0140
	Submitted by:	Cody Christensen, Development Services Director		

AGENDA HEADING:

Consideration of a request from Des Moines Independent Community School District (“DMPS”), represented by architect, Bryan Huggins, to demolish the Moulton Elementary School structure at 1541 8th Street, pursuant to Section 58-70 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

SYNOPSIS:

DMPS, represented by the Architect of the project, is proposing to demolish the existing Moulton Elementary School, located at 1541 8th Street. As part of the “Reimagined Education Plan” passed by ballot measure in November 2025, DMPS intends to utilize the site for construction of a new Moulton School of Performing and Visual Arts signature school. The existing school building meets the criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 58-58 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance. Since it meets the criteria for landmark designation, Section 58-70 of the ordinance requires the City Council to determine if the proposed demolition should be referred to the City’s Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for further study.

FISCAL IMPACT: NONE

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Moulton Elementary School is a simplified century revival architectural style, with elements that reflect a Tudor Revival style similarly evidenced in other Des Moines schools built near this time, such as Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt High Schools.
- Originally built in 1914 as Des Moines North High School, the site received additions in 1915 and 1930. The site was ultimately vacated in the late 1950’s when the current North High School was constructed.
- In 1962, in response to the purchase and closure of Crocker School by the highway commission to allow construction of the new Interstate 235, “old” North High was renovated and reopened as Moulton Elementary School.
- Moulton Elementary School underwent several additional renovations and additions throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s as the school district’s needs evolved.

- According to a 1976 DMPS publication titled “Bicentennial Reflections – The History of the Des Moines Public Schools 1846-1976”, Moulton Elementary School was named in honor of Emma Case Moulton, a retired teacher who taught in the building when it was North High School.
- City staff finds the building meets several of the City’s Landmark designation criterion, as listed below.

Sec. 58-58 Designation Criteria

(a) For purpose of this article, a landmark or landmark site designation may be placed on any site, natural or improved, including any building, improvement or structure located thereon that possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and that:

- (1) Is significant in American history, architecture, archaeology and culture;*
- (2) Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;*
- (3) Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;*
- (4) Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or*
- (5) Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.*

- The City Council is charged with determining if the request should be referred to the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) for further study or if no additional evaluation is necessary. Section 58-70(d) of the City Codes states that “the City Council will consider oral and written comments from all interested parties and determine whether or not to refer the application for proposed demolition or related plumbing work to the HPC for further study and review.”
- If the application is not referred to the HPC, the owner will be required to document and photograph the exterior and interior of the building and provide the city with a copy in coordination with Development Services Department staff. The owner is also required to salvage for re-use as many fixtures and as much material as possible from the building. Provided that the owner has conducted the documentation and salvage processes to the satisfaction of the Development Services Director, then issuance of a demolition permit in accordance with Section 26-303 and related plumbing permit in accordance with the Plumbing Code shall be authorized.
- If the application is referred to the HPC, the commission shall hold a meeting and work with the owner to determine, within 90 days, whether any alternatives to demolition are feasible. Such alternatives to be considered may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 1. The building or structure can be considered for landmark designation.
 2. Rehabilitation of the building or structure with the assistance of federal or state tax incentives or other private financial assistance.
 3. Adapting the building or structure to a viable new use.
 4. Finding a new owner who is interested in purchasing, preserving and rehabilitating the building or structure.
 5. Incorporating the building or structure into the owner’s plans for redevelopment of the site.

6. Assisting the owner in finding an alternative site for its proposed redevelopment.
 7. Moving the building or structure to an alternative site.
- If the Commission and the owner do not reach an agreement on a feasible alternative to demolition, the owner will be required to document and photograph the exterior and interior of the building and provide the City with a copy in coordination with Development Services Department staff. The owner is also required to salvage for re-use as many fixtures and as much material as possible from the building. Provided that the owner has conducted the documentation and salvage processes to the satisfaction of the Development Services Director, then issuance of a demolition permit in accordance with Section 26-303 and related plumbing permit in accordance with the Plumbing Code shall be authorized.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S): NONE

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE

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