

History of Iowa City's Northside Neighborhood Association

Not only is the Northside Neighborhood Association (NNA) the oldest neighborhood association in the city, but this section of town – bounded by Brown Street to the north, Governor Street to the east, Burlington Street on the south, and the Iowa River on the west – formed the original city of Iowa City, as designated in the 1839 Plat map.

The NNA was formed in 1989 in reaction to a proposed helipad that was to be built atop Mercy Hospital. Neighborhood opposition succeeded in persuading the City to reject that plan, and the NNA emerged as an effective neighborhood advocacy and community-building organization. That year was also Iowa City's sesquicentennial and a tree was planted in North Market Square Park (northwest corner) to mark the occasion. The plaque at the base of the tree reads: "Northside Neighborhood Sesquicentennial 1839-1989."

All Northside projects have benefited from the collective efforts of neighborhood volunteers. John Thomas (Brown Street), for example, was instrumental in the redesign of North Market Square Park, and he's been joined each year by fellow Northside garden enthusiasts who've tended to the park's flower beds. Similar collaborations have resulted in improvements to Happy Hollow Park. The annual Brown Street Block Party – to which all Northside residents are invited – is among the highlights of the year, a time to meet new neighbors, renew old friendships, and display the Northside's impressive culinary talents.

The Northside has also been an active participant in the [UniverCity](#) program, a partnership among the University of Iowa, the City of Iowa City, and central neighborhoods, resulting in the renovation of several homes on the Northside and attracting many young and/or first-time homebuyers.

Neighbors came together again to share their views about the extensive renovation and addition to the century-old Horace Mann Elementary School, a project that was completed in 2019. Mann families and friends successfully advocated for a design plan that preserves the building's historic nature and acknowledges the architectural context of the Northside neighborhood. Mann students continue to use North Market Square Park as their playground – another sign that our neighborhood resources are enjoyed by all.

The arrival of COVID in 2020 put most NNA projects and gatherings on hold. In spring 2022, a small group of neighbors got together for the purpose of reinvigorating the NNA and resuming its important work. All neighbors are invited to participate in keeping the Northside a friendly, healthy, safe, diverse, verdant and vibrant place to live, work and play. Opportunities for involvement can be found on our website at www.northsideiowacity.org.