

# NEWS FROM NORTHSIDE

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION • IOWA CITY, IOWA

## Enjoy NORTHSIDE OUTSIDE on North Linn Street

IT BEGAN IN 2020 AS WAY to support local restaurants and encourage healthy dining during COVID. Today, the half-block of North Linn Street, now closed to vehicle traffic from May 1 through October 31, has become one of our community's most popular warm-weather gathering spots.

"Cities all over the country were finding ways to expand outdoor dining during the pandemic," says Betsy Potter, director of the Iowa City Downtown District (ICDD). "We too saw the need, but we had limited options in the downtown when it came to closing streets or inhibiting traffic. But the Northside Marketplace became an obvious choice, since it was home to so many beloved restaurants. Plus, the North Linn Street business owners were very supportive."

Now in its fourth year and as popular as ever, that half block of North Linn Street has warranted increasing levels of investment from the ICDD and surrounding businesses, helping to fund the colorful street mural, painted picnic tables, planters, and more. The May 10th "Northside Outside" fundraiser was a big success, Betsy says, generating additional resources for amenities designed to improve the experience for visitors.

"Our challenge is to keep these amenities and



Aerial view of the Northside Outside public space and dining area

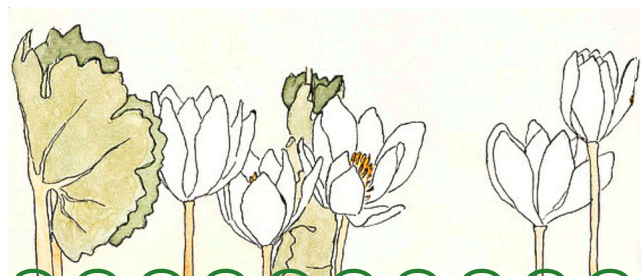
improvements sustainable," she adds. "The outdoor furniture and other fixtures undergo wear and tear over the summer months, so we're exploring ways to keep things looking nice without adding more work to the staff at those local businesses."

One way to tackle the ongoing maintenance challenge is through the work of volunteers, which is where the NNA comes in. Last month, the ICDD reached out to the NNA about recruiting Northside neighbors to assist with tasks such as picking up trash, wiping down tables, and watering planters. The NNA put out the call and (continues on page 2)

## PROJECT GREEN: OPEN GARDENS WEEKEND

Get ready to enjoy and explore attractive Iowa City gardens during Open Gardens Weekend, July 8th & 9th. This annual event is organized by Project Green and is free and open to the public. You will find the list of open garden locations by picking up a map for this self-guided tour at any one of the sponsor's brick & mortar stores, listed on the Project Green [website](#).

There are Northside gardens to admire on the tour, including North Market Square Park, which has garden beds of mostly native plants maintained by neighborhood residents.



### OPEN GARDENS WEEKEND DATES & TIMES

Saturday, July 8th from 4:00 – 8:00 PM

Sunday, July 9th from 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Stop by **Ace Hardware** at North Dodge & Church Streets to pick up your copy of the Open Gardens map!



## Northside Picnic in the Park!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS, EVERYONE!

The 2023 Northside Picnic will take place on the afternoon of Sunday, September 10th, in a new location: NORTH MARKET SQUARE PARK.

This year, we've chosen to move the annual event to the park in the hopes of attracting more people, and to bring together residents living north & south of Church Street. The park location gives us more space and allows neighborhood kids to have fun together on the playground, open field, and basketball court. We'll stage the food or music under the gazebo, and celebrate the completion of the new pavement mural to be located in the center of the park (see story on page 6).

Warm thanks to the City staff for PIN grant support which will cover the cost of printing & mailing an NNA info card with announcement for the picnic. The grant includes live music from one of the Northside's favorite musicians. We hope residents look forward to getting acquainted with one another or catching up with old friends. More details about the picnic will be shared on social media and in the next edition of this newsletter. Hope to see you all on September 10th!

## What is the ICDD?

In 2012, a Self Supported Municipal Improvement District (SSMID) was created within the downtown area to generate additional tax revenue to support the local business community. The Iowa City Downtown District became the 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization representing downtown property owners and stakeholders, and charged with overseeing the reinvestment of these funds for the purpose of enhancing downtown & the Northside Marketplace.

"Not many people realize that in Iowa City, it takes a nonprofit organization like the ICDD to request a street closure, secure a liquor license and dram shop insurance, paint the street mural, and other improvements we've been able to add to North Linn Street," says Betsy Potter. You can learn more about the ICDD, and even find job listings, by visiting their website [here](#).

(Northside Outside continued from page 1)

the Northside responded. If you wander down to North Linn Street for a drink or a nibble between 2 and 5 PM, you might recognize a neighbor tidying up the streetscape.

"We are incredibly grateful to the NNA for providing volunteers to keep this portion of North Linn Street attractive and welcoming," says Betsy. "It's a great partnership and we look forward to future collaborations with the NNA."

Spotting Northside neighbors on clean-up duty isn't the only new feature you might notice on a visit to North Linn Street this summer. Here are three other differences from prior years:

- Restaurants such as Brix, Goosetown, and the Webster will provide outdoor service only to tables located within each restaurant's designated sidewalk "patio" area.
- If you want to dine at one of the picnic tables in the street, you'll need to grab carryout food from one of the adjoining restaurants – all of which will be happy to accommodate you.
- In addition to being able to drink wine & beer at the picnic tables, patrons are now allowed to consume cocktails and other alcohol drinks purchased from one of the North Linn Street restaurants.

What hasn't changed from prior years: Enjoy your visit to the Northside Marketplace, and remember to clean up after yourselves!

## NORTHSIDE MARKETPLACE CONCERT SCHEDULE

Summer of the Arts is once again hosting monthly free concerts in the Northside Marketplace. All concerts begin on North Linn Street at 6:30 PM. Bring a lawn chair and get your groove on!

June 24: Marc Janssen & the Locals

July 29: Slim Chance & the Can't Hardly Play Boys

August 26: Natty Nation

September 30: We Funk



## Zoning Code is Upheld in Appeal of Building Permit

AT its hearing held on April 12 and April 19, 2023, and attended by several neighbors, the Board of Adjustment found in favor of a Northside resident who had appealed a decision by an Iowa City building official to issue a permit for a single-family home at 319 North Van Buren Street.

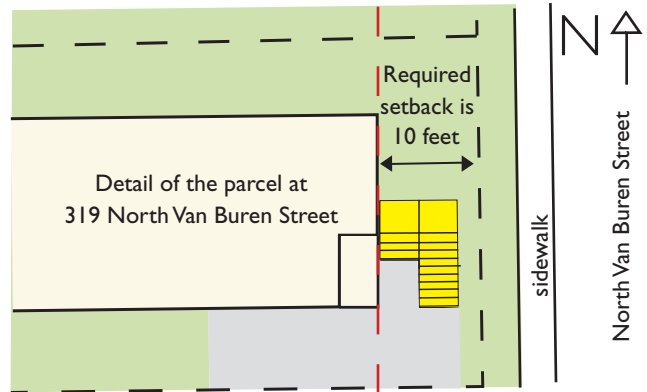
The appellant alleged that the building proposed for the lot, owned by Prestige Properties, did not meet setback and other requirements of City code. More specifically, the appellant pointed out that the building’s design had a second-story principal entrance that relied on a staircase placed in the front yard, which was too close to the property line. In this instance, City code requires a 10-foot setback and unfortunately, the staircase for the new construction would have been about two feet from the property line at the street.

The Board agreed, finding that the proposed three-story building did not meet the front setback requirement and that the building permit was issued in error. The permit was withdrawn, and Prestige must modify the building plan or submit new plans that comply with City code.

“The NNA supports new infill development that is consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan and the Central District Plan,” said NNA Chair Jim Throgmorton in a statement in support of the

appeal. “We would be eager to work with the owner to come up with a building that contributes to a healthy balance of affordable rental and owner-occupied housing without compromising the character of the Northside neighborhood.”

The NNA has reached out to Prestige owner Mike Oliveira to discuss building options for 319 North Van Buren Street. At this time, there has been no reply. It’s worth noting that scheduling a “good neighbor” meeting is a helpful way for developers and residents to discuss interests and concerns when infill development is planned.



*When the staircase (shown in yellow) did not meet zoning code, residents objected to what would have been the loss of front yard setback along the street.*

**JOIN US! JULY 16 AT 7PM**



**ICE CREAM & BAND MUSIC  
ON A SUMMER'S DAY  
NORTH MARKET SQUARE PARK**

**HEY PARENTS!**

**IOWA CITY PARKS & REC**  
is hosting supervised play and  
activities for children in grades K-6  
**NORTH MARKET SQUARE PARK**  
June 12th – August 3rd  
each Tuesday & Thursday  
9:30 to 11:30 AM



**CALL 319-356-5100 FOR MORE INFORMATION  
THANK YOU PARKS & REC!**

## ONE STEP CLOSER TO RNS-12 ZONING CHANGE

AT THE CITY COUNCIL'S work session on Tuesday, June 6, Council considered the proposal submitted by the NNA Steering Committee regarding the building height of single-family and duplex structures in RNS-12 districts. In the interest of neighborhood stabilization, the NNA requests a zoning amendment to reduce the allowable height from 35 to 27 feet. More specifically, the NNA asked Council to initiate the rezoning process and direct staff to proceed in an expeditious manner.

After brief discussion – during which Council praised the NNA for the thoroughness and sound rationale of its proposal – Council agreed to direct staff to proceed as requested. (We encourage neighbors to read the NNA's proposal, which can be found at [this link](#) on the NNA website.) We were gratified that members of the College Hill and Longfellow neighborhoods, where additional RNS-12 zones are located, submitted letters in support of the NNA's request.

This is just step one of what is likely to be a months-long process. First, City staff will make their own study of the NNA's request. Next, the Planning & Zoning Commission will review the staff's report and statements submitted by the NNA and other interested stakeholders, conduct a public hearing, and make a recommendation to the Council. At that point, the proposed zoning amendment will go to the Council for a vote. We understand that passage will require only majority (not super-majority) support.

The Steering Committee will keep neighbors informed as the zoning request moves forward, and particularly of opportunities for public comment. Your presence and voices will make a difference.

Thanks in advance for your support of our efforts to help retain a healthy balance of affordable rental and owner-occupied housing in the Northside, without compromising the unique character of our diverse and vibrant neighborhood.

## Love Nature? Love Books? This Guide's for You

**F**ormer Northside resident Beth Nobles, who now lives near family in Illinois, was looking for a retirement project after years spent working for parks and trails organizations in Texas and Colorado. She's an outdoorswoman, a devoted reader, and has long been involved in organizing volunteers to work toward the common good.

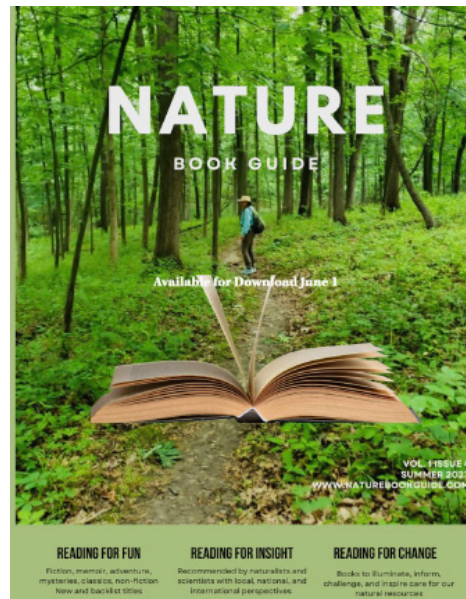
The project she devised combines all of these passions and more. Last fall, she launched the *Nature Book Guide*, a free quarterly publication available for online reading or downloading. As Beth notes on her website, the guide is designed "to share books about nature, to be a source of inspiration and wonder, to encourage reading, appreciation, and action – and investment in our world's future."

To gather book ideas, Beth reached out to her colleagues across the country and recruited a Vol-

unteer Book Recommendation Panel of scientists, naturalists, and stewards of our natural resources. Members represent a range of disciplines, ages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and local, national, and international perspectives.

Each issue of the Nature Book Guide features sections devoted to reading for fun (fiction, memoir, nonfiction, etc.), reading for insight (books recommended by naturalists and scientists), and reading for change (books that inspire readers to action). Children's and YA book recommendations are included.

The June issue has just hit the [website](#). Check it out, grab a book, hop in the hammock, and enjoy some "green" summer reading.



## Northsiders Enjoy Oakland Tree Walk

THE NNA TREE GROUP held its first event of the season on Arbor Day, April 28, with an early evening walk through Oakland Cemetery to identify & appreciate the cemetery's oldest "Heritage" trees. Tree Group member Mike Fallon (a self-described "botany nerd") led about a dozen tour participants and educated the group on the remarkable and long-lived tree species dotting the 40-acre grounds.

The tour started with some remarks about Oakland and its natural history. The cemetery was founded by the Iowa legislature in 1843 and is set on an upland oak savannah that was part of the forest that once sloped down to the river. These lands were managed for centuries by native peoples, mainly by fire, before being cleared for white settler development.

Neighbor and landscape architect John Thomas explained that Oakland Cemetery's design reflects the "garden cemetery" style that became popular in the United States in the mid-19th century, due to the overcrowding and health concerns associated with urban and churchyard cemeteries. Moreover, these rural cemeteries on the edge of town provided a public outdoor space in a natural setting before the development of public parks. (Interested in learning more? Visit the [American Forests website](#).)

As the group set out on their walk, they headed west into the oldest section of the cemetery along Governor and Church Streets. They admired the oaks and other heritage trees that still stand, some of which are more than 150 years old. Mike Fallon instructed participants on how to identify the various tree species, especially the cemetery's namesakes, using their reproductive parts, which were in full spring display.

Neighbor Shari DeGraw provided the group with copies of a brochure produced by the IOWA CITY HERITAGE TREES group in 1994, "A Walking Tour of Oakland Cemetery." That document allowed participants to note the age of what remains of the oldest trees (180 years) that are still visible as one drives north along Governor, and also what we've lost in the last 30 years. The group also spotted and enjoyed many spring ephemeral wildflowers—



Members of the Northside Tree Group learn about Heritage Trees in the Oakland Cemetery. Thanks to Mike Fallon for sharing his wealth of knowledge and to Linda McGuire for organizing the walk.

such as spring beauties, trout lilies, Virginia bluebells, and yellow violets – that were in bloom.

The tour ended at the cemetery maintenance building, where the group noted what remains of the original landscape, and what might be done in collaboration with the City to replenish and restore Oakland towards its native roots.

Our thanks to Tree Group members Mike Fallon and Linda McGuire for organizing the Arbor Day tour. They tell us there are more tree walks to come, so keep an eye on the NNA website for the latest event postings.

**JAZZ FEST  
and FIREWORKS  
at the Pentacrest  
Saturday, July 1st**

*Please remember that  
at-home fireworks are  
prohibited in Iowa City.*

**Teen Nights  
@ The James**

June 20 - July 11, 18 & 25th - August 1st & 15th

The James Theater offers space for teens to perform. It's a great way to practice in a small setting. Audience members wanted too. Visit The James Theater here to learn more.

## Pavement Mural Planned for North Market Square Park

Visitors to North Market Square Park will soon be surprised to see the addition of a pavement mural in the center of the park. In fact, if you pass by the park in the coming weeks, you may discover artist Thomas Agran and a group of painters at work. The project came to fruition during a gathering of the Northside Public Art and Neighborhood Beautification Interest Group. One member suggested a street mural project and the benefits of traffic calming that comes with street art. Others in the group pointed out that street murals were popular during the pandemic as a way to create outdoor gathering places.

Soon after, the art and beautification group agreed upon a mural project and NMSP became a natural location for it. Agran, a fine art painter with mural experience, agreed to create a design and oversee the neighborhood project. Northside residents were given a short survey to provide feedback and indicate their interest in helping. Special thanks to Heather Blatt for writing a successful grant proposal which secured partial funding for the pavement mural. We hope residents will enjoy seeing the work in progress, and have a sense of pride when it is completed, which could happen in time for Project Green's Open Gardens Weekend on July 8th and 9th.

## June 8th – A Perfect Evening



The Awful Purdies perform at North Market Square Park for an event organized by Iowa City Parks & Recreation.



A sketch by Thomas Agran shows a possible design concept for the pavement mural planned for North Market Square Park.

**IOWA CITY**  
**Historic Preservation Grants**

Grants are available for owner-occupied homes where the household income is 140% of the median income or less. Grants provide funding for 50% of the total cost of qualified exterior rehabilitation or preservation projects with a maximum grant amount of \$5,000 per project.

*Eligible Properties*  
are in HISTORIC DISTRICTS,  
in CONSERVATION DISTRICTS,  
or may be a LOCAL LANDMARK

*Properties in districts must be*  
KEY CONTRIBUTING,  
CONTRIBUTING,  
or NON-CONTRIBUTING\*

*Please contact* JESSICA BRISTOW,  
*Historic Preservation Planner, for more information*  
JBRISTOW@IOWA-CITY.ORG  
*Applications are available at this*  
[LINK](#)

\*Non-contributing structures can be awarded a grant if the funding is used to help the building become reclassified as CONTRIBUTING to its historic or conservation district.