



# NEWS FROM NORTHSIDE

NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION • IOWA CITY, IOWA

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE *and* YOU!

**T**HE NORTHSIDE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION (NNA) organizing meetings held on August 31 and September 22 involved nearly 40 neighbors in total. These were lively gatherings and participants had lots of great ideas for neighborhood enhancements. But if “it takes a village to raise a child,” it will take a similar group effort to keep the Northside vibrant, diverse, and welcoming. Opportunities for involvement fall into several categories:

**NNA LEADERSHIP:** We encourage you to read the old bylaws and submit any suggestions by Friday, November 18th; we welcome all suggestions for revision. When those bylaws are finalized they will likely call for the appointment of an NNA Steering Committee, consisting of positions such as Coordinator (who will also serve as the NNA’s liaison with local government), Recorder, and Treasurer. These positions need not take much of your time, but they are critically important to setting and achieving neighborhood priorities. Please consider volunteering for one of these key leadership roles on the Northside’s behalf!

AUGUST 31  
meeting notes

SEPTEMBER 22  
meeting notes

NNA BYLAWS  
2004

**NORTHSIDE STANDING COMMITTEES:** These groups represent ongoing functions that help the NNA fulfill its mission. If you have interest and/or skills in these areas, we hope you’ll sign up:

- **Communications and Outreach:** Responsible for the Northside newsletter, website, occasional social media posts, and materials associated with Northside events and other regular communications with Northside residents
- **Event Planning:** Organizes the annual Northside Block Party and special events to engage the community as a whole, such as walking tours of Northside landmarks (gardens, homes of famous writers, the Northside’s beer history, etc.)
- **Zoning and Land Use:** Because of its proximity to downtown and the UI campus, the Northside is under constant pressure from developers. The NNA seeks to maintain a healthy balance of owner-occupied homes, rental units, and local businesses, while respecting our architectural heritage. Doing so requires close and constant monitoring.
- **NNA Affinity Groups:** These small groups of neighbors will meet as needed to advance various interests. A partial list of these issues, generated by the recent NNA organizational meetings, appears below. (*continues on page 6*)

## Northside Website Debuts!

As part of the effort to revitalize the Northside Neighborhood Association and enhance information-sharing, the NNA has launched a new website, and we invite you to take it for a test drive! Visit [www.northsideiowacity.org](http://www.northsideiowacity.org), finger-stroll through the pages, and let us know what you think – there’s a feedback form on the Get Involved page. Our thanks to neighbors Peter Speltz and Susan Shullaw for bringing the site online.



[www.northsideiowacity.org](http://www.northsideiowacity.org)

## Skinned Infield to Return at Happy Hollow Park



BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL players (as well as those that enjoy games that may be played on a crushed limestone surface) can look forward to having the infield restored at Happy Hollow Park. With the support of responses from the Northside neighborhood and Iowa City youth baseball organizations, City Council agreed to combine the infield restoration with the playground renovation project. Construction of the playground and infield will take place during either the 2023 or 2024 construction season.

## Neighbors Welcomed Back the Northside Block Party

The barricades closing off the streets and the buffet tables were set even as a storm threatened to close out the show. Neighbors soon filled the tables with a beautiful array of plates of summer's bounty. Special guest, Ayman Sharif, Iowa City's neighborhood liaison, attended and got to know many Northsiders in attendance (see interview on page 4).

A circle of young adults sat in the intersection, talking. Those same kids at block parties a decade ago rolled down the Brown Street Inn hill and took photos with one-use cameras. Spritzing rain showered us as the event ended, followed by a rainbow in the east.

Thanks to Puja for stepping up to get the ball rolling. She had lots of help, and we are grateful to her, Dan and Muni, as well as Shari and Tom, Julian, Henri, George, Devin, John and Sarah, the Brown Street Inn and Doug, Susan, Kumar and Asha, Eric and Jackie, Diane, Linda. Warm thanks to MidwestOne Bank and Ace Hardware for contributing sidewalk chalk and hand sanitizer. Almost certainly we missed some names and apologize—we appreciate you nonetheless!



The intersection of Brown and Van Buren Streets returned as the Block Party site on September 18, 2022. Image by Thomas Lally.

## IOWA CITY STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE

AT ITS NOVEMBER 1ST Work Session, the City Council reviewed the draft of the [City's Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2028](#). The Strategic Plan identifies four Impact Areas, each with a set of action steps: NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING; MOBILITY; ECONOMY; and SAFETY & WELL-BEING. Among the many action steps, those with particular relevance to the Northside neighborhood include:

- Revamp the Program for Improving Neighborhoods (PIN) grant program and evaluate funding for district/neighborhood grassroots projects (target date fiscal years 2023-25)
- Initiate a Comprehensive Plan update and subsequent Zoning Code review to more broadly incorporate form-based principles with emphasis on growth areas first and infill area next (target date fiscal years 2024-28)
- Evaluate with the State of Iowa reverting Dodge

and Governor to two-way streets (target date fiscal years 2023-28)

- Expand snow-clearing operations at sidewalk corners in high-priority pedestrian areas, bus, and bike lanes (target date fiscal years 2025-28)

At the November 1st Work Session, I asked Council to consider prioritizing the Comprehensive Plan/Zoning Code update for the Northside Neighborhood, due to current development pressures resulting in the demolition of numerous Northside/Goosetown homes. The Council majority did not support my request ([November 1st Work Session link](#)).

The Strategic Plan will be considered for adoption at the City Council's Formal Session on December 6th. The public will have an opportunity to comment before Council votes on adoption.

—John Thomas, Iowa City Council Member

## Solar Energy Panels Approved for Historic Structure

AS A STEWARD for the environment, what are you willing to change or forgo or see in 2022 that you wouldn't have thought possible 30, 40, or 50 years ago? Banning plastic bags? Bringing your own dishes & silverware to potlucks? Buying an electric car? Going car-less and buying an electric bike?

What about seeing solar panels on houses in a historic district?

This was a question asked by a Northside neighbor in a Facebook post from January: *Would it be such an abomination to allow rooftop solar panels in our historic district, as our climate crisis worsens?* The neighbor is happy living in this neighborhood with its brick streets and charming century-old homes but, at the same time, she can imagine seeing solar panels on roofs.

She was pleased to find out through correspondence with the Iowa City's Historic Preservation Planner Jessica Bristow that solar panel installation is possible in some but not all historic neighborhood situations. According to Jessica, if you're interested, you will first need to find a solar contractor who will create a diagram explaining the ins and outs of panel location and electrical connections. The best place for an installation would be on an outbuilding or garage, and the second best location would be on the rear-facing

slope of the house. The City is also hoping the panels and frames would be darker in color as to blend in with the roof. There are other stipulations, and you would have to get the installation approved, but it's safe to say that the City applauds solar panels, is very willing to help answer questions, and wants the homeowner to move forward with the process where it's feasible.

If you want to see solar panels in action, take a walk down Brown Street and look up at the northeast corner of N. Johnson Street. Laura and Tom Mittman started the process about six months ago. "The panels took a day to install and so did reinforcing the roof's beams," said Tom. "The paperwork and testing with the City of Iowa City and MidAmerican Energy took the longest."

The solar panels were turned on a few weeks ago. Tom said that the panels generated more electricity on the first day than the couple used, even more on the second day, and slightly less on the third day. Their hope is that next summer all of their air conditioning costs will be covered.

Because of the climate crisis, Laura and Tom Mittman knew they had to take action. "If we consider ourselves stewards of the Earth, and we do, we know solar panels are the right thing to do." What action steps are you willing to take in 2022?

— Devin Redmond



Brown Street residence with southern exposure rooftop array of twelve solar panels. Please contact Jessica Bristow at [jessica-bristow@iowa-city.org](mailto:jessica-bristow@iowa-city.org) to inquire about the process of adding solar panels to a roof for residences located in a historic or conservation district.

Photo by Linda McGuire.

## Q&A with AYMAN SHARIF

### Iowa City's Outreach & Engagement Specialist

In June 2022 Ayman Sharif was hired as Iowa City's new Outreach & Engagement Specialist, following the retirement of long-time Neighborhood Outreach Coordinator Marcia Bollinger. Since then, Ayman has been getting to know all of the city's unique neighborhoods; in fact, you may have met Ayman at the Northside Block Party in September. We visited with Ayman to learn a bit more about his job and future plans.

*What are your main job functions and key priorities in this new position?*

My job is to assist in building strong and consistent connections with neighborhoods. Community engagement is at the heart of the City's strategic goals, and building and maintaining strong and effective relations with neighborhoods will make these and other goals achievable.

Priorities include working with neighborhoods to improve communication networks and publicize the fine work done in neighborhoods while maintaining positive and effective relations with the City. Also, it is important to work with neighborhoods to collectively understand, develop, and implement strategies to expand community participation and active civic engagement.

*Do you have specific projects or goals in mind for the coming year?*

We focus on working with neighborhood leaders to provide support to re-activate the Iowa City Neighborhood Association Council (ICNAC) as an important body that links the various and diverse needs and voices of our neighborhoods. There is also a focus to support the creation of new neighborhood groups in areas of the city where they do not exist. In addition, there is a focus to review the PIN [Program for Improving Neighborhoods] Grant guidelines and enhance the application process to make the use of the funds more consistent with the City's strategic goals.



Northside residents Linda McGuire and Susan Shullaw with Ayman Sharif.

*What has surprised you as you've gotten to know the various Iowa City neighborhoods?*

The diversity of neighborhoods is greater than one would expect, with almost each neighborhood having its own unique character, interests, and challenges. Also, it is surprising that fewer neighborhoods are utilizing the City's services and available resources and funds.

*What can neighborhood residents and leadership do to help you succeed in your job?*

Iowa City is known for its strong community values together with the professional knowledge and resources provided by its academic institutions. Issues that concern residents—such as equity and human rights, climate action, local food system, transportation, and economic development, etc.—nearly all take place in neighborhoods. Therefore, while my job remains a neighborhood liaison and communicator, the energy and effort will be on the part of the neighborhood leaders to build what it takes for an active and effective community engagement model.

Curious about Ayman's many other interests? Read this [Gazette](#) article from July 2022.

# 724 RONALDS STREET UPDATE

On November 6th, about a dozen people gathered at 724 Ronalds Street to learn about the collaborative effort to develop one or two homes at the vacant lot owned by The Housing Fellowship of Johnson County. Martha Norbeck of C-Wise Design & Consulting presented a visual of the lot with two options:

1) dividing the current lot (80 x 150 feet) into two 40 x 150 feet lots; one lot with a two-bedroom home and the other with a five-bedroom home and both with either a garage or small ancillary building located near the alley; 2) leaving the current lot as is, with one four-bedroom house and an auxiliary dwelling unit. Norbeck, the project architect, pointed out the limitations of designing around two sewer-pipe mains that run diagonally under the lot, creating easements that hinder development. She has also taken care to leave intact desirable mature trees along the street. The final building designs will need to be approved by the City’s Historic Preservation Commission.

Representing The Housing Fellowship, executive director Simon Andrew said that his organization

places low-income families in rental homes within the Johnson County area. The process involves vetting applicants to make sure they are a good fit for the home and that rental costs are within the means of their clients. The Housing Fellowship will remain as owners and caretakers of 724 Ronalds Street in the years to come.

Other partners of the project, GT Karr, of Sueppel’s Remodeling, and John Reynolds, industrial arts teacher and coordinator of the “Student Build” program of the City’s high schools, represented the construction side of the home building project. Karr and Reynolds discussed how the plans for the building, developed by C-Wise, will accommodate a team of builders both accomplished and new to the field of construction. Reynolds stressed the importance of training the next generation of young adults to enter the workforce in building and construction. He said, “I’m looking forward to giving students this amazing experience. The students will be all from the Iowa City community high schools.”

– Shari DeGraw

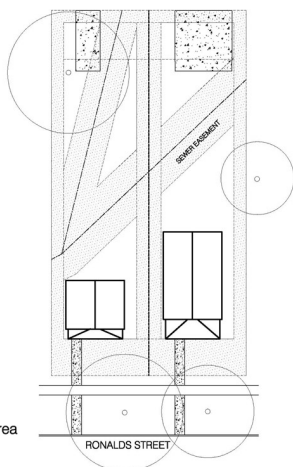


**OPTION 1**

- SPLIT LOT**
- 2 at 40 ft wide
- WEST HOUSE**
- 2 BR
- 1.5 bath
- 960 sf
- single car parking

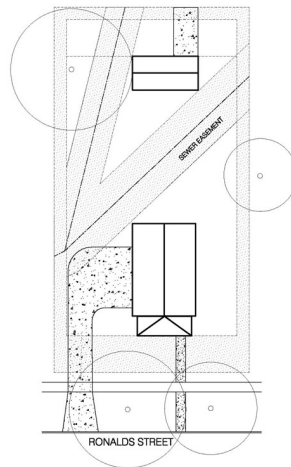
- EAST HOUSE**
- 5 BR
- 2.5 bath
- 2600 sf
- 2 car parking

**KEY**  
 Required Easement Area



**OPTION 2**

- SINGLE LOT**
- MAIN**
- 4 BR
- 1 ADA BR
- 1.5 baths
- 1 ADA bath
- 2600 sf
- 2 car garage
- ACCESSORY DWELLING**
- Studio
- 1 bath
- 390 sf
- 1 car parking



Two diagrams prepared by C-Wise Design and Consulting to show possible ways to develop the lot at 724 Ronalds Street. Groundbreaking for the project is planned for fall 2023.

- A few of the specifications:
- All electric building
  - High efficiency building and HVAC design
  - Low water use fixtures
  - Low embodied carbon material selection
  - Limited solar power due to tree canopy
  - Fulfill Historic Preservation Guidelines

Congratulations to  
 Christina Welu-Reynolds  
 on her appointment  
 to the Iowa City  
 Historic Preservation  
 Commission!

*It Takes a Village (continued)*


If you're passionate about one or more of these topics, let us know and we'll connect you with like-minded neighbors eager to make a difference in these areas and more:

- Northside tree canopy (including Heritage Trees)
- Garden helpers/public art  
(Northside parks and other public areas)
- Renewable energy (solar, geothermal, etc.)
- Housing issues (affordability, maintenance, etc.)
- Public safety (street/sidewalk maintenance, traffic, parking, vandalism, etc.)
- Utilities (electrical wires, fiber optics)
- Neighborly welfare (perhaps serving as a Welcome Committee for new neighbors, including students, and also checking on neighbors during situations such as severe weather)

Do other topics come to mind? Let us know!

**NORTHSIDE BLOCK CONTACTS:** This initiative seeks a resident from each block on the Northside to represent that block: 1) By meeting residents of the block, and 2) contacting block residents about timely neighborhood activity – this could be dropping off an announcement for the annual NNA block party or to let residents know when an issue arises (such as a zoning change about which the City Council requires time-sensitive neighborhood feedback). We would like to hear multiple viewpoints to help ensure the Northside is represented and not just the voices of a few.

If you would like to be active in the NNA by volunteering for a position or affinity group above, please go to the [Get Involved](#) form on the new NNA website. You can also write us at [info@northsideiowacity.org](mailto:info@northsideiowacity.org) and we'll get back to you about what comes next. Future issues of this newsletter will include information about neighborhood projects and priorities. Thanks in advance for your involvement!



Make plans to attend our next  
**NORTHSIDE  
NEIGHBORHOOD  
ASSOCIATION MEETING**  
Monday, December 5th  
5:45– 7:15PM  
Mann Elementary School Gymnasium

## RECOMMENDED READING

Congrats to Northside resident and former Iowa City Mayor Jim Throgmorton, whose latest book, *Co-Crafting the Just City* (2022), was featured in last month's Iowa City Book Festival. Publisher Routledge says the book “proposes a practical, action-oriented theory about how city futures are being (and can be) shaped, showing that storytelling of various kinds plays a very important but poorly understood role in the co-crafting process, and demonstrating that skillful use of ethically-sound persuasive storytelling (especially by mayors) can improve our collective capacity to create better places.” If you missed Jim's reading and panel discussion at the book festival, you can catch it on YouTube [here](#).