COUNCIL COMMUNICATION

Number:	**26-259**	Meeting:	**August 3, 2026**
Agenda Item:	**64**	Roll Call:	**26-0936**
Submitted by:	**Cody Christensen, Development Services Director**		

AGENDA HEADING:

Consideration of a request from Joppa Village Project, represented by James Hagberg, to demolish the former Chesterfield School at 2501 Maury Street pursuant to Section 58-70 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance.

SYNOPSIS:

Joppa Village Project, represented by James Hagberg, is proposing to demolish the former Chesterfield School, located at 2501 Maury Street. The property is owned by the City of Des Moines and leased to Joppa Village Project. The 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:

- Chesterfield School is a simplified Collegiate Gothic style schoolhouse constructed circa 1880 to serve the village of Chesterfield. Chesterfield was incorporated in 1882 as the town of Gilbert.
- Around 1889, Gilbert was annexed into the City of Des Moines, and the school was likely one of the approximately 20 school districts that merged to form the Independent Community School District of Des Moines in 1907.
- In approximately 1913, the school was renamed Scott School, in honor of Wilson Alexander Scott, who donated his land for the construction of the Iowa State Capitol, and is the only person interred on the Capitol grounds.
- The building suffered a fire sometime in the 1940's, and as a result lost its central tower that was located over the front entrance of the school.
- In 1951, an addition was constructed on the rear of the school.
- The school closed in 1971.

- The City of Des Moines purchased the school in 1975 and has owned it since. The building was initially used as a community center. However, it has since been vacant for an extended period of time.

- In 2025, Joppa began its due diligence on use of the property for a tiny home community. At that time, Joppa Village explored adaptive reuse of the building as a community center for the village.

- In September 2025, Joppa entered into an agreement with the City to lease the property with an option to purchase. The lease was amended by City Council on June 8, 2026.

- According to information provided by Joppa Village, the cost to renovate the structure exceeds the cost of demolition and new construction for the desired use by approximately $1.6 million. Furthermore, according to information provided by Joppa Village, the existing building would not adequately meet the space requirements needed for the community center.

- City staff finds that the building meets several of the City's Landmark designation criteria, 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 Municipal Code 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, Joppa would 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. They would also be required to salvage for re-use as many fixtures and as much material as possible from the building. Provided that the documentation and salvage processes have been conducted to the satisfaction of the Development Services Director, then issuance of a demolition permit in accordance with Section 26-303 of the City Code and issuance of a related plumbing permit in accordance with the Plumbing Code shall be authorized.

- If the application is referred to the HPC, within 90 days the HPC shall hold a meeting and work with the owner to determine 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 structure to an alternative site.

- If the HPC and the Joppa do not reach an agreement on a feasible alternative to demolition, Joppa would 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. They would also be required to salvage for re-use as many fixtures and as much material as possible from the building. Provided that the documentation and salvage processes have been conducted to the satisfaction of the Development Services Director, then issuance of a demolition permit in accordance with Section 26-303 of the City Code and issuance of a related plumbing permit in accordance with the Plumbing Code shall be authorized.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION(S):

Date: June 8, 2026

Roll Call Number: 26-0704

Action: Approving First Amendment to Lease Agreement with Joppa for option to purchase City property located generally at 2501 Maury Street. Moved by Gatto to adopt. Second by Voss. Motion Carried 7-0.

BOARD/COMMISSION ACTION(S): NONE

ANTICIPATED ACTIONS AND FUTURE COMMITMENTS: NONE

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