

Staff Report

**REQUEST FROM THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION REGARDING
WINDOWS AND INFILL OF OPENINGS**

February 24, 2026

BACKGROUND:

On December 16, 2025, City Council referred to staff two zoning text amendment requests from the Ames Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) (see Attachment). The requests pertain to Double Pane Windows and Infill of Openings:

Double Pane Windows:

The first requested change includes explicitly stating that double pane windows are allowed as an acceptable window type to increase energy efficiency of historic structures and including definitions for *Double Pane Windows, Multi-Pane Windows, and Muntin Bar*. Currently, Chapter 31 does not explicitly allow or disallow double pane windows, nor are there added definitions for clarity when referencing window details.

The current regulations applied by staff focus on use of historic materials for windows and do not address multi-pane window types. Staff's understanding is that the current window design criteria and guidelines would still apply. However, the change would essentially allow for double pane windows without consideration of the of the standard of repair of existing versus replacement.

Staff researched the requested changes and provided the initial findings to the HPC in October before the Commission formulated its recommendations. The communities that staff consulted with, Iowa City and Dubuque, did not have historic preservation guideline language regarding double pane windows; instead, they prioritized the retention and repair of original windows, as well as non-invasive weatherization techniques to increase energy efficiency versus replacement.

It is staff's understanding that the HPC requests are not intended to alter the existing historic requirements, but to allow increased energy efficiency when they otherwise meet the historic material and profile requirements of an appropriate window. The structure, form and materials should be sensitively treated to preserve the building's character. Depending on how the double pane window language is written, the priority of historic character vs. modern window design will be defined.

Infill of Openings:

The second request is to amend Chapter 31 to provide clear guidance related to when, or whether, to allow for the infill of window openings. An example of this issue would be someone wanting to fill in a window as part of remodeling project of a room.

The request to address this issue follows the Commission's review of a Certificate of Appropriateness where the Commission found that Chapter 31 does not provide standards or guidance on window removal or infill to make an adequate decision. There was a mixed history of whether to approve or deny such requests as precedence for the decision.

Before making this request, the HPC considered language from other cities, and believes that addressing the issue directly would be appropriate to assist homeowners with understanding what alterations would be permissible. **The Commission requests to add specific window infill language stating when window removal or infill is appropriate, as well as specifying that any window infill must be architecturally consistent with the historical structure.**

Staff also reviewed language from Iowa City related to how infill of openings may be permitted by the HPC and reviewed this with the HPC in October.

OPTIONS:

Option 1. Direct staff to prepare a Text Amendment to allow double pane windows in historic districts as well as add and revise definitions to add clarity on Double Pane Windows, Multi Pane Windows, and Muntin Bar.

Council could amend Chapter 31 to explicitly allow double pane windows and improve or add definitions. During a text amendment process final language and guidance regarding how to apply it would be developed.

Option 2. Direct staff to prepare a Text Amendment to add code language regarding the removal and infill of windows.

This option would provide clear guidelines to Chapter 31 regarding the removal or infill of windows. The HPC has reviewed several applications for window infill over the years and has a mixed history of approving or denying applications. The request looks to provide language that would provide a consistent approach and determination. During a text amendment process final language and guidance on the removal or infill of windows with the limits of meeting the historic materials and character defining feature requirements would be developed.

The intent is to apply guidance allowing window infill to side and rear facades, but not front facades. Infill could be approved on an historic side or rear façade if it met the guidelines.

Option 3. Direct staff to prepare a Text Amendment to allow double pane windows AND address removal and infill of windows.

Council could amend Chapter 31 to allow the requested changes from both Option 1 and Option 2.

Option 4. Make No Changes at This Time

If the Council is satisfied with City standards within Chapter 31, *Historic Preservation Districts*, or finds the requests to allow alterations that would negatively impact the historic district, no

change is required.

Under this option, the Historic Preservation Commission will continue to review applications on a case-by-case basis and only allow changes that will not be harmful to the historic character of the district. Window changeouts would be subject to the current standards, and if they are met could still allow for new double pane windows. Infill of openings is less clear regarding whether it is permitted, but based on past practice it could be considered by the HPC without well defined standards.

STAFF COMMENTS:

Enhanced energy efficiency and reviewing Chapter 31 are designated Historic Preservation Commission tasks from its 2025 Work Plan. Through Commission research and applying the existing guidelines when reviewing Certificate of Appropriateness applications, the HPC has identified areas of desired improvement.

The existing guidelines do not explicitly disallow or allow double pane windows, nor do they provide the Commission, or staff, with clear direction regarding window removal and infill. If double pane windows were allowed, the added definitions would provide increased clarity regarding the differing window features to ensure there is no confusion by the new term within the code.

While increasing energy efficiency and identifying areas of improvement within the Code are important goals of the Commission, all historic structure alteration shall maintain the existing historic character whenever possible. However, staff has not found in its initial research that allowing double-pane windows is a recommended alteration to a historic structure because it may modify the original character. This issue will be subject to more review of language if the text amendment is initiated.

The removal or infill of windows was allowed by other communities when specific criteria had been met relating to the location of the window. The HPC informed staff that its intent is not to provide guidelines or language that would directly conflict with the goal to preserve, but to allow alterations that may help improve a structure when it is appropriate to do so.

A representative of the HPC will be present to discuss the proposal with the City Council at the February 24 meeting.

If City Council decides to proceed with any text amendment, two steps must be decided. The first is to decide what level of input from the public is necessary before adopting new standards. As a text amendment, no specific public notice is required other than a published newspaper notice. Staff believes that at a minimum, a mailing to all properties in the Old Town Historic District prior to review by the HPC of final text would be expected. Council could also direct that a neighborhood meeting be held prior to presenting final text amendment language to the HPC.

The second issue is the timing of starting the text amendment process. Council will have also seen the proposed HPC workplan for the upcoming year before making a decision regarding this request. Council could determine to proceed with the text amendment process in May, or wait to review it in relation to other P&H workplan priorities at an upcoming Council meeting on April 14.

ATTACHMENT(S):

2025-12-04 HPC Memorandum to City Council.pdf