



## Take a Tour of Urbandale

Do you want to learn more about your community? Do you have family members who have been away for a few years or out-of-town visitors who have never been here? Now is a good time to take a real or virtual driving tour of some of the historical and cultural sites that are important to our ever changing community.

Logically, to learn about history, start at the Olmsted-Urban House, 4010 70th Street, headquarters of the Urbandale Historical Society. Built in 1904, the house is furnished in the period of the 1920's and 1930's, and contains a wide collection of printed materials and objects related to Urbandale history. The barn includes farm related memorabilia.

To view the collection, come to a scheduled Open House or call 270-2917 in advance to arrange for a family or group tour. Also take time to look at the names on the memorial bricks in the Walk of History that leads from the house to the street.

Next go south to 70th and Douglas to what is now the Walgreens parking lot. This was the site of the first Urbandale two-room school built in 1913. A two-story brick building to serve all grades was constructed in 1926. Plaques on a memorial wall list the names of nearly 800 graduates starting with the Class of 1937. Through the years, the building was used by various grade levels until it was torn down in 1975. A sculpture also includes symbols of Urbandale High School activities.

More history is documented at 70th and Roseland at Trolley Park. This is the site of the turn-around for the trolley system starting in 1904. In later years, as many

as 100 round trips were made daily from downtown Des Moines. Service ended in 1951. The sculptures of a trolley and riders also includes informative metal plaques giving facts about Urbandale's early days and the trolleys.

Next, go back north on 70th Street to Meredith Drive and one of our oldest historical sites - McDivitt Grove Cemetery. When the son of William McDivitt, one of the earliest settlers died, the father set aside some of his farmland for a cemetery. Now grave markers give the names of many families important to the area's development. Most of the lots have been purchased, but there are two columbariums that have been erected with compartments to hold cremated remains. Contact Urbandale Parks and Recreation for more information about the cemetery.

Come back south on 70th Street to Aurora. Here you see Frerichs Field, named for long-time coach, Denny Frerichs. A variety of football, soccer, and track events are held here. This block is also the location of the new Urbandale High School. An earlier high school was built in 1959. Several additions, a gym and auditorium were constructed through the years. Except for the gym, now all these original buildings have been replaced by a greatly expanded structure. Open House for the new building was held in November 2009. Potential capacity is 1,800 students.

Just west on Aurora, past the Swimming Pool, is the Urbandale Senior Center. Originally built as the Urbandale Public Library, it became the Senior Center in 1988. A full schedule of social, recreational and education programs are offered throughout the week. A new Memory Garden includes plantings,

benches and engraved commemorative bricks.

Back on 72nd Street you will go past Lions Park. This was Urbandale's first park. The Gazebo was built in 1990 as part of an Eagle Scout project with funds from the city and community groups. A number of musical events are held here and the gazebo can even be rented for special events. It appears as a symbol in Urbandale's flag. The park is also the site of the Ralph Whitten Shelter House used by many community organizations and family groups. The office of UCAN and Caring Corp is located here.

Take Douglas west to 86<sup>th</sup> Street. This is the center of much of the community's activity. Here you will find the Water Department, Police Department, Parks and Recreation, and City Government. The new sculptures planned by the Fine Arts Committee have been positioned at the east side of the parking lot. For more art appreciation take time to come into the Urbandale Public Library and view the gallery displayed in the hallway to the meeting rooms. In the Youth and Children's section you will see many examples of the creative work of the artists from Sticks. Outside on the south side of the Library a butterfly garden has been planted.

Much community effort has gone into the development of the Charles Gabus Memorial Tree Park featuring special sculptures, plantings, benches, and a fountain. A feature added in 2011 is the Memorial to Veterans with flags, stone markers, and donated bricks engraved with name, branch of service and military conflicts, that veterans have served. This is also a good place to access the popular walking trails:

**Urbandale Historical Society**  
4010 70<sup>th</sup> Street  
Urbandale, IA 50322

Go south to Hickman and west to Living History Farms. Martin Flynn's Walnut Hill Farm at one time involved 1,700 acres. In 1870 the family built a substantial brick home which is known as the Flynn Mansion and has recently been restored. Though this was long before Urbandale became an incorporated community, the city boundaries have changed, and this nationally known tourist destination now officially has an Urbandale address.

Urbandale's development now goes many miles west of Interstate 35/80. If you go back up to Douglas and west to 128th Street and then north you will be at Webster School. This is the newest of Urbandale's elementary schools and is located at what was the site of an early one-room country school in Webster Township. Statistically, this is now nearly in the center of Urbandale, as boundaries stretch from Merle Hay road on the east to 184th Street in Dallas County on the west – an area of over 22 square miles. Urbandale's population is now over 40,000.

Conclude your trip by going north to Meredith Drive and back to 123rd Street to see some of the newest development. Here at Paragon Office park you can look at the beautiful Paragon Prairie Tower. Nearly 1.8 million pieces of glass tile were applied to create a prairie scene of grasses, corn, and wheat appearing beneath a blue sky. The tower, which can also be seen at night is now a cultural landmark believed to be the largest mosaic glass tile mural in the United States. At this location in the business park, the tower represents the old and new that is Urbandale, and provides a fitting ending to our symbolic trip around our growing community.

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