



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 our 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 Olmsted-Urban House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The barn includes farm related memorabilia and historical artifacts of Urbandale.

To view the collection, come to a scheduled Open House or call 270-2917 in advance to arrange for a family or group tour. For more information, please call or see our website. 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 to replace the original two-room school. Plaques on a memorial wall on the corner 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 the **Lawson 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.

The 70th & Douglas intersection was the center of business for 'old' Urbandale. To the east are businesses and buildings dating to the 1940s, such as **Stormy's Tavern** and the **American Legion Hall**. To the west is the **Urbandale Fire Station** after relocating from 70th St.

Go back north on 70th Street to Meredith Drive to one of our oldest historical sites **McDivitt Grove Cemetery**. The land was originally sold in 1853 to William McDivitt, a pioneer settler, whose name the cemetery still bears. When John McDivitt, son of William, died, his father set apart a portion of his farm for the cemetery in 1865. A schoolhouse was built on the site in 1866 and the ground was deeded for cemetery purposes in 1870. 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 currently six columbariums that have been erected to hold cremated remains. Contact Urbandale Parks and Recreation for more information about the cemetery.

Go 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 **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.

Just west of the High School parking lot on Aurora, is the **Urbandale Senior Recreation Center**. Originally built as the Urbandale Public Library, it became the Senior Center in 1988. A full schedule of social, recreational and educational programs are offered throughout the week. A new Memory Garden includes plantings,



benches and engraved commemorative bricks. To the north and east of the Senior Center is where the Urbandale Community Pool was located. It was razed in 2021.

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. Lions Park is slated for a complete site remodel in the coming years. Across from Lions Park on Prairie is the new reconstructed **Millard Olmsted Elementary School**, opened in 2022.

Follow 72nd St. south to Douglas then west on Douglas, passing the McRea house on your right (oldest house in Urbandale) and continuing on to 86th Street. This is the center of much of the community's activity today. Here you will find the **Water Department, Police Department, Parks and Recreation** and **City Government** offices. The new sculptures planned by the *Urbandale Public Art 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. 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, in which the veterans have served. At Christmas time this is the site of a beautiful light display, Urbandale's *Miracle on 86th Street*. This is also a good place to access the popular walking trails.

Go south to Hickman and west to **Living History Farms**. Martin Flynn's Walnut Hill Farm at one time comprised 1,700 acres. In 1870 the family built a substantial brick home which is known as the Flynn Mansion. Though not part of the original Urbandale, as city boundaries have changed, this nationally known tourist destination now has an Urbandale address.

Urbandale's development now goes many miles west of Interstate 35/80 into Dallas County. Follow Hickman west to 128th Street, then north on 128th St. To the northwest of the Douglas Parkway intersection is **Des Moines Christian School**. Continuing north on 128th St. at Aurora Ave. you will see **Webster Elementary School** on the west side of the street. This is the newest of Urbandale's original 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 east 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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