



## History, Architecture, and Gathering Spaces -- October 2021

The District is made up of two historic neighborhoods which straddle the Cedar River.

### **New Bohemia Neighborhood**

On the east side the south end -- what is now known as New Bohemia -- was first settled in the 1870s by Bohemians and other immigrants, many of whom came to Cedar Rapids to work in the Sinclair packing house. The neighborhood, on the far south end of the eastside downtown, developed a lively commercial and cultural district with homes, professional services, retailers, and several buildings which became the hubs of social and cultural life for the immigrants and their families. These buildings feature Romanesque, Classical and Folk Victorian architecture. Through the years, the '60s, '70s, and '80s, and especially after the packing closed in the the neighborhood began to lose its luster.

### **Czech Village Neighborhood**

On the westside - what is now known as Czech Village - began with the construction of the new 1910 16<sup>th</sup> Ave bridge. After 1905, and, especially through the much of the '20s, the new commercial district on the west side became a very attractive retail and service district that featured shops and businesses owned and operated by Czech-speaking families.

From the early 1900s, a westside 16th Avenue Commercial Club, functioned as a chamber of commerce to promote and support Czech businesses. Due to those efforts, the 16th Avenue SW commercial zone was established as a major shopping district for Cedar Rapids, second only to the downtown area between 1920 and 1960. After 1960, with the prevalence of malls, the neighborhood began to wane. In the '70s the Czech Heritage Foundation, in the interest of preserving Czech traditions and history, "Czech Village" to appeal to the tourists. In 1974, the National Czech and Slovak Museum & Library was founded.

### **Flood of 2008 - Devastation and Afterwards Re-Flowering**

The neighborhoods were dealt a huge blow with the devastating flood of 2008. And yet, with assistance from the community, and state and federal governments, the New Bohemia and the Czech Village neighborhoods rose again. Today, with the help of Main Street Iowa and local foundations, both neighborhoods are healthier than ever and once again form a thriving residential, commercial, cultural and entertainment district. Despite the destruction experienced, the community has more than just rebuilt, but preserved and enhanced the character and historic assets of the area.

### **The Future and Making it Possible**

In the future, we will continue to be vigilant about preserving our architecture and we will continue to work with those building new structures to ensure architecture of interest to the District. We will continue to attract cultural, entertainment and unique retail opportunities. We will see quite a bit more housing as demand grows in this pedestrian and bike friendly walkable District. And, we expect to attract many more visitors to our charming, lively and thriving historic neighborhoods.

We find that dreaming big and building relationships and partnerships are the keys to making our District come alive and continue to advance toward our goals.