



Downtown Ames landmark receives \$75,000 grant for restoration

Ames, IA – The Main Street Cultural District (MSCD) has received a \$75,000 Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) grant to help with renovations to the Sheldon Munn Hotel in downtown Ames.

“The Sheldon Munn is a grand old lady in need of restoration,” said Cindy Hicks, Executive Director of the MSCD. “With the help of this grant, the owner of the building can begin the process of saving this important piece of Ames history.”

The IEDA awarded over \$900,000 in Main Street Iowa Challenge Grants to 14 communities around the state. The grants will benefit local improvement projects such as façade upgrades and restoration, upper floor rehabilitation, and remodeled spaces for expanding downtown businesses. This is the third Challenge Grant awarded to the Ames Main Street Cultural District for renovation of a downtown building.

“Rehabilitated buildings in downtown Ames lead to opportunities for new businesses, new jobs, and better housing for the community,” said Hicks. “I am proud that our local organization opens the door of eligibility for this grant money to come in.”

John Lott, owner of the downtown Ames architectural firm Benjamin Design Collaborative, has owned the building since November of 2014. His \$4.5 million dollar renovation plans for the Sheldon Munn include the massive undertaking of stabilizing the foundation, making \$1 million in façade improvements, total renovation of the 56 apartments in the building, new HVAC systems in every apartment, and renovation of the old Fire House Book Store.

"The Sheldon Munn hasn't had proper care or maintenance for many decades," said Lott. "This project is going to be very expensive, and the Main Street Iowa grant will allow us to add back some of the original grandeur to the building."

The Sheldon Munn Hotel, located at the corner of Main Street and Kellogg, was built in 1915. The tallest building in town at the time, it stood four stories tall and had 72 guest rooms the day it opened. It also included a ballroom, a dining room, a four-chair barbershop and a large kitchen with six full-time chefs. The hotel attracted people from all over the Midwest, and was often booked months in advance. The Iowa State University Memorial Union had not been built yet, so the hotel also served as a meeting place and dance hall for the college fraternities and sororities. Gloria Betcher, Ames City Council woman for Ward one, says while we haven't recognized or valued the Sheldon Munn for the past 60 years or so, it is still the heart of Main Street in downtown Ames.

"If we lose the building to neglect, we will lose much more than an important historic hotel," Betcher said. "We will also lose a prime opportunity to rehab the hotel's apartments into urban homes for those who like to live close to services, stores, and restaurants,"

The Sheldon Munn's popularity led to an expansion in 1926 with the addition of the west wing which doubled the hotel's occupancy and included commercial spaces on the ground floor. In the 1970's Ames, and communities all over the country, started seeing people move away from the downtown areas. With this decline, the once popular hotel was converted in to apartments. Extensive renovation on those apartments has already begun. Each will be gutted and rebuilt with new lighting, new cabinets and granite countertops, new flooring, raised ceilings, and *wifi*.

"People want to live in America's historic downtowns and Ames has a chance to capitalize on that trend," Betcher said. "Now is the time to actualize the potential in this historic hotel and make it the hub of Ames life that it once was."

This is the second grant the Sheldon Munn Hotel has received this year for renovations. The City of Ames awarded \$56,423 from its façade grant program to the project in July. All of the renovations, interior and exterior, are expected to be complete within a year.

***The Main Street Cultural District** is a nationally accredited Main Street Iowa program created to promote historic preservation and economic revitalization in downtown Ames. Originally established on January 1, 2004, its mission is to advance the downtown area as the destination district in the heart of our community. The MSCD is an affiliate organization of the Ames Chamber of Commerce. To keep updated on MSCD happenings, become a fan of the Main Street Cultural District on Facebook, bookmark www.AmesDowntown.org, or contact our office at 515-233-3472. MSCD is an affiliate organization of the Ames Chamber of Commerce.*