



Village of Downers Grove

Historic Preservation and Design Review Board – Agenda

Table 1 - Detailed information on this Board or Commission meeting.

Meeting Location	Civic Center – Betty Cheever Council Chambers
Meeting Address	850 Curtiss St., Downers Grove, IL 60515
Meeting Date	September 16 th , 2026 at 7:00 PM

Call to Order.

Roll Call.

Approval of Minutes.

- May 20th, 2026.

New Business.

Downers Grove Historical Society.

The Downers Grove Historical Society will provide an overview of its community programs and its dedication to keeping history alive for future generations.

Old Business.

Public Comment.

Adjournment.



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Meeting Date	May 20th, 2026 at 7:00 PM

Call to Order.

Roll Call.

Approval of Minutes.

A. January 21st, 2026.

Motion by Commissioner Brooks, second by Commissioner Kolev to approve the minutes of the January 21st, 2026 meeting.

Old Business.

There were none.

New Business.

Flora León, Senior Planner, thanked the HPDRB for coming in. She then introduced the guest speaker: Felicia Camacho, Recreation Supervisor for the Downers Grove Park District.

Chairperson Gassen shared that while there was no formal petition on the agenda, the HPDRB is required to meet quarterly to maintain their Certified Local Government designation. She then thanked Felicia for attending the meeting.

Felicia Camacho, Recreation Supervisor for the Downers Grove Park District shared that the 1846 Blodgett House was added to the National Park Services Network to Freedom. She then noted that the presentation would include more details about that program and how this site was added to the network. She began by stating that Zachary Bishop, Downers Grove Historical Museum Curator up to 2018, was working on an exhibit for the Blodgett family history. During that process Zachary learned more about the house and the Blodgett family's participation in the Underground Railroad. He then looked into recognition programs and discovered the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom by the National Park Service. This program was pursued because there were already two other sites in DuPage County that had been recognized by the program. Ms. Camacho also noted that the designation has increased visitors.

With regards to National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, Ms. Camacho shared that it was started in 1998 via federal legislation and the program "...honors, preserves and promotes the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight..." Ms. Camacho noted that it does not have to be a site that was involved. It could also for example a church that issued some sort of mandate about anti-slavery. She then shared that there are over eight hundred (800) Network to Freedom locations in over forty (40) states.

Ms. Camacho explained that the two sites in DuPage County that are already part of the program include Wheaton College and the Sheldon Peck Homestead. She noted that both of the Blodgett's attended Wheaton College, previously called the Wesley Methodist Illinois Institute in 1853. The institution was led by Reverend John Cross, a known abolitionist. In 1859 the institution was renamed Wheaton College after a benefactor name Warren Wheaton. Two of the Blodgett sons attended Wheaton College, Whales Blodgett and Charles Blodgett. Charles Blodgett built the 1892 Blodgett House. The Sheldon Peck Homestead was built in 1839 by Sheldon Peck

who was an arts teacher. Sheldon Peck's connection to the underground railroad is through his son Frank and his diary entries. Specifically, she noted the Frank wrote about how his father helped a freedom seeker name Old Charlie. There is also evidence that the Peck and Blodgett family knew each other during the California gold rush.

Ms. Camacho then provided details related to researching the Blodgett House. She began by sharing that in 2022 Zachary Bishop, Downers Grove Historical Museum volunteer reached out to the Network to Freedom. Robin Krawits, Northeast Regional Program Manager, directed Zachary to look into website for old newspapers, books, and diaries to put together more evidence. The biggest evidence that was found was that Israel's eldest son Henry became a federal judge in Waukegan. Henry wrote a biography and included his childhood and shared some of those stories. Additionally, a memoir was published in Amherst Massachusetts', where the Blodgett family was originally from, the Amherst Record detailed a very similar story from Henry's biography. The story was about Israel Porter Blodgett losing his job at the Harpers Ferry Armory for helping an enslaved person escape in the night. Ms. Camacho also noted that Avis Blodgett (Israel's wife) was interviewed before she passed away and this was written down in "Recollections of Avis Blodgett." Ms. Camacho went on to explain that Cora Blodgett interviewed her father Israel Blodgett Jr. confirming the family's connection to the Pecks. Also, the son of William Shraw - who was another conductor of the Underground Railroad near Aurora, shared in the Aurora Daily News said that his father transported freedom seekers to Israel Blodgett. Ms. Camacho then explained that the biggest physical piece of evidence that was found was fragments of the Western Citizen, a known anti-slavery newspaper found in the house when the Blodgett House was being moved. The newspaper included a partial date and staff confirmed the article was from a June 13, 1846 edition. Staff was then able to get a copy of the edition from the Lincoln Presidential Library Museum. During this research, it was confirmed that Sheldon Peck and Israel Blodgett both attended a conference about anti-slavery.

Ms. Camacho then transitioned into the formal application process and shared that they met with the new Midwest Regional Manager for the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad to Freedom program Barry Jurgensen. After receiving some application pointers Ms. Camacho stated that all of this information was submitted in January of 2023. Notice of approval was received in March of 2023. In September of 2023 the Park District was able to celebrate the addition of the 1846 Blodgett House into the Network to Freedom with a reception at Wandschneider Park. The reception was attended by Charley Smart and Gordon Goodman. The house is now part of the school tours, where second graders are introduced to the underground railroad and the Blodgett family. The Historical Society also donated a plaque that showed the home's status as part of the Network to Freedom Program. Ms. Camacho also shared that being part of the program allows for opportunities to apply for additional grants in the future.

Ms. Camacho then shared photos of the house including when the home was moved the second time. Photos also included the bedroom exhibit, kitchen area, a history of the Blodgett family with a video from the College of DuPage on the Underground Railroad, the second floor, the basement which includes the original logs, and a recognition wall.

Chairperson Gassen thanked Ms. Camacho for the presentation and opened it up to questions from the board.

Commissioner Brooks asked if during their research, they came across any other names that had not been previously known to be abolitionist.

Ms. Camacho stated that they did not find any new names. Instead, they found a lot of names that they already knew about as abolitionist. As an example, she shared the name of Philo Carpenter (no known relation to Downer Grove's Carpenter family). One newspaper article stated that Israel Blodgett would transport people over to Philo Carpenter's house.

Commissioner Ciufinni-Kemp shared that she and her daughter attended a field trip at the museum and thanked Ms. Camacho and the museum for the work that they do.

Ms. Camacho shared that she is so grateful and excited that the Downers Grove Museum is open to second grade field trips.

Chairperson Gassen, shared that this is such a great story: it's the house, its about it being around still, about it being moved twice, and now finding all this history, and then to then receive this designation. She added that she was grateful that all the people involved were able to do this. Chairperson Gassen invited the board to visit the house and asked Ms. Camacho for the hours of operation.

Ms. Camacho shared that the museum is open from Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from noon to 4pm and Saturdays from 1-3pm. She added that if those times did not work for someone that the museum is open by reservation as well.

Commissioner VerVers asked about the Blodgett House location.

Ms. Camacho shared the address as 831 Maple Avenue, but noted that if you went straight down Belden Avenue the museum was right there. She noted that folks should come into the larger building to see the Blodgett House.

New Business.

There were none.

Old Business.

There was none.

Public Comments.

Chairperson Gassen made a general announcement stating that on Tuesday June 16, 2026 the Historical Society and the Village of Downers Grove would be giving a

presentation about the Landmarking Program and the Historic Homes Program, Tuesday June 16th at 7pm at the Lincoln Center.

Adjournment.

The meeting was adjourned. Upon a motion by Commissioner Brooks, second by Commissioner VerVers. A voice vote followed and the motion passed unanimously.