

9. Implementation

Three elements are generally recognized as key to the success of a comprehensive plan: continuing implementation, monitoring and evaluation of implementation actions, and regular updates of the plan to keep in step with changing circumstances. This chapter focuses on all these elements, with particular emphasis on the action steps needed to implement the Land Use Plan.

During the 25-year time period of this plan, changes will occur, some identified in the plan (i.e., specific road and trail improvements) and some that are as yet unknown (i.e., energy costs). It will therefore be important to respond to these changes with periodic updates of the plan and with occasional amendments to the Future Land Use Map and plan policies. The key to allowing some degree of change – without losing sight of the plan's fundamental goals – is to use the Vision statement and goals as yardsticks against which any proposed change or new concept can be measured.

Table 9-1, at the end of this chapter, summarizes the implementation strategies discussed below, as well as the more specific strategies outlined in the other chapters of the Plan. Roles and responsibilities are identified, along with estimates of time frames for each action.

Day-to-Day Use of the Comprehensive Plan

Like the preceding 1990 Comprehensive Plan, the plan will be used for many functions on a daily basis, and for others on an annual cycle or as needed. Following are some of the primary functions of the Comprehensive Plan.

As a Guide and Educational Tool

Planning and community development within the Des Moines metro region is conducted by multiple local governments and regional and state agencies, as well as by private developers, not-for-profit agencies, educational and health care institutions, and other public and private entities. The County's Plan should be shared with and promoted to those agencies and organizations, as a means of educating and informing them about the County's vision.

The executive summary document for the plan will be designed as a user-friendly 'Citizens' Guide' that can be widely disseminated to these stakeholders. A series of workshops or periodic newsletters introducing and summarizing aspects of the plan are also recommended as a follow-up step.

As a Staff Resource

County land use staff will have the primary responsibility for using the Plan in development review, review of city plans or annexation petitions, review of proposed zoning changes,

response to inquiries from the public, and numerous other day-to-day functions. It is their responsibility to ensure that the Plan is consulted and its policies followed. When inconsistencies or conflicts arise, staff will take the lead in facilitating their resolution by the Planning and Zoning Commission or Board of Supervisors.

As a Policy Guide for Decision-Makers

The Board of Supervisors and advisory bodies such as the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals should use the Plan as a guide in making policy decisions in the areas of land use, capital improvements, economic development initiatives, housing programs, and other related areas of County involvement. As mentioned above, the Vision and goals statements are intended to establish general principles for decision-making, while the policies in the plan are more specific, and therefore more likely to change over time.

As County departments and advisory boards establish annual goals, work programs and priorities, the Plan should also be used as a guide.

As a Guide to Ongoing Ordinance Changes

Major updates to ordinances and regulations are discussed below. However, additional requests for ordinance changes are likely to arise in the future, and the Plan should be used as the yardstick against which those proposals can be measured.

Implementation Initiatives

There are several major initiatives that are key to ensuring that the Comprehensive Plan is implemented, ranging from regulations to incentives and direct investments.

Update County Land Use Regulations

The County has a 'toolkit' of existing ordinances and regulations that control land use, including zoning and subdivision regulations and development review procedures. Foremost among these are the Zoning and Subdivision ordinances. The County's Zoning Ordinance was updated following adoption of the 1990 Comprehensive Plan, and the Subdivision Ordinance was updated in 2003.

Zoning Ordinance Update. The Zoning Ordinance and accompanying map are the primary tools for implementing the Land Use Plan. The plan includes significant changes in land use patterns, densities and the intensity and character of development compared to the 1990 Comprehensive Plan. Therefore, significant changes to the Zoning Ordinance will be needed. While this zoning update will require additional

analysis and public input, the following new districts or standards are recommended for inclusion in the update:

- Include requirements and incentives for conservation design, also known as cluster development, in all rural districts. As recommended in the Land Use Plan, conservation design offers a means of preserving natural features, productive farmland and open space while creating cohesive neighborhoods with visual and physical access to open space.

Design standards for the protected open space in conservation design subdivisions should also be strengthened, to ensure that the important resources are preserved and that open space on adjacent parcels is interconnected.

- One or more mixed-use districts, for use along transit corridors or in areas already characterized by a mix of uses. For example, areas along the I-80 corridor where residential and small industrial uses are intermingled could benefit from application of a mixed-use district.
- A medium-density residential district (approximately 5 units per acre) for use in existing densely-developed areas, such as the historic village areas in Saylor and Delaware townships, or for new development along transit corridors or around other activity centers. (This district could replace the multiple Neighborhood Conservation districts in the current ordinance.)
- Design standards for infill and new development adjacent to historic village areas, to ensure that the character of these communities is preserved and enhanced.
- Design standards and incentives for affordable medium-density housing in areas of the County served with public utilities.
- Replacement of the current mixed commercial-industrial districts with distinct commercial districts at both a neighborhood and a highway-oriented scale, and both light and general industrial districts. Experience with the current districts has shown that commercial and industrial uses are only compatible in certain locations, not along all commercial corridors and in all industrial areas.
- Landscaping and design standards that encourage the integration, rather than the separation, of compatible land uses, consistent with current planning practices.

Subdivision Ordinance Updates. The current subdivision ordinance is quite recent, and therefore will require relatively few updates. However, updates to road and driveway

standards should be considered, in order to ensure adequate driveway separation on County and local roads and to encourage internal roads or shared driveways for minor as well as major subdivisions.

Additionally, many of the “green building techniques” and best management practices discussed below could be incorporated into the subdivision ordinance, as well as other County regulations.

Adopt New Standards for Environmental Quality.

The recommendations in Chapter 5 for stormwater and green infrastructure policies should be implemented by means of the following strategies:

1. Updating Countywide regulations for erosion and sediment control and stormwater management.
2. Intergovernmental coordination on stormwater management and other green infrastructure policies.
3. Link acquisition and management of public open space to green infrastructure goals and policies.

County Regulations and Inspections

The County needs to ensure that its own development review practices and standards reinforce state and local stormwater management efforts, and provide an example for quality development that recognizes and protects surface water resources. As discussed in Chapter 5, water quality in streams, rivers, and lakes is largely determined by the kinds of land uses and the management of land clearing in the watershed. Land clearing and paving can result in erosion and sedimentation, putting water quality at risk. However, best management practices can reduce the volume, energy and pollutants carried by stormwater.

Federal requirements for meeting stormwater planning and sediment and erosion control standards now apply to all activities or development, whether in a city or in a county, that disturb more than one acre of ground.

The County Zoning Ordinance includes standards for protection of drainageways, stormwater management, and erosion and sedimentation control. These standards may require updating to meet the most current NPDES standards. The standards will need to address the following:

1. Construction practices to limit erosion and sedimentation, including performance standards, best management practices, and designated staging of land clearing and construction activities.
2. Post-construction stormwater management, including minimizing runoff and maximizing on-site treatment, and creating conveyance systems for larger

Construction Best Management Practices (BMPs):

- Scheduling site activities.
- Minimize exposed soil.
- Perimeter sediment controls.
- Channel protection.
- Outlet protection.
- Erosion and sediment control methods.

storms that limit volume, velocity and pollutants from degrading water quality in streams, rivers, and lakes.

Additionally, County ordinances should be revised to encourage “green” building techniques that emphasize natural methods of stormwater management. A variety of proven designs and technologies can be adapted to unique characteristics of each community or building site to limit impervious surfaces and maximize infiltration, including the following:

- a. Narrowing street widths.
- b. Reducing parking lot size.
- c. Reducing setbacks and driveway widths.
- d. Maximizing open space while incorporating smaller lot sizes to conserve natural areas and reduce the amount of stormwater runoff generated at the site.
- e. Using landscaping and soils to treat and infiltrate stormwater runoff.
- f. Use vegetated swales or engineered equivalent in the place of curb and gutter systems where practicable.
- g. Creating vegetated areas to filter sheet flow, remove sediment and other pollutants, and increase the time of concentration.
- h. Disconnecting impervious areas by allowing runoff from small impervious areas to be directed to pervious areas where it can be infiltrated or filtered.
- i. Directing runoff from downspouts, driveways and other impervious areas to pervious surfaces.
- j. Buffers around streams, steep slopes, and wetlands to protect from flood damage and provide additional water quality treatment.
- k. Use of shared parking facilities.
- l. Semi-permeable/permeable or porous paving.

In addition to updating regulations, County inspections and enforcement of stormwater management, erosion and sedimentation control standards need to be increased. While the County currently requires submittal of plans, the Iowa DNR is responsible for most field inspections, and typically inspects only commercial and industrial developments or projects adjacent to cities. The County should consider directing additional staff and resources toward inspections.

“Land disturbing activity” means any activity on property that results in a change in the existing soil cover (both vegetative and non-vegetative) and/or the existing soil topography. Land-disturbing activities include, but are not limited to, development, redevelopment, demolition, construction, reconstruction, clearing, grading, filling, and excavation.

“National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit” or *“NPDES permit”* means a permit issued pursuant to 33 U.S.C. 1342 and Iowa Rules 567 Chapters 60 and 64.

Improve Intergovernmental Coordination

One of the Economic Development Task Force’s key recommendations is that infrastructure issues, including stormwater management and other green infrastructure such as hike/bike trails be approached on a regional basis. The County has an opportunity to serve as the coordinating entity for managing systems that stretch across political boundaries,

Stormwater management will require intergovernmental coordination in stream basins and watersheds in order to improve the quality and manage the quantity of runoff. The County’s role in pursuing this strategy could include:

- Ensuring consistent interpretation and enforcement of best management practices for erosion and sediment control as required under National Pollution Discharge Elimination Permits (NPDES).
- Working with local governments on the education and stormwater planning required under NPDES Phase II to ensure consistency on education programs, management of local stormwater systems, and watershed based development standards to maximize on-site infiltration and retention.
- Working with regional initiatives such as Growing Green Communities (sponsored by the Metro Waste Authority) to encourage the use of green building technologies like those discussed in the previous section.

Improve Tools and Techniques for Open Space Management

The Zoning Ordinance requires that a certain percentage of land developed for residential use be dedicated as open space, to be dedicated to recreational or resource protection uses. As mentioned above under Land Use Regulations, standards should be developed for the uses and interconnection of these open space areas across parcel boundaries. Private open space of this type may serve other public purposes, such as stormwater management, links in a trail system, or buffers around parks.

The Polk County Conservation Board acquires and manages substantial land in parks and preserves, and the Public Works Department acquires and manages land for other public purposes, such as road, trail, sewer or drainage improvements. A coordinated strategy should be developed to manage publicly held open space so that each site can potentially serve multiple public purposes. For example, a trunk sewer easement can provide an ideal location for a trail. Intergovernmental coordination with regional bodies such as the WRA and city agencies may also be needed to achieve this type of synergy.

Impervious surface means any land cover on which water will flow off rather than soak in or infiltrate, including roads, parking lots, buildings, compacted soils, or vegetation that prevents infiltration.

Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan. Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs) provide all the information required in the IDNR’s guidance document for Stormwater Management for Construction Activities, and consistent with Iowa Rules addressing NPDES permits. The SWPPP identifies and describes the development project or proposed vegetative clearing as described in the IDNR guidance document, and identifies or provides the following information where applicable:

2. Stormwater management performance standards.
3. Minimize impact to natural features.
4. Design criteria and methods for minimizing impervious surfaces and maximizing infiltration.

The Conservation Board should be provided with additional resources and tools for the acquisition or protection of open space. Chief among these is the ability to acquire easements from landowners as a way to protect significant open space and natural resources without acquiring them in fee simple. Easements could be used to protect a variety of areas, such as:

- Buffers along stream corridors, wetlands and other sensitive areas. Buffers are particularly critical to protect the function of waterways, especially if adjacent upland areas are being developed.
- Areas adjacent to Camp Dodge, where military exercises can impact, or in turn be constrained by, the presence of nearby residences. A buffer is recommended along the northwest boundary of Camp Dodge in the Northwest Area land use plan, and easements offer one way to achieve this goal.
- Buffers adjacent to County and regional parks. These areas are especially attractive for residential development, given their proximity to protected open space, and development can affect both scenic views from the parks and the functioning of natural systems.

Sources of funding are needed for the management and monitoring of conservation easements. Typically, protected open space in a conservation development is owned by a homeowners' association, but protected by a conservation easement that prohibits further development but allows other specified activities, such as recreation, agricultural activities, or habitat restoration. Easements run with the chain of title in perpetuity (although term easements may be used in certain circumstances). In most cases, easements are jointly held by land trusts (such as the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation) and units of government. The Conservation Board is currently able to hold and monitor easements, but lacks the resources to devote to such an effort. Options for funding this effort might include:

- Use of bonus density lots to create an 'endowment' for management of the open space. Bonuses could be awarded as one of several potential incentives for the use of conservation design in the Zoning Ordinance, discussed above under Land Use Regulations.
- Use of tax increment financing (TIF) districts to help improve and manage the green infrastructure and open space elements of conservation developments. Counties in Iowa are not currently authorized to create residential TIF districts. However, the use of TIF should be considered in the case of mixed use developments that include residential and nonresidential components.

Consider a Unified Development Ordinance

Given the degree of overlap that typically occurs between zoning and subdivision ordinances, building codes, erosion and sedimentation standards and other environmental regulations, Polk County may wish to consider combining these into a Unified Development Ordinance. This type of ordinance typically includes the ordinances mentioned above, along with a combined definitions chapter, a single chapter on permits and administrative procedures, and other efficiencies that the unified format makes possible.

Negotiate and Update Urban Service Area Agreements With Cities

Cities and counties are authorized under Chapter 28-E of the Iowa Code to establish agreements for land use regulation and/or provision of services. Polk County has worked with cities within the County to establish urban service area agreements through the 28-E process. An Urban Service Area is an area outside a city's existing corporate limits within which the City and County agree to coordinate their land use and subdivision regulation, and to work jointly to provide water and sewer extensions. The intent is that portion of the area planned for urban-density development would ultimately be annexed, while outlying areas might remain rural or agricultural.

The County will use the Land Use Plan and Infrastructure Plan as a basis for negotiating urban service area agreements with cities. Refinements or adjustments to these elements of the Comprehensive Plan may occur as a result of negotiations, and these would then be treated as revisions to the Comprehensive Plan. However, the underlying principles of this Plan, as expressed in the Vision and goal statements, should continue to guide future urban service area plans.

Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) and Public Investments

Polk County regularly invests in public improvements such as roads and sewers, builds and manages County facilities, acquires land for parks and trails, and contributes to regional facilities such as the Science Center. While the Public Works Department maintains a five-year Capital Improvements Plan, there is no County-wide CIP and no process for coordinating and reviewing the expenditures of other County departments.

Typically, a CIP process involves several steps: County departments prepare a list of all public improvements needed within the next five years, including transportation, community facilities, technology and land acquisition. Projects are then reviewed by a task force or committee that

can assign priorities, review cost estimates and identify potential funding sources.

The County should consider the benefits of adopting a Capital Improvements Plan process, using the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan to help set priorities and select among competing projects. The Comprehensive Plan is not intended to tie the hands of decision-makers, but it should provide guidance. The discipline of going through this exercise will also increase awareness of the importance of the Plan, and the need to keep it up to date.

Undertake Specific Area and Corridor Plans

Comprehensive Plans are general by nature, and are typically not used to make decisions about land use on a parcel-by-parcel basis. Several more specific planning efforts are recommended:

- A land use plan for the Northeast Beltway corridor, to be undertaken at such time as environmental studies are complete and the timing of road improvements has been determined. Land uses should be planned to further the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, i.e., fostering continued protection of agricultural areas and compact development patterns around interchanges or intersections.
- Corridor plans for the transit/access management corridors identified in the Land Use Plan – NW 2nd Street, IA 141 and IA 163 – working cooperatively with cities along those corridors, and with IDOT on the state highways. (Note that Pleasant Hill is currently engaged in a corridor plan for a portion of IA 163.)
- Focused redevelopment and neighborhood revitalization plans for the unincorporated village areas in Delaware and Saylor townships, as recommended in the Housing Plan chapter. Plans should facilitate private development of new housing, in combination with public improvements that would enhance the livability of these areas.
- An area plan designating a Planned Manufacturing District in central Polk County, as recommended in the Economic Development Plan chapter. This designation would function as both a zoning district and an economic development tool.
- Plans for one or more health care districts in downtown Des Moines, working with the City and the major health care institutions, to encourage and guide private and public investment.

- A park and open space plan for new County parks and trails, as locations for these are identified, and for improvements to existing parks and trails.

Monitor and Update the Plan

Plan Amendments

The Comprehensive Plan, once adopted, must respond to the continuous process of change that occurs within every community. The plan's recommendations range from the very general to the highly specific. The plan contains broad vision and goal statements developed with extensive community input, and a series of policies and strategies that are intended to realize the vision and goals. The *Future Land Use Map* is specific – although not as specific as the County's Zoning Map.

It makes sense that the most specific parts of the plan are the most likely to be amended over time, while the more general vision and goal statements are intended to be more fundamental and long-lasting.

Amendments to maps and policies should be evaluated based on the magnitude of the proposed revision, its relationship to the Vision and Goals statements, and the nature of the changing circumstances that have resulted in the amendment request. Proposed changes in land use should also be evaluated in relation to their impacts on the following:

- Public facilities and services, such as transportation, sewers, water supply, schools and public safety;
- Surrounding properties and neighborhood character;
- Productive farmland and ongoing agricultural operations;
- Natural resources and open space; historic buildings or structures.

Changes may also be needed to correct errors, meet regional goals, or refine the plan based on more recent specific area or corridor plans.

Plan Review and Updates

County land use staff should track progress in implementing the Comprehensive Plan. A brief annual report, using the table in this chapter as a checklist, can summarize the County's progress toward implementation, obstacles or barriers to implementation, plan amendments, and changes in conditions that may call for amendments in the future.

At least once every five years, County staff should conduct a formal review of the entire plan, and should propose amendments to features, policies or sections that are considered out of date or no longer relevant. Other County departments and regional agencies should be consulted as part of this review. The Planning and Zoning Commission

should review staff recommendations and make a recommendation to the County Board.

A more detailed and lengthy update should be considered on at least a ten year basis. Like this planning process, it should involve advisory committees on key topic areas, area committees, and consultation with affected cities.

Summary of Implementation Actions

Table 9-1 on the following pages summarizes the implementation strategies listed in this chapter and other chapters of this Plan. Strategies are organized by category and timing, based on a 15-year time frame.

- Short-term: next two years
- Mid-term: years 3-8
- Long-term: years 8-15
- Ongoing: some actions occur on a regular cycle or are continuous, such as capital improvements programming.

The primary entity responsible for plan implementation is Polk County, specifically the County Planning and Public Works staff. However, many strategies are intended to be carried out through partnerships, and these partnering agencies or organizations are also listed in the table. The names of agencies, organizations or interest groups with supporting roles in the specified action or strategy are italicized.

Table 9-1, Summary of Implementation Strategies and Actions

Strategies and Action	Primary Responsibility / Partnering Organizations	Time Frame
Land Use & Environmental Strategies (recommendations in Chapters 3, 5 & 9)		
Update County land use regulations	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>Growing Green Communities, development interests, PCCB</i>	Short-term
Zoning Ordinance		
Subdivision Ordinance		
Consider a Unified Development Ordinance		Mid-term
Adopt/enforce environmental quality standards	Polk County Public Works, <i>Growing Green Communities</i>	Short-term
Update erosion, sediment control and stormwater management standards		
Encourage low impact and green building techniques		
Improve intergovernmental coordination on open space and green infrastructure issues	PCCB, Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, Metro Waste Authority, WRA</i>	Ongoing
Coordinated strategy for management of public open space	PCCB, Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, Metro Waste Authority, WRA</i>	Mid-term
Obtain easements to buffer natural areas, parks and other sensitive facilities	PCCB, Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, land trusts</i>	Ongoing
Seek funding to manage and monitor conservation easements	PCCB, Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>development interests</i>	Ongoing
Negotiate and update urban service area agreements	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities</i>	Ongoing
Develop a county-wide Capital Improvements Program process	Polk County Public Works/ Planning; other County departments	Long-term
Undertake Specific Area and Corridor Plans	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, development interests, consultants</i>	Mid-term
Infrastructure Strategies (recommendations in Chapter 4)		
Continue to stage water service improvements in areas appropriate for development as specified in the Land Use Plan	Des Moines Water Works, Polk County Public Works/ Planning	Ongoing
Assist cities with extension of trunk sewers, if consistent with the Land Use Plan	Polk County Public Works/ Planning <i>WRA, cities</i>	Ongoing
Continue to support significant road improvement projects included in the regional LRTP	Polk County Public Works, <i>Des Moines Area MPO</i>	Ongoing
Pursue trail improvements needed to complete links in the regional system	PCCB, Polk County Public Works, <i>cities, Des Moines Area MPO</i>	Ongoing
Participate in MTA's transit corridor study process; support transit-oriented development as recommended in the Land Use Plan or subsequent studies.	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, Des Moines Area MPO</i>	Short-term, Mid-term

Strategies and Action	Primary Responsibility / Partnering Organizations	Time Frame
Consider corridor access management policies in development review, both for driveways and intersections	Polk County Public Works, IDOT	Mid-term
Agriculture Strategies (recommendations in Chapter 6)		
Consider Rural Characteristics Notification program for Agriculture and Ag Transition areas	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>Polk County Farm Bureau</i>	Short-term
Investigate and evaluate potential new programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of development rights (PDR) • Property tax incentives • Transfer of development rights (TDR) 	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities</i>	Mid-term
Update zoning regulations to allow value-added agricultural uses in agricultural districts	Polk County Public Works/ Planning	Short-term
Economic Development Strategies (recommendations in Chapter 7)		
Support full funding for workforce training (state and local programs)	Polk County, Greater Des Moines Partnership, local economic development agencies	Ongoing
Create planned manufacturing districts	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities, consultant</i>	Short-term
Support and promote DM Intl. Airport area development	City of Des Moines, Greater Des Moines Partnership, Polk County	Ongoing
Support agriculture-related advanced manufacturing and biotechnology research	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, Polk County Farm Bureau, <i>Greater Des Moines Partnership, local economic development agencies</i>	Ongoing
Plan and develop health care district(s) in Downtown Des Moines; coordinate with downtown planning efforts	City of Des Moines, Greater Des Moines Partnership, <i>Polk County, consultant</i>	Short-term
Investigate and evaluate regional initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tax sharing • Improved intergovernmental coordination • Coordination of economic development efforts 	Greater Des Moines Partnership, Polk County Public Works/ Planning, local economic development agencies	Mid- to long-term
Housing Strategies (recommendations in Chapter 8)		
Consider and encourage set-asides and zoning incentives for affordable housing	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities</i>	Ongoing
Assist in development of residential TIF-funded affordable housing	Polk County Housing Trust Fund, <i>cities, not-for-profit housing providers</i>	Ongoing
Reduce regulatory barriers to affordable housing	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, <i>cities</i>	Ongoing
Focus redevelopment efforts in Delaware, Saylor & Webster townships (historic village areas)	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, PCHTF, <i>not-for-profit housing providers</i>	Mid-Term

Strategies and Action	Primary Responsibility / Partnering Organizations	Time Frame
Assist Des Moines in redevelopment of tax-delinquent lots	Polk County Assessor, PCHTF, <i>not-for-profit housing providers</i>	Ongoing
Explore feasibility of creating community land trusts	PCHTF, <i>not-for-profit housing providers</i>	Mid-term
Support Metropolitan Transit Agency in promotion of improved transit and transit-oriented development	Polk County, cities, <i>not-for-profit housing providers, development community</i>	Short-term
Support Growing Green Communities efforts; promote housing diversity	Polk County Public Works/ Planning, PCHTF, cities	Ongoing