Planning Context

The Northeast Planning Area is the most rural part of Polk County, with the largest area in agriculture. Highly-productive farmland soils, many with extensive ditch and drainage systems, dominate the landscape. Topographic variety is provided by the broad valley of the Skunk River, straightened early in the 20th century for flood control purposes. The wooded bluffs west of the river valley have provided attractive sites for estate-type housing, while the valley bottoms are largely protected by floodplain regulations and the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt. The city of Bondurant, adjacent to I-80, is the only one of the area’s three cities to be experiencing fairly rapid growth. The other two, Alleman and Elkhart, are small rural communities.

Bondurant’s comprehensive plan has been updated several times in recent years. The plan envisions development of a new central business district along the U.S. 65 corridor, industrial development along the rail line that crosses the city, and gradual expansion westward toward the proposed Northeast Beltway and the I-80/IA 5/65 interchange. Polk County has worked with the city to negotiate an urban services area east of the city’s current boundary.

Under the expansion plans of the regional Wastewater Reclamation Authority (WRA) Bondurant will connect to the regional trunk sewer system, via the new Mud Creek Interceptor, in approximately 2012, taking its municipal treatment plan off-line and expanding its treatment capacity.

Issues

Among the primary issues of concern to the Northeast Area Committee were:

- A strong desire to protect prime farmland and maintain large-
Northeast Area Plan

scale agricultural activities within the Northeast area.

- A preference for concentrating new housing within and close to existing towns.
- Issues regarding the proposed Northeast Beltway, and how its development might affect agriculture and other rural land uses.
- The desire to protect recreational and natural areas, along with some concern over continuing land acquisition.
- The desire to improve water quality through improved stormwater management.
- Rural water service and its limitations.
- Interest in promoting ag-related economic development and agricultural support businesses.

Vision Statement

Looking down from the air, one sees an area dominated by farmland and agricultural activities. Houses are spread out in a very low-density pattern, a pattern enforced with agricultural zoning requirements and urban growth boundaries. Agricultural activities include both production of crops and commodities and value-added production. Increased tourism in conservation areas has helped preserve the rural landscape. Farms vary in size. Tree planting efforts have increased tree cover in areas with marginal agricultural soils.

Northeast Polk County has achieved a balance between urban and rural development, between employment and housing, and between growth and preserved natural areas and working farmland.

Northwest Area Goals

Farmland Protection Goal – Polk County will preserve the Northeast Area’s high quality farmland and protect the agricultural practices necessary to retain farming as the primary land use in the area.

Rural Protection Goal – Polk County will protect the rural character of Northeast Area landscapes and communities by directing growth to municipalities and discouraging significant municipal expansion.

Road Infrastructure Goal – Polk County will guide Northeast Area roadway development and expansion so as to enhance the viability of agricultural practices in regard to sitting of new roads, improvement of existing roads, and road maintenance considerations.

Value-Added Economic Development Goal – Polk County will encourage and promote key industries, with particular emphasis on those that add value to the Northeast Area’s agricultural production and practices.

Community Economic Development Goal – Polk County will promote compact commercial development in the Northeast Area’s municipalities, and discourage non-agricultural commercial development in rural areas.

Natural Areas and Recreation Goal – Polk County will protect unique natural and wildlife areas, parks, wetlands, and recreational amenities; and work to expand trails and enhance park resources throughout the County.

Rural Infrastructure Goal – Polk County will encourage efficient growth patterns to encourage targeted economic investment in the Northeast Area’s rural water system, telecommunications system, wastewater systems, and emergency response and law enforcement systems.

Water Goal – Polk County will improve surface water and groundwater quality and lower the risk of flooding by promoting appropriate stormwater management and assessing water quality impacts of land use decisions.

Public Awareness Goal – Polk County will encourage public education and participation in the Polk County Comprehensive Plan and other local governmental decision-making processes.

Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan keeps the vast majority of the Northeast Planning Area rural and agricultural. Most urban expansion is planned around Bondurant, as well as some area southeast of Elkhart. Medium and high-density housing in these areas will create a relatively land-efficient pattern of development that minimizes road and utility extensions.

Land Use Categories

The Northeast Area plan includes some, but not all, of the land use categories in the countywide land use plan. The categories found in the Northeast, and their locations, are:

- Agriculture: This is by far the most dominant land use category, except for the urban expansion areas around Bondurant and southeast of Elkhart.
- Residential: This very low-density category is located primarily in areas already partially developed with large residential lots or cluster development at equivalent densities. Most of these areas are located on the bluffs and wooded areas west of the Skunk River. Conservation design (clustering) is recommended for larger developments in these areas to concentrate housing away from natural areas or agricultural operations.
- Rural Residential: This one-acre lot category is located primarily in a few locations already developed or developing at this density, as well as a small expansion area around the hamlet of Fararr, east of U.S. 65.
- Low Density Residential: This district, designed to accommodate urban-density housing that will be served by public utilities, is located along the urban expansion area around Bondurant, reflecting designations in that city’s comprehensive plan.
- Medium and High Density Residential: These categories are applied to match the designations in Bondurant’s comprehensive plan in locations close to major highways or existing residential areas. A medium-density area is also shown just southeast of the city of Elkhart, consistent with that city’s intentions (Elkhart is in the midst of updating its land use plan.)
- Industrial: General industrial land use is shown in the southeast corner of Bondurant’s expansion area, consistent with the city’s comprehensive plan. (Additional industrial uses are planned within the city proper along the Bondurant Short Line rail corridor.)

Institutional and Open Space: These categories show existing parks and protected open space, primarily the Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, and one new school site in Bondurant’s expansion area. In addition, stream buffers are shown along the major creeks in this area: the upper reaches of Four Mile Creek and Mud Creek. The buffers are not a true land use category, but are intended to indicate improved standards for vegetative buffers and other stormwater management techniques.

Related Transportation and Infrastructure Policies and Projects

- The proposed Northeast Beltway is shown as a study corridor, with as yet no relationship to adjacent land uses. The County will undertake a more detailed planning study of the corridor as plans for the roadway are refined and inter- or intersection locations are determined.

Other transportation and infrastructure improvement projects currently planned include:

- The Chichaqua Trail, which currently begins just east of Bondurant, is intended to be linked to the Four Mile Creek Trail between Ankeny, Altoona and Bondurant, although a specific route has not yet been determined.
- The proposed Bondurant Short Line Railroad will run from Des Moines to the eastern edge of Bondurant along a currently unused rail corridor. The City of Bondurant was awarded funds in 2005 for the purchase and revitalization of that line. The city is working with Polk County and a private group to entice a company to make improvements and begin operations.