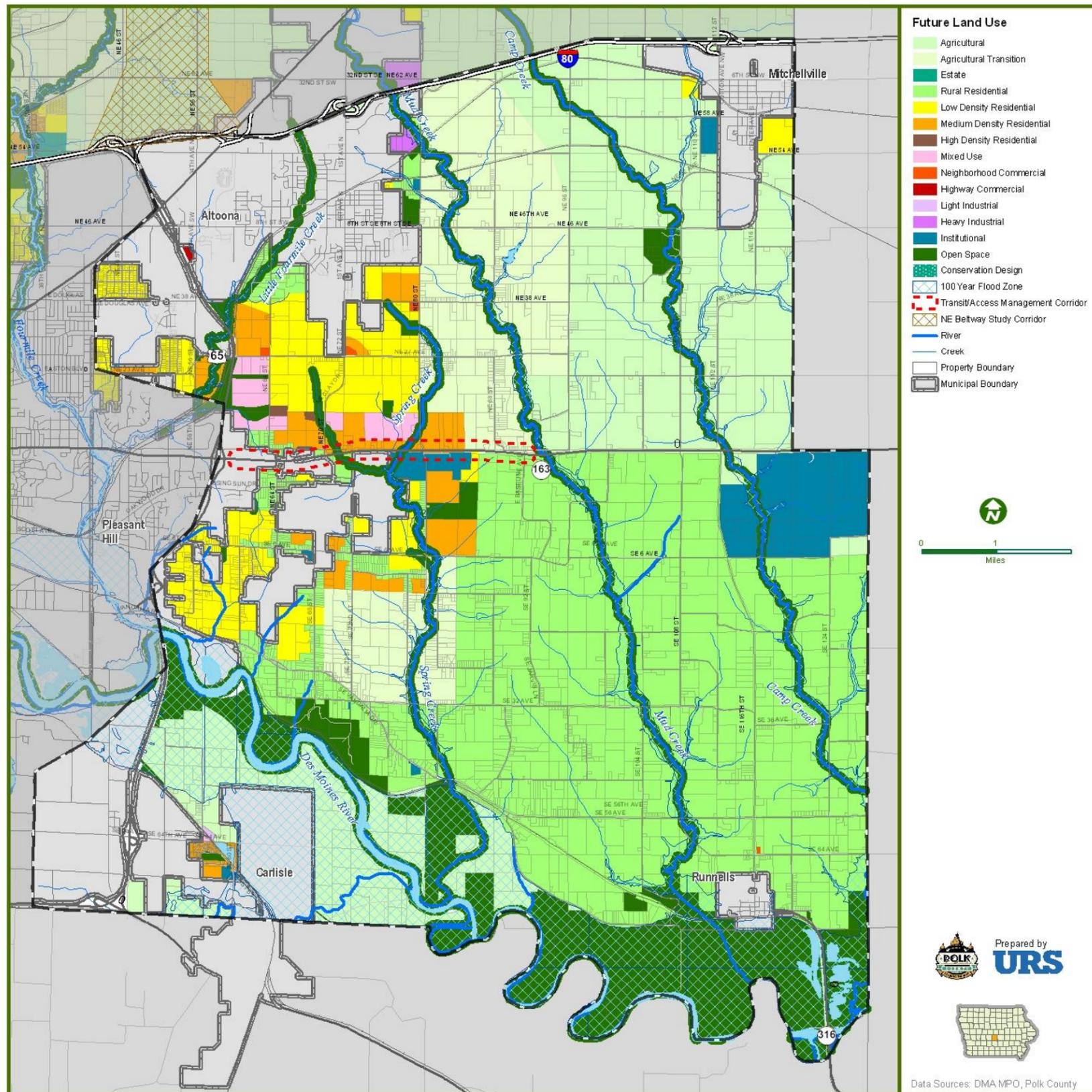


# Southeast Area Plan



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## Planning Context

The Southeast Planning Area differs markedly from north to south in topography, soils, drainage patterns and vegetation. This is because the area contains the boundary between two landforms: the glacial Des Moines Lobe, (the southernmost edge of the glacier during the last glacial period, some 60,000 to 10,000 years ago) and the non-glaciated Southern Iowa Drift Plain. The relatively level Des Moines Lobe area contains the most productive farmland soils, while Southern Iowa Drift Plain is characterized by steep rolling hills and highly erodible loess soils. As a result, the area generally south of IA Highway 163 has smaller farms and more wooded areas than areas to the north.

The prevalent zoning pattern of one-acre lots in the Southeast area has created a series of problems. One-acre lots around city boundaries can prevent well-planned urban expansion and cost-effective extension of municipal utilities. The introduction of multiple driveways onto rural roads creates traffic safety problems as development densities increase. Future subdivision of large interior parcels can also become more difficult. However, The County's subdivision ordinance, revised in 2003, has limited the amount of road frontage development by requiring an internal road for subdivisions of more than four lots.

The Southeast area cities of Altoona and Pleasant Hill are both experiencing rapid growth. Altoona benefits from access to I-80 and the new Highway 5/65 beltway, and the presence of the Adventureland amusement park and the Prairie Meadows Race Track and Casino. The city's recently updated comprehensive plan shows expansion in a southerly direction extending to 36<sup>th</sup> Street SW, with an 'urban reserve' extending to Highway 163. Business park and commercial uses are concentrated close to I-80 and Highways 5 and 65.

Pleasant Hill's comprehensive plan envisions development of all remaining developable land within the existing corporate limits during the 20-year planning period, plus annexation of

areas along the Highway 163 corridor, east of the corporate limits and south to Vandalia Road. During the development of the County comprehensive plan, Pleasant Hill proposed annexation of over 3,000 acres, of which over 300 have since been annexed, as reflected on the current land use plan. The city is also completing a plan for the Highway 163 corridor, emphasizing medium-density housing and mixed-use development.

The city of Des Moines recently completed a large annexation extending east to the interchange of Highways 5/65 and SE 64<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The city's land use plan shows this area as agricultural, but it is ultimately envisioned for business and industrial use. Several small annexations have also occurred along the Hubbell Avenue (IA 65) corridor. The city of Carlisle, on the west side of the 5/65 corridor, has also expanded west to the Highway 5/65 interchange, although much of the city's developed area lies within Warren County.

Under the expansion plans of the regional Wastewater Reclamation Authority (WRA) Altoona will connect to the regional trunk sewer system via the new Little Four Mile Creek Interceptor within the 2010-2015 period, taking its municipal treatment plan off-line and expanding its treatment capacity.

## Issues

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

- An interest in fostering economic growth and living-wage jobs within the area, with a particular focus on sustainable economic development.
- Conflicts between rural residential development and continuing agricultural operations, particularly animal agriculture.
- Concern regarding soil erosion and stormwater management along streams and other water bodies.
- A strong desire to protect open space, trails and natural areas.
- Concern about the pace of growth and urban expansion, combined

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with recognition of landowners' expectations of development under existing zoning.

- Concern about the adequacy of utilities, especially rural water for fire protection.

### Vision Statement

*Southeast Polk County, viewed from above, shows a balanced mix of residential and commercial development interspersed with green space. The area has experienced slow but steady, organized growth of housing and businesses. Land uses transition gradually from urban to rural. New housing is concentrated in and around the growing cities following growth agreements between the County and the cities. New housing shows a variety of styles and materials. New utility investment has been staged to keep new development contiguous to existing development.*

*New housing is carefully designed to protect drainageways and natural features. The Southeast landscape is interlaced with green belts that connect the Southeast with the rest of the region, and link the area's many recreational facilities.*

*Ongoing commercial development is concentrated in compact villages or vital small cities along major transportation corridors. Business parks and industrial development are also concentrated along these corridors, separated from residential areas. New development standards for building materials and landscape improvements have resulted in visually appealing developments. A strong economy with many high-tech jobs offers incentives for college graduates to stay in the region.*

*A renaissance in urban living has brought more people to live in downtown Des Moines, relieving some of the growth pressure at the fringes. Des Moines has grown outwards in an organized pattern of streets and blocks; most neighborhood roads are interconnected. New county highways and improvements to existing roads*

*help ensure smooth inter-community traffic flow and minimize congestion.*

*In the rural areas, one still sees rolling fields of crops, small livestock operations and scattered farmsteads. Farms have grown in size and are more productive, but have fewer owners. Conservation practices have ensured that creeks are lined with trees, steeper land is timbered, and wildlife habitat is protected. Light pollution in the rural area and coming from the cities is minimized. Properties are well-kept: junk cars and appliances, litter and garbage have been cleaned up.*

### Southeast Area Goals

**Conservation & Quality of Life Goal** – Polk County will promote development patterns and agricultural practices that conserve agricultural resources in rural areas and natural areas and natural infrastructure throughout the Southeast.

**Water and Stormwater Goal** – Polk County will protect streams and waterways through effective storm water management, flood plain protection, and by directing investment to enhance the County's natural infrastructure.

**Trails and Natural Area Conservation Goal** – Polk County will plan for investment in an enhanced trail and greenway system, including preservation of natural areas and resources, creating new opportunities for outdoor recreation, and linking local and regional parks.

**Economic Growth Goal** – Polk County will direct investment to new industries and businesses to create quality jobs, a strong tax base, and foster sustainable economic growth for small and large businesses.

**Design Goal** – Polk County will encourage quality visual and functional design of new homes and businesses in order to integrate development with the landscape and visually distinguish Southeast communities.

**Agriculture Goal** – Polk County will protect agricultural practices in areas

with prime soils and viable agricultural interests, and will work with agricultural producers to reduce conflicts with other land uses.

**Regional Growth Management Goal** – Polk County will manage housing growth on a regional basis, encouraging infill development and redevelopment of urbanized areas and staged urban density annexations in partnership with cities.

**Zoning Goal** – Polk County will work to ensure an efficient housing and commercial growth pattern that creates compact villages and corridors linking distinct Southeast communities.

**Utilities Goal** – Polk County will encourage extension of urban services including wastewater, water, fire protection, and telecommunications infrastructure in an efficient manner that serves urban and rural residences.

### Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan focuses housing development around the boundaries of the larger cities in the Southeast area: Altoona, Pleasant Hill and Des Moines. These are areas that are served or will be served by municipal utilities during the planning period. The development patterns are generally consistent with those cities' land use plans. The rural areas show a combination of farmland protection and continuing rural residential development.

### Land Use Categories

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

**Agriculture:** This is the most dominant land use category in rural areas, including most areas west of Mud Creek and north of Highway 163. This roughly corresponds to the Des Moines Lobe landform, considered most suitable for row crops.

**Agricultural Transition:** It is anticipated that lands in this category will not be annexed and developed at urban densities during the time frame of this plan, but most of these areas will

be sewerred, and this designation is intended to prevent leapfrog development. Areas outside east of Altoona and Pleasant Hill and west of the drainage divides between the stream valleys fall into this category.

**Rural Residential:** This one-acre lot category will remain dominant in areas already developed or developing at this density, most of which cannot be served by central sewers. These areas are primarily located along Vandalia Road and around the current boundaries of Pleasant Hill. The final revisions to the Future Land Use Plan saw the expansion of this category to most of the developable lands within Camp Township.

Growth in the rural residential area is limited to some degree by the County Subdivision Ordinance, which requires that major subdivisions (more than 4 units) be served by internal roads. However, growth pressures are likely to increase during the planning period, threatening the capacity of rural roads and the logical extension of utilities. Therefore, updates to the County zoning ordinance should provide incentives for conservation design and protection of natural areas and farmland.

**Low Density Residential:** This district, designed to accommodate urban-density housing that will be served by public utilities, comprises most of the expansion areas around the cities of Pleasant Hill and Altoona, and to the south of Mitchellville.

**Medium Density Residential:** This category is applied to match the designations in Pleasant Hill's and Altoona's land use plans, including Pleasant Hill's Highway 163 Corridor Plan, as well as the existing hamlet of Avon Lake.

**High-Density Residential:** Several small areas of this land use correspond to designations in Pleasant Hill's and Altoona's land use plans.

**Mixed Use:** This category is located at several locations along Highway 163, as identified in the Highway 163 Corridor Plan.

**Commercial:** Several small neighborhood commercial nodes are shown in the expansion areas of Altoona and

Runnells, but most commercial development is planned within existing city limits.

**Industrial:** This designation applies in a few areas adjacent to the cities of Carlisle and Altoona; most industrial development is planned within existing city limits.

**Open Space and Institutional:** Includes protected County and State parkland and federal recreation areas along the Des Moines River, as well as several existing and planned school sites and the MPE landfill. Stream buffers are shown along the major streams (Spring, Mud and Camp creeks) feeding the Des Moines River.

### Related Transportation and Infrastructure Policies and Projects

- IA Highway 163 is designated in the comprehensive plan as a transit/access management corridor. Access management policies along state highways are controlled by the Iowa Department of Transportation, but land use policies should encourage centralizing of access points, creating pedestrian connections between land uses, and providing enhanced transit service where appropriate (see discussion in Chapter 4, Infrastructure, of potential transit corridors).
- Several new trunk sewers are planned to cross the Southeast area, serving the cities of Altoona and Bondurant. Pleasant Hill is also extending its municipal trunk sewers eastward to serve the Highway 163 corridor.
- A trail link between Pleasant Hill the Four Mile Creek Trail in Altoona and the Chichaqua Trail in Bondurant is planned, although an exact alignment has not been determined. Similarly, trail links are needed along the Des Moines River (both land and water-based) between Pleasant Hill and the city of Runnells.