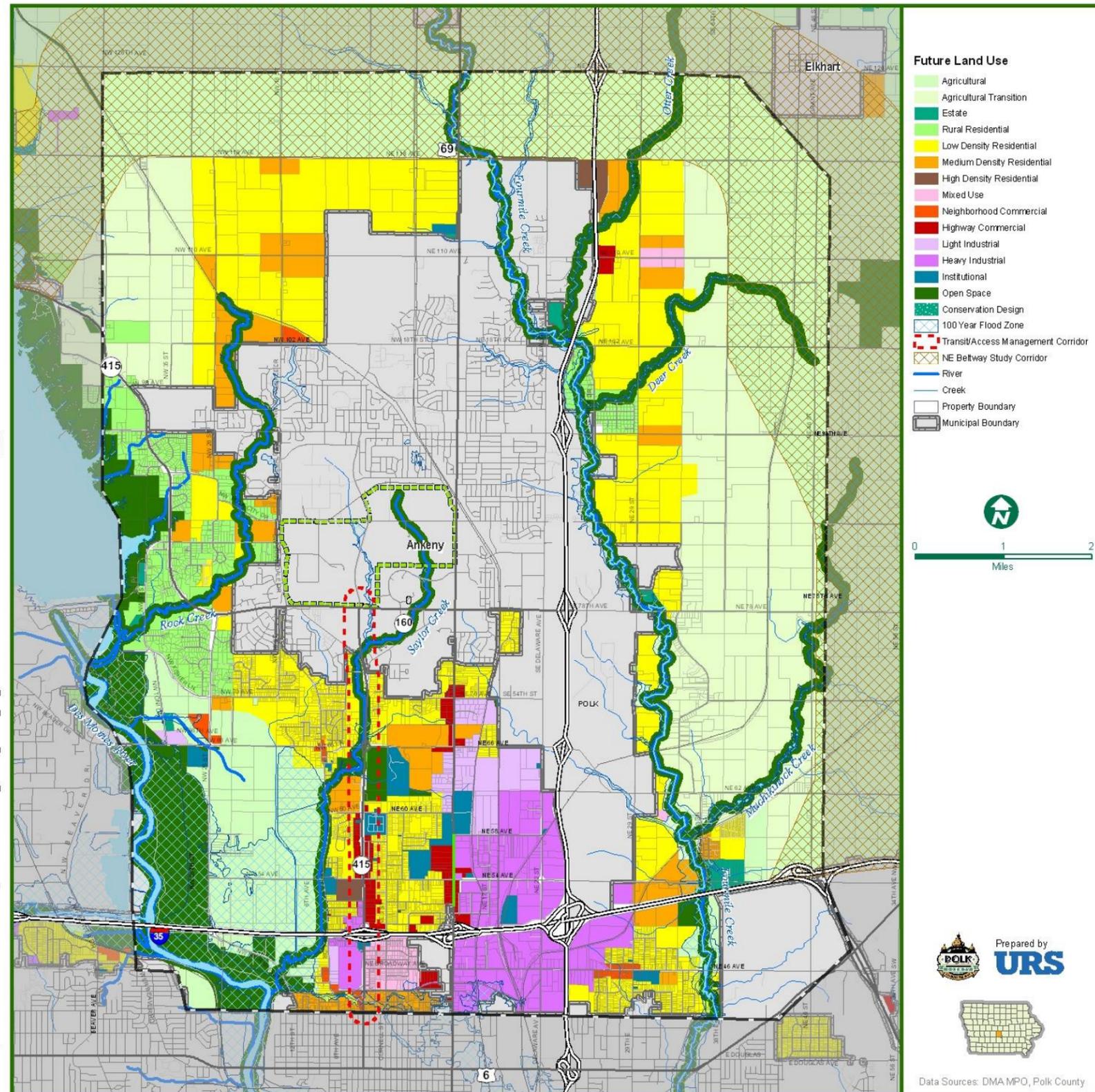


North Central Area Plan



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Planning Context

The North Central Planning Area includes the most urbanized areas of unincorporated Polk County, including large industrial districts, commercial corridors, and historic village areas in Saylor and Delaware townships. The area centers on the rapidly-growing city of Ankeny, but also contains large areas of productive farmland to the north, east and west of that city. Four Mile Creek runs north-south through the area, while the extensive floodplain of the Des Moines River and Saylor Creek provides a large expanse of open space on the west side of the area.

Ankeny's recently adopted comprehensive plan (2004) promotes principles of smart growth while also laying out fairly aggressive expansion plans. Smart growth elements of the plan include promotion of new housing in the form of planned and defined neighborhoods containing a mixture of land uses; and planning for mixed use at a variety of scales, from neighborhoods to urban corridors, with a well-connected local street and parkway system.

The plan envisions a continuation of the 4% yearly growth rate the city experienced in the past ten years, reaching a population of 55,000 in 2020. (A Special Census of Ankeny in July 2005 showed a population of 36,161, a 33% increase over the 2000 population.) This growth would be accommodated through both infill and annexation. The plan establishes four development policy tiers that extend from the existing city, with opportunities for infill and redevelopment, to an urban reserve intended to remain in agricultural and open space use through the year 2020.

Recent projects in Ankeny include construction of the new Corporate Woods Interchange on I-35 and the related development of the Cross-winds Business Park, a 1,000-acre tract to the south and east of that interchange. Another major ongoing project is the redevelopment of the former ISU Research Farm, planned as Prairie Trail, a pedestrian-oriented development incorporating a town center, a wide range of housing types and densities, office development, parks and trails.

Under the expansion plans of the regional Wastewater Reclamation Authority (WRA) Ankeny will connect to the regional trunk sewer system in approximately 2011, taking its municipal treatment plan off-line and expanding its treatment capacity.

The City of Des Moines forms the southern boundary of the planning area, with a few small peninsulas of annexed land extending north of the boundary. During the preparation of this plan, the city annexed a largely undeveloped area in the southwest quadrant of the I-35/I-80 'mixmaster' interchange. Plans for that area, over a square mile in size, have not yet been finalized, but are expected to include a planned business park.

Issues

Among the primary issues of concern to the North Central Area Committee were:

- The proposed Northeast Beltway, which was particularly controversial in this planning area. (As noted in the Vision Statement below, some committee members opposed the concept of a beltway, while others advocated for a limited-access parkway design.)
- The desire to protect prime farmland, and the conflicts and trade-offs between farmland protection and Ankeny's continuing growth.
- Issues of economic development, including the need for land for industrial and business park expansion and the area's suitability for logistics, advanced manufacturing and value-added agricultural production.
- The desire to strengthen downtown Des Moines and support infill development in both Des Moines and Ankeny, as a way to maintain a vital region and lessen the need for continued suburban expansion. This is accompanied by a strong interest in transit improvements.

Vision Statement

The view from above the North Central area of Polk County extends from the revitalized urban core of Des Moines to the still productive farm fields north and east of Ankeny. Development and open space on this landscape is influenced by coordinated planning and partnering between cities and between the County and cities.

Polk County is central Iowa's hub of commerce, industry, business and transportation. High quality jobs follow successful business, supporting a sound, broad tax base and a high quality of life. Downtown Des Moines remains the hub of economic activity for the County. The

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downtown includes a mix of high-density housing, entertainment, and shopping, linked by walkable streets and riverfront greenways. Redevelopment of surrounding city neighborhoods continues.

North Central Polk County is also a major hub of economic activity. Economic development in this area has fostered small business development and continues to create new entrepreneurial activity. Retail and office centers are designed with small town character – as individual storefronts, rather than big box retailers. Industrial land uses dominate along the I-80 corridor. Value-added agricultural production such as ethanol, polymer plastics, biodegradable plastics, health products, and soybean products are based upon successful biotech research conducted in the region, and use Iowa and Polk County agricultural feedstocks.

Land uses in the North Central area are diverse, but fairly compact. Growth occurs around Ankeny and in areas of infill between Des Moines and Ankeny. Population density varies, but on average is higher than in previous decades. New residential housing includes a mix of higher-density housing for a variety of income levels, integrated into cohesive neighborhoods, interspersed with green space. Residential areas have retail cores within walking distance. Walking is once again an important form of transport, to schools, shopping, parks and local entertainment. Children can now bike and walk to city parks and local schools, reducing obesity.

The impacts of the new Northeast Beltway¹ are mitigated by attractive landscaping, and by a greenbelt that separates it from residential areas. The Beltway has attracted new office development at nodes along the eastern boundary of the area. New sanitary sewer trunk lines extend into the Northeast and North Central areas, but prime agricultural land beyond the Beltway is protected from development.

¹ Committee members were split on whether or not the Northeast Beltway should be constructed, and emphasized that the vision statement is not intended as an endorsement of the Beltway concept by the entire Committee.

The landscape shows a balance between land uses, with well-defined boundaries limiting urban sprawl. Wooded buffer areas are located between farmland and city boundaries. In agricultural areas outside the beltway and in fringes of the North Central area, sustainable agricultural practices are widely used, and there are more family farms with livestock, orchards, and truck gardens. Rural housing is concentrated on large lots in areas not suitable for agriculture.

Waterways such as Four Mile Creek are protected from development and floodplains are protected as open space. Stormwater management focuses on infiltrating stormwater and buffering waterways to keep surface water clear, attractive, and free of pollutants. A well maintained park system provides trails for walking and biking that also support wildlife and link communities.

Public transportation connects suburban communities with Des Moines and each other. Major roads have been widened, keeping congestion in check. Most local roads are paved, requiring little maintenance.

North Central Area Goals

Growing the Tax Base Goal – Polk County will promote economic development and private investment that builds the tax base and improves the North Central Area's quality of life.

Quality of Life Goal – Polk County will work to improve residents' quality of life and safety in policy and regulatory decisions, investment in public infrastructure, economic development initiatives, and natural resource protection.

Environmental Quality Goal – Polk County will conserve unique natural areas and wildlife habitat, air and water quality, and will work to expand and enhance trails, greenways, and park resources throughout the County.

Character of Development Goal – Polk County will promote development that maintains neighborhood and landscape character, including existing neighborhoods, communities, and natural landscapes.

Agricultural Land Protection Goal – Polk County will practice stewardship of its agricultural resources and lifestyle, including preserving prime agricultural

soils, protecting agricultural practices, and maintaining rural character in the North Central Area.

Respect for Property Owners Goal – Polk County will respect the individual decisions and values of private property owners in setting land use policy and regulation.

Growth Patterns Goal – Polk County will align City and County land use plans to discourage sprawl, protect social/economic/natural resources, and encourage controlled, orderly growth of North Central cities.

Economic Development Goal – Polk County will encourage appropriate commercial, office, and agricultural business development in the North Central Area when making infrastructure decisions and identifying the costs of service associated with proposed land uses.

Roads and Highways Goal – Polk County will manage road and highway investment to stabilize local traffic patterns and protect the flow of arterial traffic.

Mass Transportation Goal – Polk County will promote efficient public transportation and multi-modal alternatives to automobiles and car-oriented transportation corridors.

Future Land Use Plan

The future land use plan for the North Central area has a dual focus: focusing new development in the areas adjacent to Ankeny that can effectively be served by public utilities, while strengthening the industrial districts and residential neighborhoods of 'central' Polk County. The proposed Northeast Beltway study corridor is maintained as an agricultural area until environmental assessments are completed and an alignment is determined.

Land Use Categories

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

- **Agriculture:** Areas designated for continued agricultural use include lands within the Northeast Beltway study corridor and lands within or adjacent to the Des Moines River floodplain west of IA 415.
- **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 sewered, and this designation is intended to prevent leapfrog development. Areas east and northwest of Ankeny fall into this category.

- **Estate Residential:** This very low-density category applies to a few small areas along Four Mile Creek already developed at this density.
- **Rural Residential:** This one-acre lot category is located primarily in areas already developed or developing at this density, primarily between the west side of Ankeny and Saylorville Lake.
- **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 Ankeny. Note that the expansion area northwest of Ankeny will depend on the construction of the proposed Rock Creek Trunk Sewer.
- **Medium Density Residential:** This category is applied to match the designations in Ankeny's comprehensive plan and to recognize existing medium-density housing in village areas, and opportunities for such housing along NW 2nd Street, a proposed transit corridor.
- **High Density Residential:** This category is located in a few small areas corresponding to Ankeny's comprehensive plan and opportunities for higher-density housing along NW 2nd Street.
- **Mixed Use:** This category is located at several locations reflecting Ankeny's comprehensive plan, as well as an existing mixed industrial-residential area south of I-80 and east of IA 415.
- **Commercial:** Two commercial categories are shown on the plan: Neighborhood Commercial is applied in small commercial nodes in the communities of Saylorville and Norwoodville. Much of the land along major highway corridors, including NW 2nd Street and U.S. 69 (Ankeny Boulevard) is designated Highway Commercial, reflecting existing use patterns.
- **Industrial:** The North Central area includes the largest concentration of industrial land in unincorporated Polk County. Most of this area is designated

Heavy Industrial; however the northern part of the area is designated Light Industrial, consistent with existing zoning and use patterns.

- **Open Space and Institutional:** The plan shows major parks, open space and protected floodplain along Saylorville Lake and the Des Moines River, and numerous large institutional properties such as schools, cemeteries, and the County Public Works facility.

Related Transportation and Infrastructure Projects

- NW 2nd Street / IA 415 is designated as a transit/access management corridor. This corridor is well-suited to improved transit service, since it will serve the proposed Prairie Trail mixed-use development in Ankeny.
- The 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 and intersection or interchange locations are refined.

Other planned transportation and infrastructure improvement projects include:

- The Saylor Creek Trunk Sewer would extend north from the existing Saylor Creek Interceptor, and may be extended to serve portions of Ankeny.
- The Rock Creek Trunk Sewer would extend north from the Saylor Creek Interceptor along the west side of Ankeny, terminating in Polk City.
- A new water treatment plant is being planned by the Des Moines Water Works for NW 66th Avenue and NW 26th Street in Saylor Township, serving users in Ankeny and Des Moines.
- Water service improvements are planned by DMWW in parts of the North Central area, primarily in areas south of Ankeny between IA 415 and U.S. 69, to upgrade the service to fire protection standards, thus facilitating new industrial or residential development in these areas, consistent with the Land Use Plan.