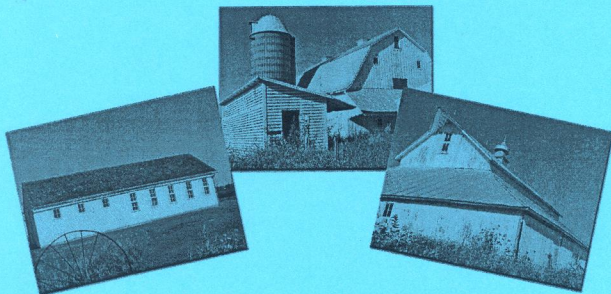

Johnson County Poor Farm Planning Study Final Report



Adopted by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors June 12, 2003

Prepared by:
Jeff Davidson, Executive Director
Brad Neumann, Associate Planner



Johnson County Council of Governments
410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, Iowa 52240



Johnson County Council of Governments

410 E. Washington St. Iowa City, Iowa 52240

June 18, 2003

Mike Sullivan, Administrative Assistant
Johnson County Board of Supervisors
913 S. Dubuque Street
Iowa City, IA 52240

Re: Transmittal of Johnson County Farm Planning Study Final Report

Dear Mike:

Following is the final report for the Johnson County Farm Planning Study which has been completed by the Johnson County Council of Governments at the request of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. This report was adopted by the Board on June 12, 2003. We appreciate the Board's assistance as well as the assistance of County staff in completion of this report. We also appreciate the assistance of the Johnson County Historical Society and the residents of Johnson County who provided input during the planning process. This final report incorporates all revisions to the draft report that the Board has requested at the various public review meetings which we have held over the past two years.

I believe this document will serve you well in providing guidance for future decisions regarding the County Farm property. Preserving the heritage of this important piece of Johnson County history is a great responsibility for current and future Boards of Supervisors. We are pleased to be of assistance.

Feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JD".

Jeff Davidson
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

In June 2001 the Johnson County Board of Supervisors asked JCCOG to coordinate a planning study for the Johnson County Farm site in west Iowa City. The Johnson County Farm is located on the southwest corner of the U.S. Hwy 218/Melrose Avenue interchange. This is the location of the original Johnson County Poor Farm, which evolved into the current County Home, Chatham Oaks. Several old County Poor Farm buildings remain, including the asylum building, a horse and hay barn, a dairy barn and silo; as well as a pauper's cemetery. The property was purchased in 1855 and has been in continuous use by the County ever since.

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors asked JCCOG to coordinate a planning study of the County Farm which would consider all future possibilities for the site. The preservation of the old County Poor Farm buildings is a priority, as well as preservation of the Poor Farm cemetery. Existing and future uses of Chatham Oaks need to be considered, as will the relationship of possible development of a portion of the property to the nearby residential uses in Iowa City.

As part of the planning study, JCCOG solicited public comment regarding the possible future uses of the site, and reviewed background information and historical data. Following is a summary of the data collected: individual interviews, public meeting comments, written correspondence, and anything else received during the comment period last fall.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Johnson County Farm is a fairly even mix of agricultural uses and wooded or brushy areas. There are approximately 150 acres remaining from the original 160-acre farm (10 acres were purchased for the construction of U.S. Highway 218), plus approximately 40 additional acres which have been added to the east. The existing historic sites and the Chatham Oaks facility take up about 22 acres on the north side of the property along county road F-46 (Melrose Avenue). There are also 55 acres of the original County Farm located north of F-46 which consist of the County's Secondary Roads Department, agricultural land and wooded areas. The west side of the property is bordered by Slothower Rd and in agricultural use. The south side of the property is bordered by the Southwest Estates and Wild Prairie Estates subdivisions, which are zoned RS5, Residential Single Family. The east side of the property is bordered by U.S. Highway 218.

The County Farm has flat tilled soil on the north and west sides of the property with a hilly wooded and brushy area ranging from the center of the property southward and eastward. The property slopes toward the southeast. In this hilly wooded area is the source of Willow Creek which flows toward the east. The Poor Farm cemetery is located in this hilly wooded area. Figure 1 provides an overall view of the property. The City of Iowa City sensitive areas inventory map shows an area of steep slopes and two prairie remnants on the property. The agricultural land is currently under contract with a private land management company.

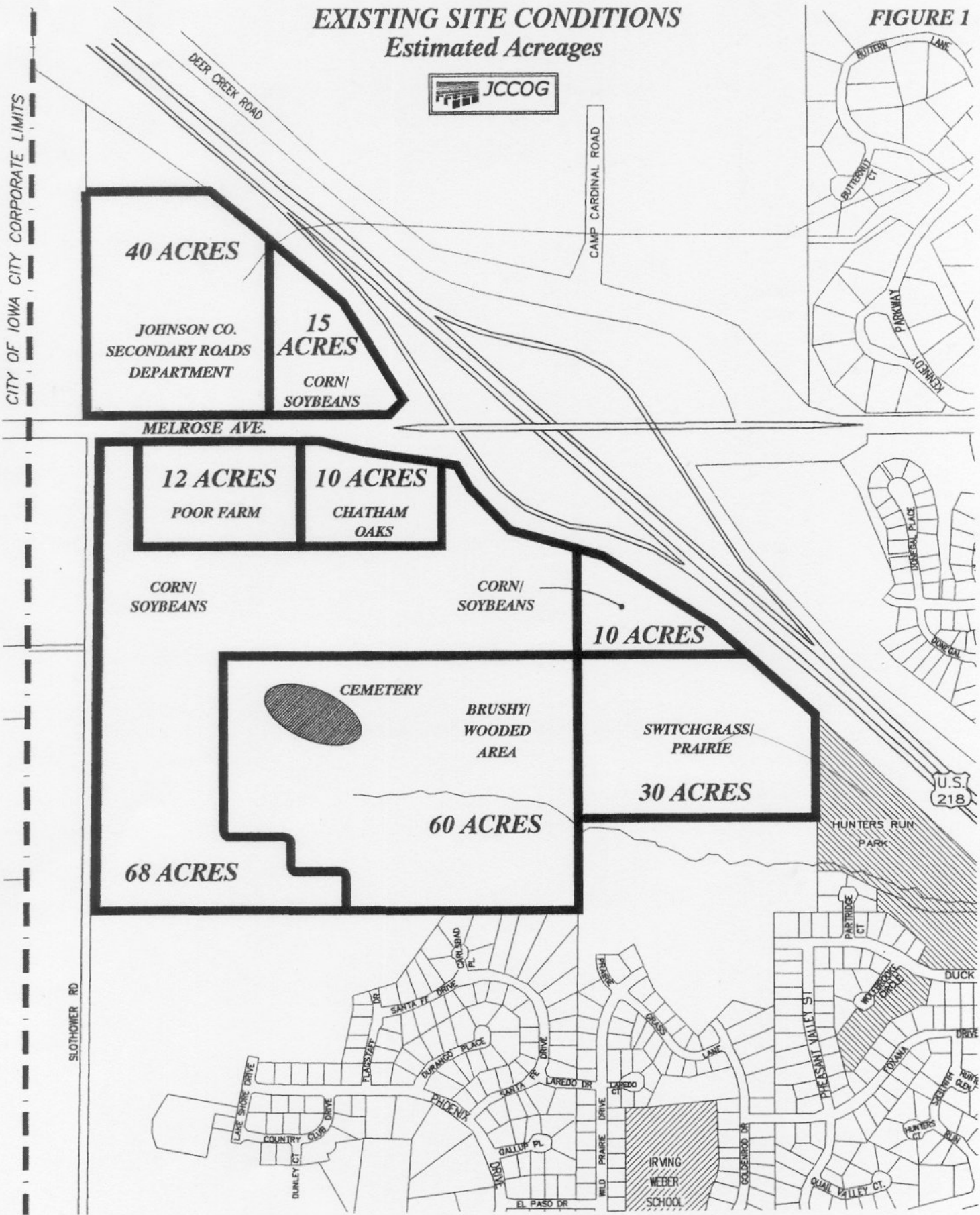
IOWA CITY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Johnson County Poor farm is located in the Southwest Planning District of Iowa City's Comprehensive Plan. The Southwest Planning district contains a variety of land uses but is primarily residential. The Southwest Planning District contains large parcels of land devoted to public uses, including the County Farm, and contains environmentally sensitive features including steep slopes, stream corridors, and potential wetlands. According to the City of Iowa City Sensitive Areas Ordinance, these features will need to be considered carefully if the property is developed.

EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

Estimated Acreages

FIGURE 1



The Southwest Planning District contains Willow Creek Park and Kiwanis Park, which together provide a large regional park for the neighborhoods on the west side of Iowa City. Connecting these two parks with the County Farm property is a priority for the regional trail system, as is the connection of the Willow Creek Trail to Melrose Avenue. The district also contains many smaller neighborhood parks. According to Iowa City's Neighborhood Open Space Plan, there is a deficit of 1.28 acres of public open space in District B, which includes the County Farm property. The proposed regional trail system is shown in Figure 2.

The location of U.S. Hwy 218 within the Southwest Planning District will have an effect on future development of this area. Previous plans have included a policy of protecting the Melrose Avenue interchange with U.S. Hwy 218 from commercial encroachment, with the Iowa Hwy 1/U.S. Hwy 218 interchange designated for commercial use.

The decision by Coralville, Iowa City and Johnson County to locate the extension of Hwy 965 on the western boundary of the Southwest Planning District, approximately one-half mile west of the County Farm, will have an effect on the long-range planning for the County Farm. The location of a major roadway on the west boundary of the planning area will result in proposals for development in the vicinity of the future Hwy 965 extension.

The Southwest Planning District contains several arterial streets, including Melrose Avenue and Rohret Road. These arterials are located north and south of the County Farm, respectively. Recent improvements to these two arterial streets has improved street infrastructure in west Iowa City. The Melrose Avenue frontage adjacent to the County Farm has not been improved. It may be necessary to upgrade this portion of Melrose Avenue if substantial development of the County Farm is proposed. Eventually Slothower Road will be upgraded to collector street standards as redevelopment of property occurs west of the County Farm.

Figure 2 shows that City of Iowa City municipal water and sanitary sewer infrastructure is already extended to the County Farm site. Figure 2 shows water and sewer line extensions that would be constructed as public projects. Private development activities will require extensions from these lines that would be constructed by the private sector. Also shown is a proposed sanitary sewer service line to the property owned by Johnson County north of the County Farm. This line has a price tag of approximately \$85,000. The property north of the County Farm is under consideration for relocation of the National Guard Armory.

The area west of U.S. Hwy 218 in the Southwest Planning District has limited sanitary sewer capacity. Improvements are necessary to provide adequate sewer capacity for most of this area, and the construction of lift stations will also be necessary to provide adequate sewer capacity west of Slothower Rd. A new water storage facility is planned for immediately south of the County Farm property.

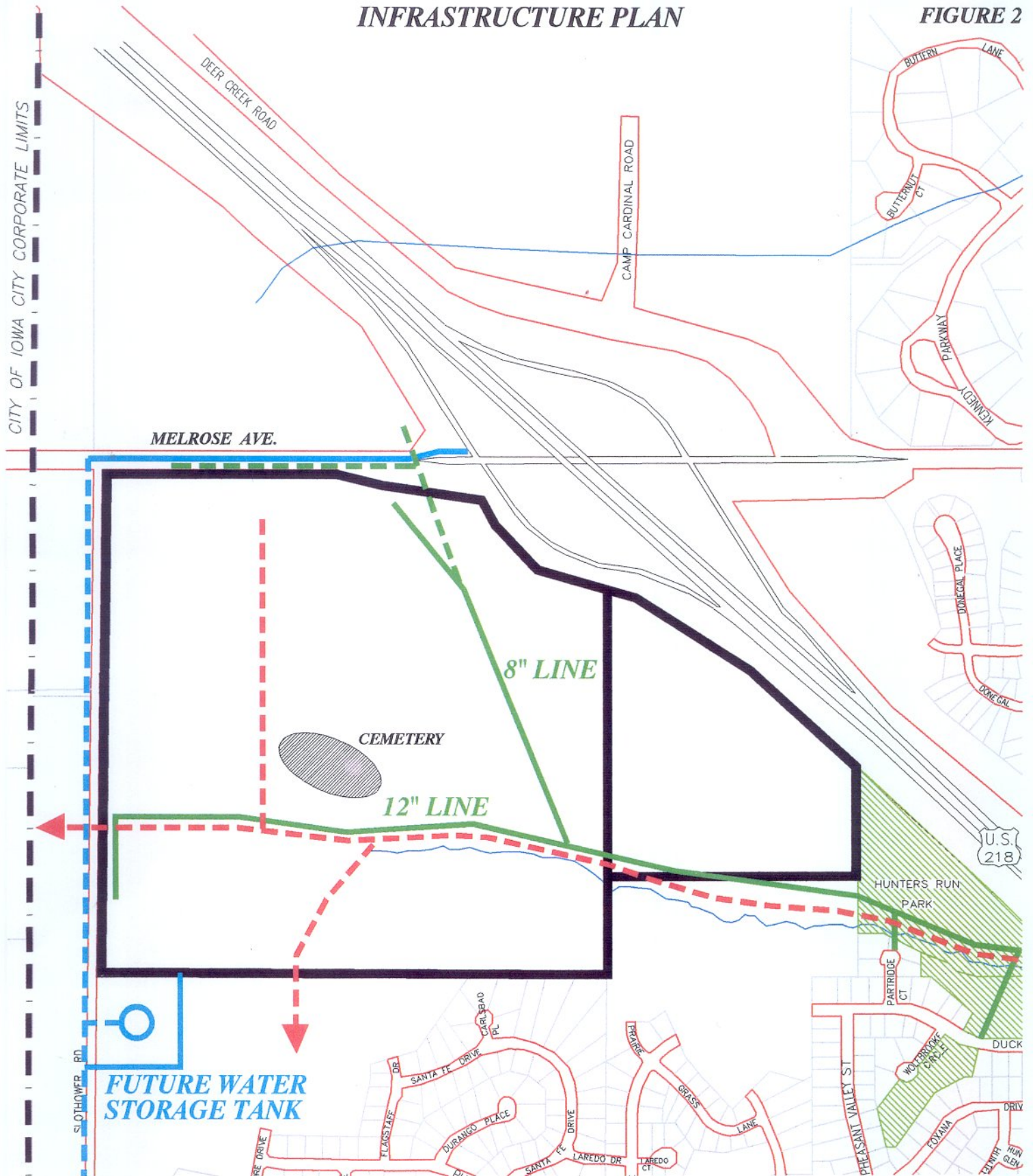
INTERVIEWS

Mary Donovan, Executive Director Chatham Oaks

- Chatham Oaks has persons with disabilities that can't exist in the community independently or care for themselves. Alcohol, drugs, suicidal. Rough life. Teach life skills with ultimate goal of having them leave.
- Some local wealthy families are willing to build apartments on the grounds but county Board of Supervisors has been unwilling.
- Current census is 95. They use approximately 15 acres for all of their activities. They would like to expand the facility but not sure how much space they would need.
- Likes the idea of redeveloping the County Farm into a regional City park.

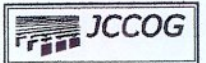
INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

FIGURE 2



Municipal Infrastructure

- Existing Sanitary Sewer (proposed: - - - - -)
- Existing Water - all 12" lines (proposed: - - - - -)
- Existing Trails (proposed: - - - - -)



- Chatham Oaks mows the cemetery, the Poor Farm and their grounds.
- Storage building is something they might want to build in the future for mowers and equipment since the carriage house was torn down.
- Additional parking may also be needed.
- Long-term future of facility is unclear. Trend is more toward independent living.
- Need to maintain existing recreational areas.

Chuck Schmadeke, Iowa City Public Works Director

- There is a 24" sanitary sewer line that comes up the draw to Slothower Rd. It was designed to sewer development of the County Farm.
- There is a 12" water line that follows Melrose Ave and serves Chatham Oaks and County Secondary Roads shop. Could be extended for redevelopment. This water line should be looped into the Southwest Estates subdivision. Maybe locate water tank in SW corner of County Farm.

Pat Harney and Terrence Neuzil, Johnson County Board of Supervisors

- Options evaluated should include:
 - Hickory Hill West
 - Tourism destination/fix up buildings
 - Sell part of property for redevelopment

Mike Lehman, Johnson County Board of Supervisors

- Presented information regarding the purchase history of the Poor Farm property back in 1855.

Melvin Dvorsky, resident of the County Home from 1962 to 1988

- Described how the facility operated when he lived there.

PUBLIC MEETINGS

Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, September 5, 2001

Matt Pacha: County Farm property should remain undeveloped

Al Stroh: Need to consider maintenance of regional park.

Rex Pruess: Likes idea of regional park. Concerned about access at U.S. Hwy 218.

Kevin Boyd: Supports preserving land if County is so inclined.

Terry Trueblood: The consensus of the commission is to support the concept of a regional park at the County Farm.

September 25, 2001 Johnson County Board of Supervisors public input session

This meeting was a formal meeting of the Board regarding the County Poor Farm planning study.

Carol Spaziani, the League of Women Voters: Move carefully. Consider JCCOG timeline vs. Johnson County Historical Society's survey timeline. Lengthen JCCOG timeline if necessary. Consider a Vision Iowa grant.

Brian Conser: Would like to operate a golf driving range on the Poor Farm grounds. A driving range would generate revenue for the County and move away from farming the ground.

Del Richards, Johnson County Historical Society: Farm should be preserved and the history of the farm should be considered. County needs to make a commitment so that funds can be invested in rehabilitating the buildings.

David Burbidge (lives in SW Estates): Would like to see a trail connection to Willow Creek trail and more recreational facilities developed to keep farm as open space.

David Redlawsk: Be careful about growth. Retain open space. Make the area a good place to live. Board of Supervisors needs to consider all of the options.

George Dane: Keep farm in public domain. Don't allow sprawl to occur. Develop educational opportunities. Restore the wetlands. Don't sell out.

Bill Mathis: Consider three questions; is it good for the community? Can it be done well? Is it right? Honor heritage.

Wayne Peterson, Bicentennial Farm Project: Don't just focus on Iowa City, focus on all of Johnson County. Provide exposure for the urban sector to experience agriculture. Vast number of possibilities.

Hodge Carter (lives in SW Estates): Likes to walk in Poor Farm field. We need to review the fauna on the farm. Would like to see a bike trail and conservation of the site.

Kara Logsdon: Don't rush. Preserve area.

Mike Lehman, Johnson County Board of Supervisors: Use Harry Graves, Johnson County Conservation Board Director, as a resource.

Bruce Ahrens, Poor Farm Manager: Wants to be a resource.

Les (*last name unknown*), Sons of the Union Army: Cemetery is important. They are researching.

Margaret Wieting, Executive Director of the Johnson County Historical Society: Read letter from Bob Burn's daughter, Linda Langenberg.

Terrance Neuzil, Johnson County Board of Supervisors: Poor Farm buildings need attention. County doesn't have funds to do it all. There are fiscal realities.

Doris Watson: Wants County farm kept as is. Maybe developed into a tourist attraction.

Other general comments from September 25 meeting: Sell the land. County needs the money. County needs a jail or a facility for nonviolent prisoners to help overcrowding.

NOVEMBER 8, 2001 City of Iowa City Southwest District Plan workshop

• **Comments made at planning meeting regarding the County Farm:**

Open Space comments:

- County owned property adjoining the County Farm should be added to the Farm and kept undeveloped to serve as a buffer between the Weber School area and Melrose Avenue.
- Establish prairies and wetlands on the property in lieu of more active recreation parks.
- Establish alternate land uses for the County Farm. Use the land for highway related businesses, such as hotels, gas stations, restaurants, and office buildings.
- Create "living farm".

Housing comments:

- Limit development of county land, including the County Farm.
- Consider developing some of the County Farm property as a Peninsula type neighborhood.

February 5, 2002 City of Iowa City Southwest District Citizen Planning Workshop

- Don't sell the County Poor Farm property. Consider it as "Westside Hickory Hill Park"; leave it as open space.
- Various uses with varying degrees of support were suggested for the Poor Farm area: environmentally friendly industrial park; demonstration garden, garden plots, botanical gardens, flowering trees, prairie restoration (or creation).
- Family-oriented recreation center on south part of Poor Farm property.
- Link all city trails to Poor Farm.
- Preserve wildlife area on Poor Farm.
- Maintain existing county home and historic farm.
- If there is housing, it should be only single family.
- Add some commercial near the existing county home.
- Connect Willow Creek trail to the County Poor Farm.
- Use County Poor Farm as community open space.
- Possibilities for Poor Farm: living history farm, community garden space.
- Possible uses for the County Poor Farm: living history farm; prairie preservation, recreation trails, hotel.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Friends of Historic Preservation:

- In a November 19, 2001 letter to the Johnson County Board of Supervisors, Friends indicated that they would like the Board to consider preserving the 180 acres that comprise the County Farm. The land has been public since 1855 and should remain this way. They are working with the Bicentennial Farm Project and the Johnson County Historical Society. The buildings and the cemetery are worth saving for future generations. It is a green space worth saving.

Johnson County Historical Society's November 2001 Newsletter:

- Talks about the HRDP/REAP grant the society received in order to conduct a survey of the County Poor Farm. Leah Rogers, an Historic Preservation Consultant, was hired and

has begun her survey. The project will entail an examination and evaluation of the extant architectural properties to assess individual integrity and significance; an examination of the archaeological potential of the poor farm; an examination of primary and secondary resources for information related to the historic context of the poor farm property; and a determination of eligibility for the poor farm property as either a historic district or as individually eligible buildings and sites. Currently only the 1856 asylum is listed on the National Register. The survey will take about 12 months.

Johnson County Historical Society's August 2001 Newsletter:

- The newsletter introduced the Bicentennial Farm Project.

Iowa City's City Manager's letter to the Economic Development Commission:

- The letter is in regards to the local National Guard Unit's proposed move to the County property north of Melrose Ave. Concerns over utilities. Coralville also offered land to the Guard Unit.

Del Richards, Johnson County Historical Society

- Presented a proposed redevelopment plan for the County Poor Farm.

General comments from the Board of Supervisors:

- They have had requests for space from many different organizations including SEATS, county jail, ambulance service, and Chatham Oaks.
- Selling a portion of property in order to raise funds for other projects must be an option to consider.
- How does it fit into Iowa City's Southwest District Plan? What are the utility issues?

CORRESPONDENCE RECEIVED

- Letter from Del Richards, Johnson County Historical Society, regarding history of farm and support of the Bicentennial Farm Project.
- Letter From George Dane to Johnson County Board of Supervisors regarding history of farm and support for preserving the natural features and symbols of rural life. Also supports the Bicentennial Farm Project.
- Note from Carol Spaziani, League of Women Voters, urging the Board of Supervisors to consider creative public uses for the farm and to not make any decisions until the Johnson County Historical Society finishes their survey of the property. The League would also like to see joint planning with the City of Iowa City.
- Email from Linda Langenberg to Johnson County Board of Supervisors regarding her father's (Bob Burns) efforts to preserve the insane asylum building and establish a museum on the farm property. The email also encouraged the Board of Supervisors to consider the survey being taken at the farm and to pursue National Register status.
- Email from Jim Ruebush. Mr. Ruebush teaches at West High School and lives on Durango Place just south of the County Farm. He would like to see the farm remain as-is and supports an educational use of the property.
- Letter from David Burbidge supporting the option of leaving the area open space.
- Letter from Doris Watson states that she would like to leave the property as is and supports the efforts of Chatham Oaks. She would like to see Chatham Oaks expanded.

- Email from Rex Pruess stating that he would like to see the County Farm connected to Hunters Run Park via a trail, and then eventually connected to the Willow Creek Trail.

SUMMARY

Most of the comments during the public input process and information gathering period support preserving the property, including the buildings, cemetery, and agricultural land. Using the land for education and open space was the most common recommendation by the public. However, other issues were raised, such as selling a portion of the property in order to raise funds for other necessary County projects. Many believe some redevelopment can occur while saving a majority of the property for open space and educational opportunities.

Overall recommendations are shown in Figure 3 and can be summarized as follows:

1. The old County Poor Farm buildings should be preserved in some manner, and open to the public. There is great variation in what form this might take, depending on the level of investment that is made. Options range from improving the existing facilities and having them open to the public on special days, to a functioning "living history farms" type of operation. The Poor Farm buildings are in need of immediate attention to maintenance.
2. It is not likely Chatham Oaks will be expanding significantly; however, perhaps five acres of ground surrounding their existing operation should be preserved for their possible future use and as a buffer. Additional residential facilities for persons with disabilities at this location have been discussed periodically.
3. There is considerable public sentiment for converting at least a portion of the County Farm property into a regional city park, and this concept has been endorsed by the Iowa City Parks and Recreation Commission. The property is entirely within the Iowa City corporate limits. There is also considerable support for extension of the Willow Creek Trail to a possible trailhead at the old Poor Farm. The remaining original County Farm property is approximately 150 acres in size, plus there are approximately 40 acres which have been added to the east. Of this 190 acres, approximately 100 acres are wooded, brushy, or prairie areas which would be appropriate to preserve as parkland. The cemetery should also be carefully preserved and interpreted appropriately, and a link maintained between the cemetery and the Poor Farm buildings. At minimum, an additional 20 to 30 acres of the flatter ground would also be needed for proper park development.
4. If the Board of Supervisors determines that they would like to raise some revenue for other projects from a sale of a portion of the property, the southwest section of the property contains approximately 25 acres of relatively flat ground which is currently row-cropped. This could be redeveloped as an extension of the Southwest Estates and Wild Prairie Estates subdivisions which exist immediately south of the County Farm property. Streets have been stubbed from Southwest Estates and Wild Prairie Estates to allow such redevelopment to occur. Residential development of this area would be consistent with the Iowa City Comprehensive Plan and still allow items 1 through 3 above to occur.

The following Figure 3 reflects the recommendations stated above, as well as the Board of Supervisors' desire to reserve 40 acres of the County Farm property for unspecified future public use. These future public use areas, shown in purple on Figure 3, could potentially be added to any of the functional elements of the County Farm Plan, or specified for another use as determined by the Board of Supervisors. Figure 3 also shows the future division of property north of Melrose Avenue between the Johnson County Secondary Roads Department and the future location of the Army National Guard.

PROPOSED LAND USE PLAN

FIGURE 3



CITY OF IOWA CITY CORPORATE LIMITS

