

River Junction Village Plan 2019



Vision Statement

The Village of River Junction will continue to be a quiet, rural community. Agricultural land and recreational areas will be protected, while limited single-family residential and low-intensity commercial development may occur in a manner that respects the village's historic character and follows the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan.



Prepared by the Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability Department, Johnson County, Iowa

Adopted by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors: November 14, 2019

RESOLUTION No. 11-14-19-02
RESOLUTION APPROVING THE RIVER JUNCTION VILLAGE PLAN 2019

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors finds that the River Junction Village Plan 2019 is intended to further the objectives of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan, specifically regarding future growth and preservation in the area of the county known as River Junction; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors finds that it is in the public interest to adopt said River Junction Village Plan 2019 to ensure safe and orderly growth in the village; and

WHEREAS, the Johnson County Planning and Zoning Commission having studied said Village Plan and conducted a public hearing thereon on October 14, 2019, by a majority vote recommended that the River Junction Village Plan 2019 be approved;

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA, that the River Junction Village Plan 2019 attached hereto and included in the online agenda packet for the meeting of the Board of Supervisors held on November 14, 2019, copies of which can be obtained at the Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability Office, Johnson County Auditor's Office, or at www.johnson-county.com, is hereby adopted.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this River Junction Village Plan 2019 shall become effective upon adoption of this Resolution.

It was moved by Rettig and seconded by Sullivan the Resolution be adopted, incorporating Figure 6 on page 11 of the River Junction Village Plan 2019, Village Boundary Option Number One, as described in the legislative file designated as Item 3.a.b. in the Board packet for this meeting, this 14th day of November, 2019..

Roll Call

Green-Douglass aye Heiden no Porter no Rettig aye Sullivan aye

ATTEST:


Lisa Green-Douglass, Chairperson
Board of Supervisors


Travis Weipert, Auditor
Johnson County, Iowa

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Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the River Junction area residents who contributed significantly in the planning process. Your input has been vital to the creation of the plan. In addition, the Johnson County Historical Society and the Iowa Office of the State Archaeologist provided important historical details about River Junction. We also appreciate the City of Lone Tree and Lone Tree Community School District for allowing us to use the community's Wellness Center conference room for the village planning meetings.

Introduction

The River Junction Village Plan is the result of a collaborative effort between area residents, community leaders, and County officials. The goals and vision statement of the River Junction Village Plan are consistent with the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan (Figure 1). In fact, this is the first village plan created since the comprehensive plan was adopted in May 2018. This village plan focuses on maintaining the quiet, neighborly environment of River Junction, while also providing a framework for the future of the community.

In accordance with the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan, the following document has been adopted by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. The plan serves as a guide for future development and preservation efforts in the Village of River Junction.

Unincorporated villages have a special place and value within the county's rural areas, having developed in conjunction with agricultural land uses or related services. Several goals within the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan support appropriate development within unincorporated villages while balancing preservation goals ([Appendix A](#)). In addition, the following information was provided to area residents during the planning process:

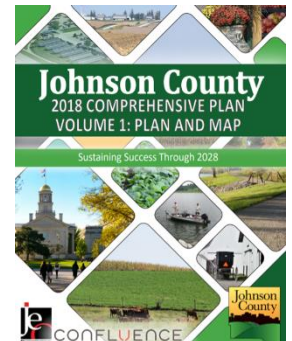


Figure 1: River Junction is the first unincorporated village in the county to create a plan since the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan was adopted.

What A Village Plan Does and Doesn't Do

Village planning supports the well-being of the County's small communities, balances growth opportunities and preservation goals, and sets village boundaries. Together with the County comprehensive plan, a village plan and boundary provide the basis for decision-making about development and zoning while respecting property owners' rights and boundaries.

A village plan does not raise taxes, does not require property owners to change how they use their property or alter the zoning of land, and does not promote large-scale or disconnected development that is out of character with existing land uses. The plan also does not change the fact that the village is unincorporated.

A village plan identifies strengths and weaknesses and can help village residents enhance their community. The plan can potentially help the village obtain grants or other funding or support that requires evidence of community engagement as a condition of participation.

River Junction Profile

Location

The unincorporated village of River Junction is located in the southeast corner of Johnson County, Iowa (Map 1). More specifically, it is located in the northwest corner of Fremont Township, approximately three miles west of the City of Lone Tree. River Junction received its name based on its location near the intersection of the Iowa River and the English River, which runs through Washington County.¹

Map 1: River Junction Location Map

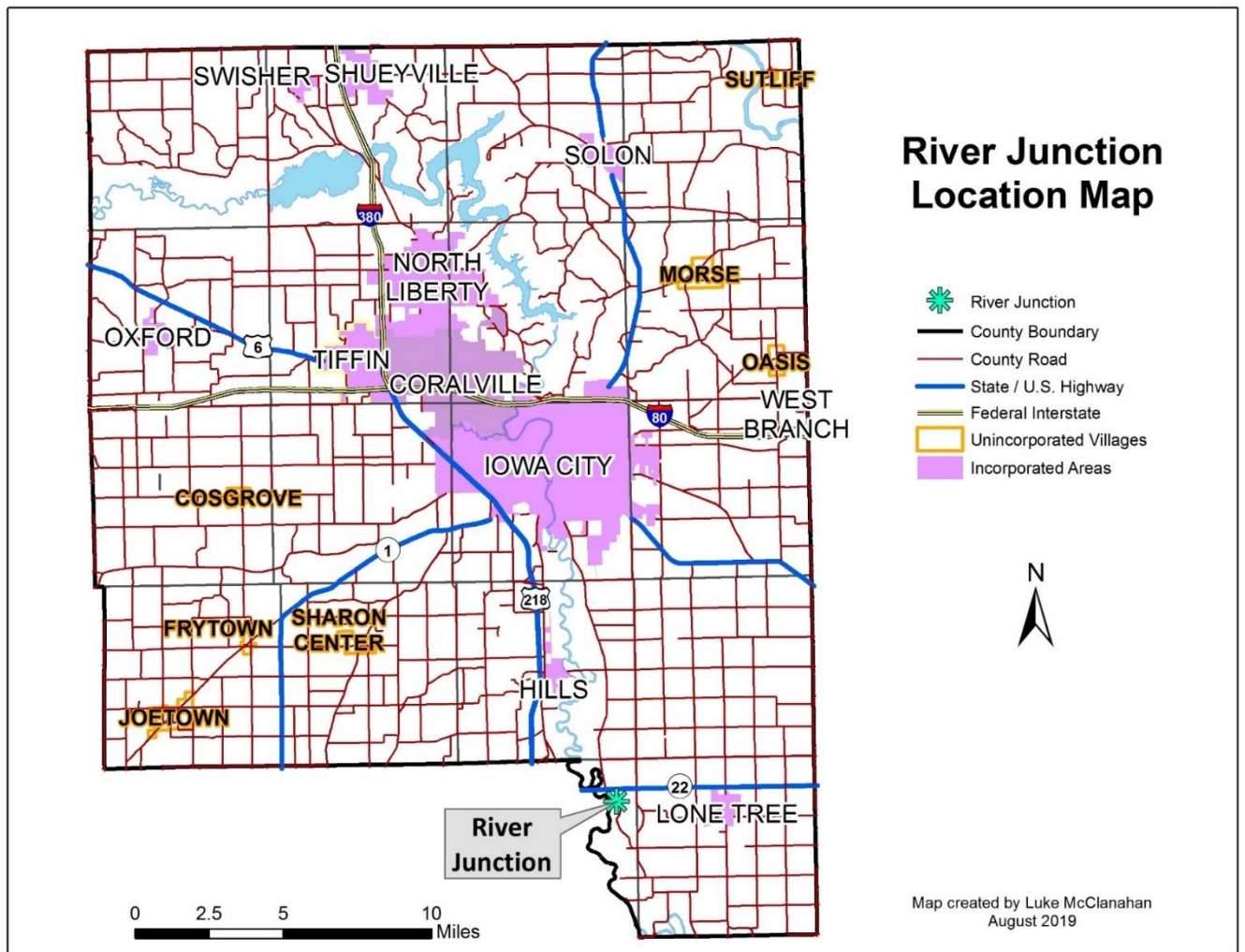


Figure 2: River Junction Location Map

¹ General historical information provided by the Johnson County Historical Society.

History

Prior to and after European settlement of the Midwest, a large number of Native American settlements existed along the Iowa River, including in what is now known as the River Junction area.² The river provided a means of transportation and trade, along with water and food sources for Native communities. Interactions between Native Americans and Europeans were recorded by “Forty-Niner” Abraham Owen in his memoirs during the mid-1800s. Owen lived near the mouth of the English River and documented trading that occurred with the Native communities nearby.

River Junction was founded in 1873 by Henry and Harriet Walker and John and Louisa Porter. That same year, the River Junction Railroad Depot was built. The depot was served initially by the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Minnesota Railway Company. It was later served by the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway. In the early days of River Junction, there were four grocery stores, two brickyards, a cement block factory, a meat market, and a lumberyard. The community’s population was estimated at 100 people at its height. Train service ended in 1933, and River Junction’s population began to decline.

River Junction is commonly referred to as “Stumptown.” The origins of this nickname are unclear, but local residents have suggested several possibilities.³ Some think the name comes from the large number of trees that were removed after European settlement. Others have said that a large tree stump was used as a bumper to stop railroad boxcars from rolling away. Another theory is that the Native American description of the location translated to Stumptown.⁴

Although the railroad was decommissioned in River Junction nearly a century ago, and the area’s population declined, the historic traditions and feel of the community remain. A portion of the general store (Figure 3) built around the turn of the 20th century remains in use as both commercial office and residential space. There is a replica of a settler’s cabin at Walker Park. Next to Walker Park is the community’s cemetery, which has been maintained since the 1800s. Several community events, including the Settlers’ Picnic, occur regularly in River Junction. Through these preservation efforts, River Junction’s legacy continues today.



Figure 3: Former general store in River Junction.
Photo Credit: Johnson County PDS, 2019.

Demographics

Population data is not collected in a way that shows exactly how many people are in an unincorporated village. As a result, demographic data for Fremont Township was utilized to reveal local characteristics. The U.S. Census Bureau publishes the Decennial Census every 10 years and data from the Population

² Information about the Native American presence near River Junction provided by the Iowa Office of State Archaeologist.

³ “Tiny, tranquil River Junction,” Karen Herzog, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, November 4, 1984 (page 22).

⁴ Based on input collected from River Junction area residents on July 18, 2019.

Estimates Program in the years between censuses. This demographic section focuses on the most recent Decennial Census from 2010, but first shows trends indicated by the Population Estimates Program.

Population

The overall population of Johnson County was 130,882 in 2010 and estimated to be 149,213 in 2017 (Table 1).⁵ (The increase over those seven years is 14% countywide. The population of Fremont Township in 2010 was 1,743 persons. The Population Estimates Program indicates Fremont population is now 1,961 persons, an increase of 12.5% from 2010 to 2017.

Table 1: U.S. Census for 2010 and Population Estimates for 2011-2018

Location	April 1, 2010	Population Estimate (as of July 1)							
	Estimates Base/Census	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Johnson County, IA	130,882	131,339	134,066	137,096	140,160	142,745	144,931	146,858	149,213
Fremont Township	1,743	1,743	1,738	1,750	1,808	1,780	1,790	1,920	1,961

Source: Annual Estimates of the Resident Population, U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

Age Distribution

The 2010 Decennial Census indicates the population of Fremont Township is older overall than the Johnson County population (Table 2). The median age of Fremont Township residents is 40.1 years compared to 29.3 years for Johnson County residents, partly due to the many college-age students residing in the county. Even so, there is a higher percentage of people age 17 and younger in the township (26%) than in the county (20%). The township also has also a greater portion of residents age 75 or older (8%), than the county does (4%). In Fremont Township, only 18% of the population is 18 to 34 years of age, whereas in Johnson County, 38% of the population is 18 to 34 years of age.

Table 2: Johnson County and Fremont Township's population age distribution (2010)

	Johnson County		Fremont Township	
	Population	%	Population	%
Total	130,882		1,743	
17 and younger	25,918	20%	451	26%
18 to 24	28,128	21%	102	6%
25 to 34	22,496	17%	200	12%
35 to 44	14,956	11%	242	14%
45 to 54	15,128	12%	268	15%
55 to 64	13,045	10%	215	12%
65 to 74	6,135	5%	121	7%
75 and older	5,076	4%	144	8%
Median Age	29.3		40.1	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

⁵ Comparable data for Johnson County and Fremont Township available only through 2017 when this plan was created.

Household Characteristics

As shown in *Table 3*, Fremont Township has a higher percentage of family households (70%) compared to Johnson County (53%), with a family household defined as a household maintained by a householder with a family and can include any unrelated people residing there.⁶ This is also likely due to the large student population that is concentrated primarily within Iowa City, which may also explain the high percentage of nonfamily households in Johnson County (47%). Nonfamily households are fewer in Fremont Township (31%). The average household size in Fremont Township is 2.5 persons, which is similar to the Johnson County average household size of 2.3 persons. In keeping with the age distributions previously noted, Fremont Township has a higher percentage of households with children under the age of 18 (33%) in comparison to Johnson County overall (25%).

Table 3: Household characteristics for Johnson County and Fremont Township

	Johnson County		Fremont Township	
	#	%	#	%
Total Households	52,715		675	
Family Households	27,883	53%	468	70%
Nonfamily Households	24,832	47%	207	31%
Households With Children Under 18	13,161	25%	222	33%
Average Household Size	2.3		2.5	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

Housing Types

Johnson County and Fremont Township share some common characteristics in housing types and amount as shown in *Table 4*. Of the 55,967 housing units countywide, 719 of those are located in Fremont Township. In both areas, housing units are estimated to be 94% occupied and 6% vacant. Fremont Township, however, has a higher owner-occupied rate of 76%, while Johnson County's rate is 59%. This difference may be explained in part by the large number of student rental properties within Iowa City and Coralville.

Table 4: Housing Unit Characteristics for Johnson County and Fremont Township.

	Johnson County		Fremont Township	
	#	%	#	%
Housing Units	55,967		719	
Occupied	52,715	94%	675	94%
Vacant units	3,252	6%	44	6%
Owner occupied	31,299	59%	512	76%
Renter occupied	21,416	41%	163	24%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

⁶ Family household definition based on U.S. Census Current Population Survey Subject Definitions (2019).

Land Use and Zoning

River Junction is located in an area of Johnson County where the primary land use is agriculture. However, there are many parcels within a half-mile radius of the original plat of River Junction that are zoned Residential. As of 2019 the majority of these parcels were zoned as RUA-Urban Residential (37 of 45 parcels). This zoning classification created when zoning was first adopted in Johnson County in 1960, and used in River Junction, indicates a history of residential use in and near the village core. Also within the half mile radius are two R5-Residential parcels and one R-Residential parcel.

Beyond the half-mile radius and up to a one-mile radius of River Junction, there is one parcel zoned R-Residential and one parcel zoned AR-Agricultural Residential. Currently, there are no parcels within a mile of River Junction that are zoned Commercial or Industrial.

Infrastructure and Services

The River Junction area is served by the Lone Tree Fire & Rescue, an all-volunteer department currently consisting of 28 firefighters. Law enforcement services are provided by the Johnson County Sheriff's Office. The Johnson County Secondary Roads Department maintains the following roads: Sand Road SE, River Junction Road SE, Otter Creek SE, and Sioux Avenue SE. Highway 22 is maintained by the Iowa Department of Transportation. River Junction is served by the Lone Tree Community School District. (The nearest country school, Fremont No. 1, was located one-half mile from River Junction and closed in 1960.) The current PK-12 Lone Tree school building, which serves an estimated 500 students, is located approximately 5 miles east of River Junction.



Figure 4: Walker Park is one of two County Conservation areas in or around River Junction.
Photo Credit: Johnson County PDS. 2019.

Natural Resources and Agriculture

The Iowa River is an important nearby natural resource and recreational amenity, including the Johnson County Conservation Board's River Junction Access. In 2018, an Iowa River Trail Plan was created, which identifies improving amenities at River Junction Access. The village includes a second Conservation Board area, Walker Park, (Figure 4) and a separate cemetery. Farming in the area includes corn, soybean, and hops and includes family-operated farms over the generations.

Hazards

While the Iowa River is an asset in many ways, it also poses risks. River Junction is surrounded on several sides by flood hazard areas related to the Iowa River, and nearby Otter Creek has a floodplain that spans Highway 22 (Map 2). The presence of floodplain makes development difficult or impractical in those areas subject to inundation by flood waters.

Map 2: Floodplain in and near River Junction

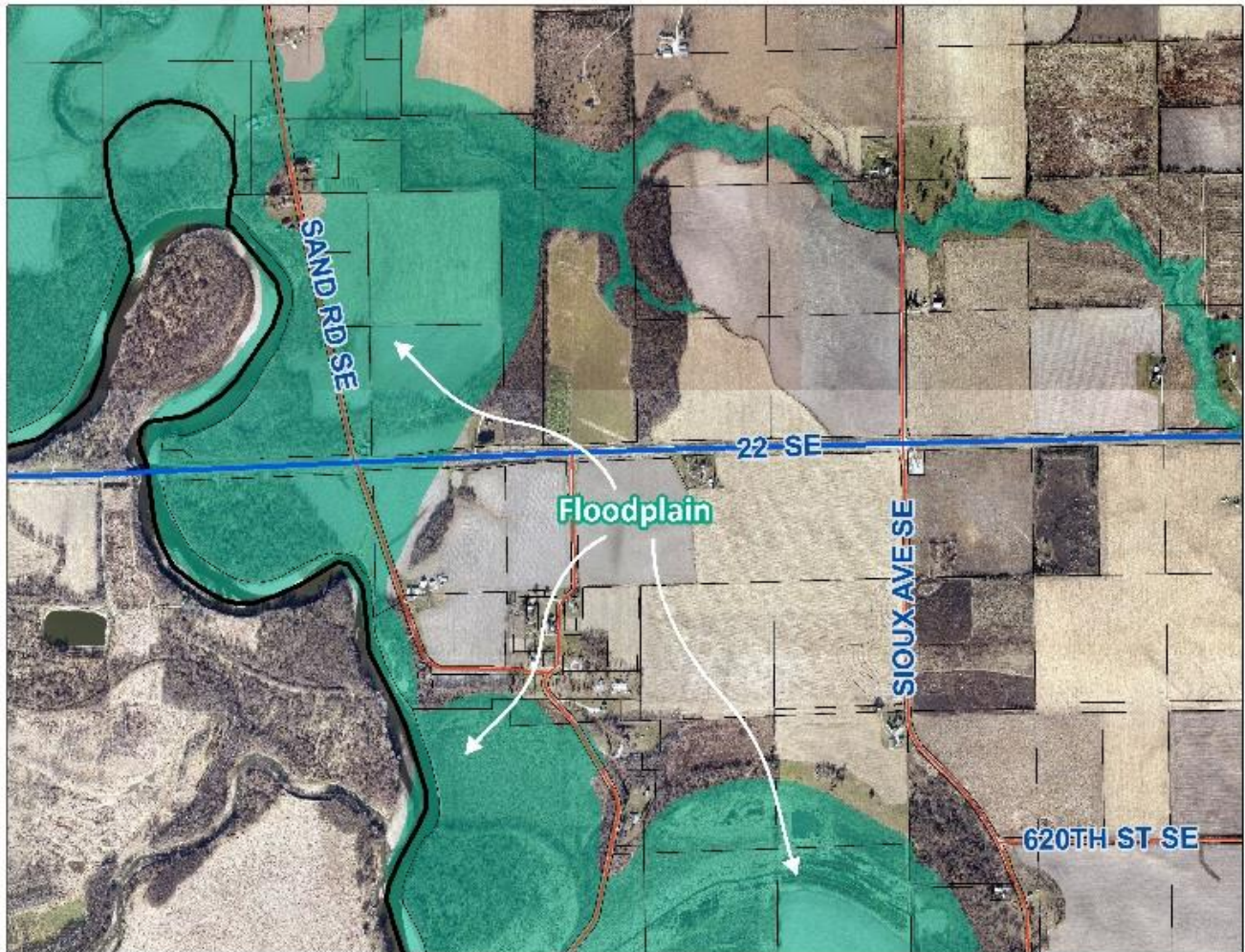


Figure 5: Floodplain in and around River Junction.

Public Meeting and Input Process

Two public meetings and other input opportunities during the summer of 2019 enabled River Junction Residents to provide invaluable feedback to county staff. Direct mailings, news releases, website postings, social media and email were used to publicize the meetings and input opportunities.

The public input was essential to develop River Junction's goals, vision statement, and village boundary. The following summaries provide brief overviews of each of the summer 2019 meetings. In addition, several residents contributed input by phone, email or in-person. In fall 2019, the draft plan was heard at public hearings by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Board of Supervisors for formal approval.

Meeting One

The first public meeting for the Village of River Junction planning process was held on July 18, 2019, at the Lone Tree Community Wellness Center in Lone Tree. Invitational letters were sent to all property owners within an approximately half-mile radius of the original plat of Lone Tree (Appendix B: Map 3). Nineteen attendees participated in the meeting including County Supervisors Lisa Green-Douglass and Pat Heiden, and officials from the Johnson County Conservation Board, the City of Lone Tree, and the Lone Tree School District. Josh Busard, director of Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability; and Luke McClanahan, assistant planner; facilitated the meeting.

McClanahan reviewed the planning process and the intent of establishing a village plan. Background information was presented about the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan and other village plans that have been adopted by the Board of Supervisors. Staff and participants additionally discussed the history and demographics of River Junction. The current zoning was also discussed ([Appendix B: Map 5](#)).

Busard then led the group in a discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of River Junction. The group also brainstormed goals for the community. The participant's responses were documented and have been incorporated into the goals and vision statement for the Village Plan ([Appendix C](#)).

Meeting Two

The second public meeting was held on August 8, 2019, also at the Lone Tree Community Wellness Center. Letters were sent to all recipients of the first letter, as well as additional participants at the first meeting who provided their addresses. Eighteen attendees participated in the second community meeting, including several area residents who did not attend the first meeting. The meeting was again facilitated by Josh Busard and Luke McClanahan. McClanahan provided an overview of the first meeting and explanation of the intent of village planning. Next, draft goals and a vision statement of the village plan were presented to the group, which was followed by discussion about revisions needed.

The final portion of the meeting involved reviewing and discussing three proposed village boundaries for River Junction. The first proposal, consisting of 68 acres, included part of the original village plat. The second proposal (124 acres) included additional parcels along River Junction Road SE and Otter Creek Road SE. One additional parcel on the north side of Highway 22 was included for the third proposed boundary (138 acres). The 68-acre proposal was preferred according to a show of hands by the group.

Village of River Junction Vision Statement

The Village of River Junction will continue to be a quiet, rural community. Agricultural land and recreational areas will be protected, while limited single-family residential and low-intensity commercial development may occur in a manner that respects the village's historic character and follows the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan.

Village of River Junction Goals

Quality of Life

- Uphold the community's quiet, rural lifestyle where people take care of each other.
- Maintain and enhance the community cemetery and existing recreational amenities at River Junction Access and Walker Park.
- Preserve River Junction's sense of history by honoring both the Native American presence that once existed in the area and the railroad system that helped build the community.
- Investigate and work to resolve nuisance violations affecting the community's safety and aesthetics, such as junk piles.
- Follow policies to ensure safe and well-attended village events.

Land Use and Growth

- Give preference to infill development that utilizes historically zoned or platted land, and is in keeping with the historic character of the village.
- Enable limited single-family residential development on larger lots.
- Give preference to low-density development. Preferred zoning density is R-Residential or R2-Residential.
- Allow for low-intensity businesses that support the local community and are compatible with historic development.

Infrastructure and Services

- Improve road conditions and signage on River Junction Road SE and other roads in the village.
- Ensure the County maintains the current quality of snow removal services.
- Improve culverts and road drainage around the village.
- Ensure River Junction continues to be a safe neighborhood.

Natural Resources and Agriculture

- Protect open space, wetlands and native timber while honoring and supporting agricultural uses and low-density development.
- Consider opportunities that may arise through the Iowa River Water Trail Plan or other efforts to enhance river protection in addition to access and use of the river.

Village of River Junction Boundary

The village boundary (Map 3), which includes 138 acres, lies within the jurisdictions of the Lone Tree Community School District and Lone Tree Fire & Rescue. Proposed development applications within the village boundary will be considered more favorably if the proposals align with the stated goals and vision statement of the River Junction Village Plan. Current zoning designations ([Appendix B: Map 5](#)) will remain in place and any requests to rezone a property must be initiated by the property owner.

Map 3: River Junction Village Boundary

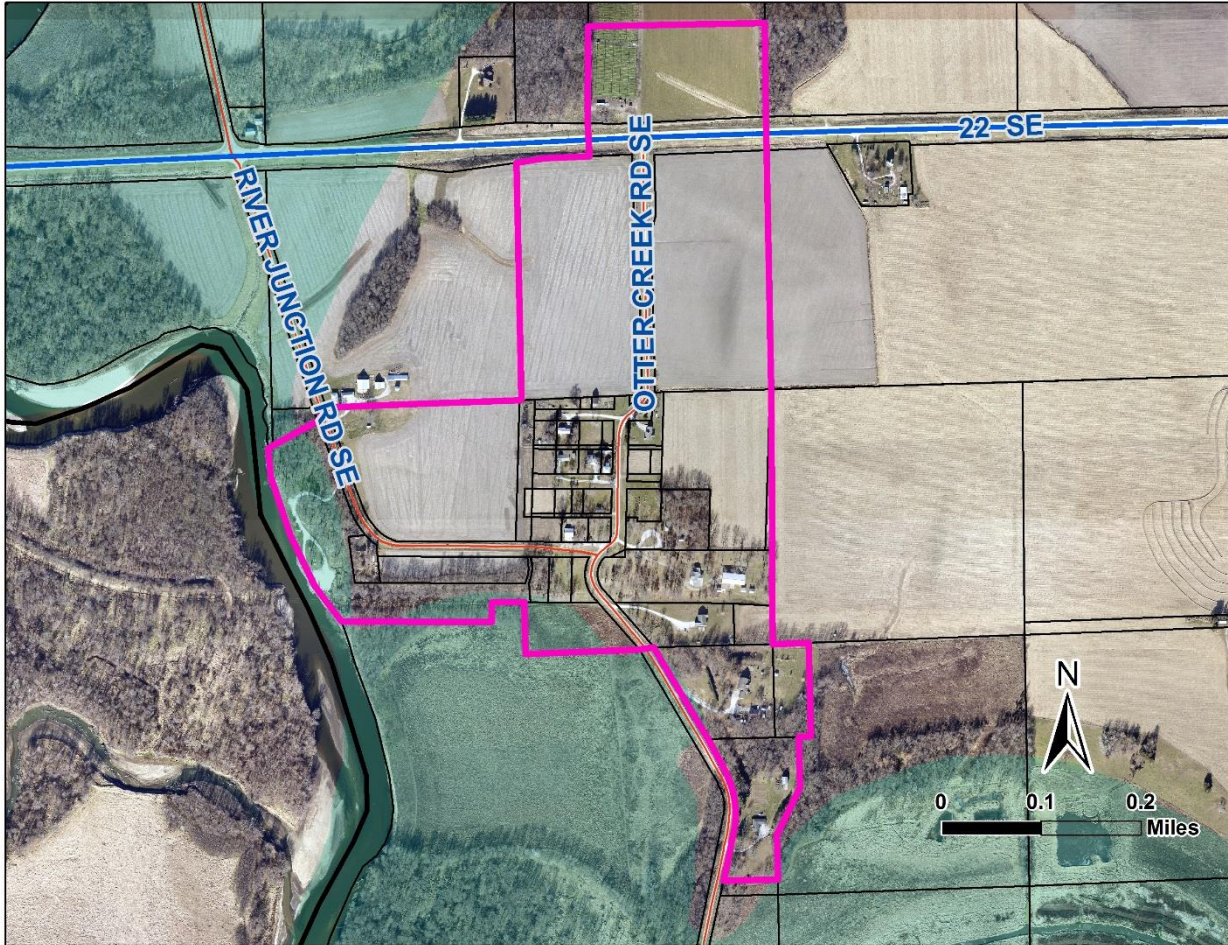


Figure 6: Adopted Village Boundary for River Junction

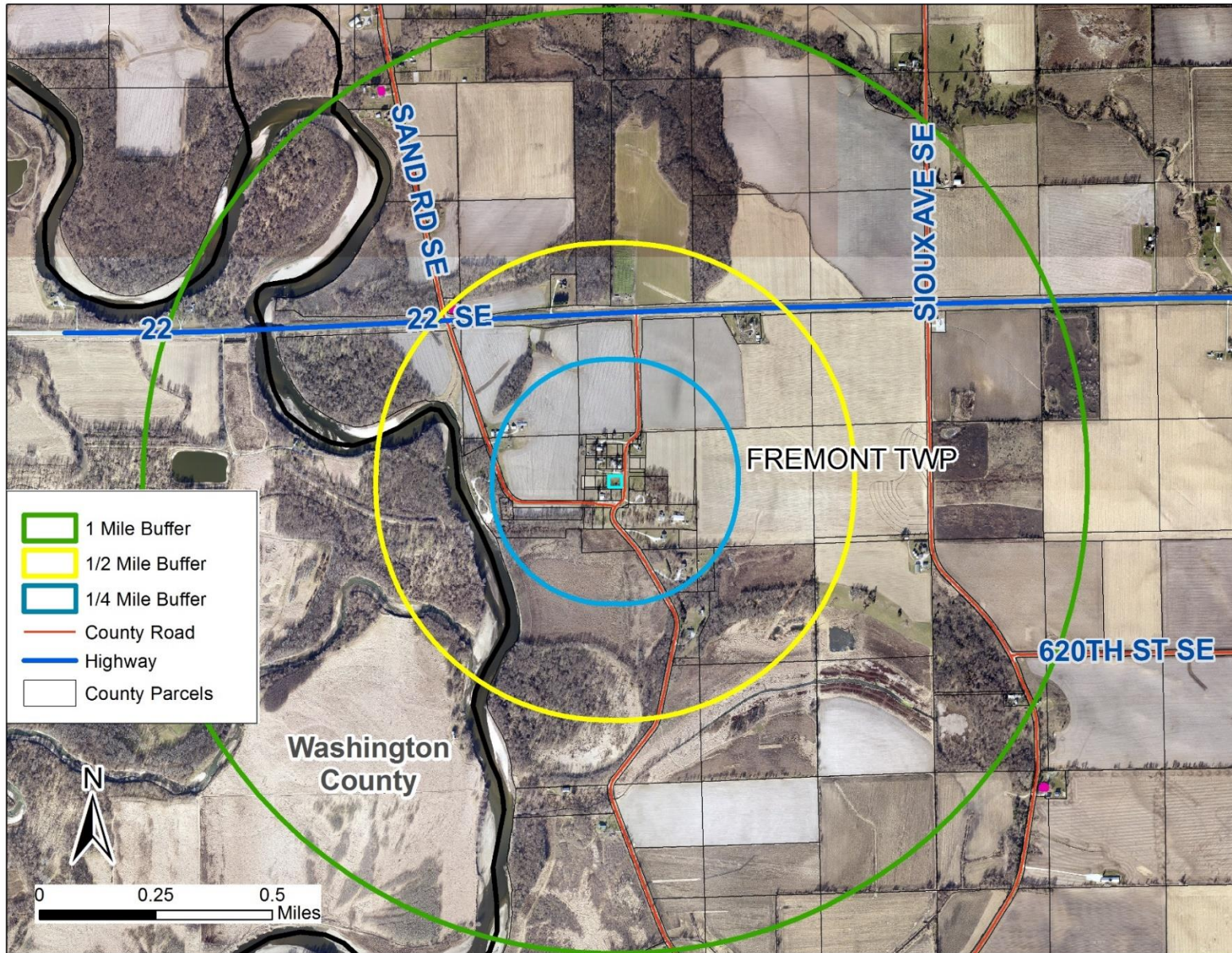
Appendix A: Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan: References to Village Planning

[The Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan Volume 1: Plan and Map](#) provides a basis for accommodating appropriate development and balancing preservation goals in unincorporated villages throughout the county. The Comprehensive Plan includes several priorities and/or goals, strategies and action steps related to village planning:

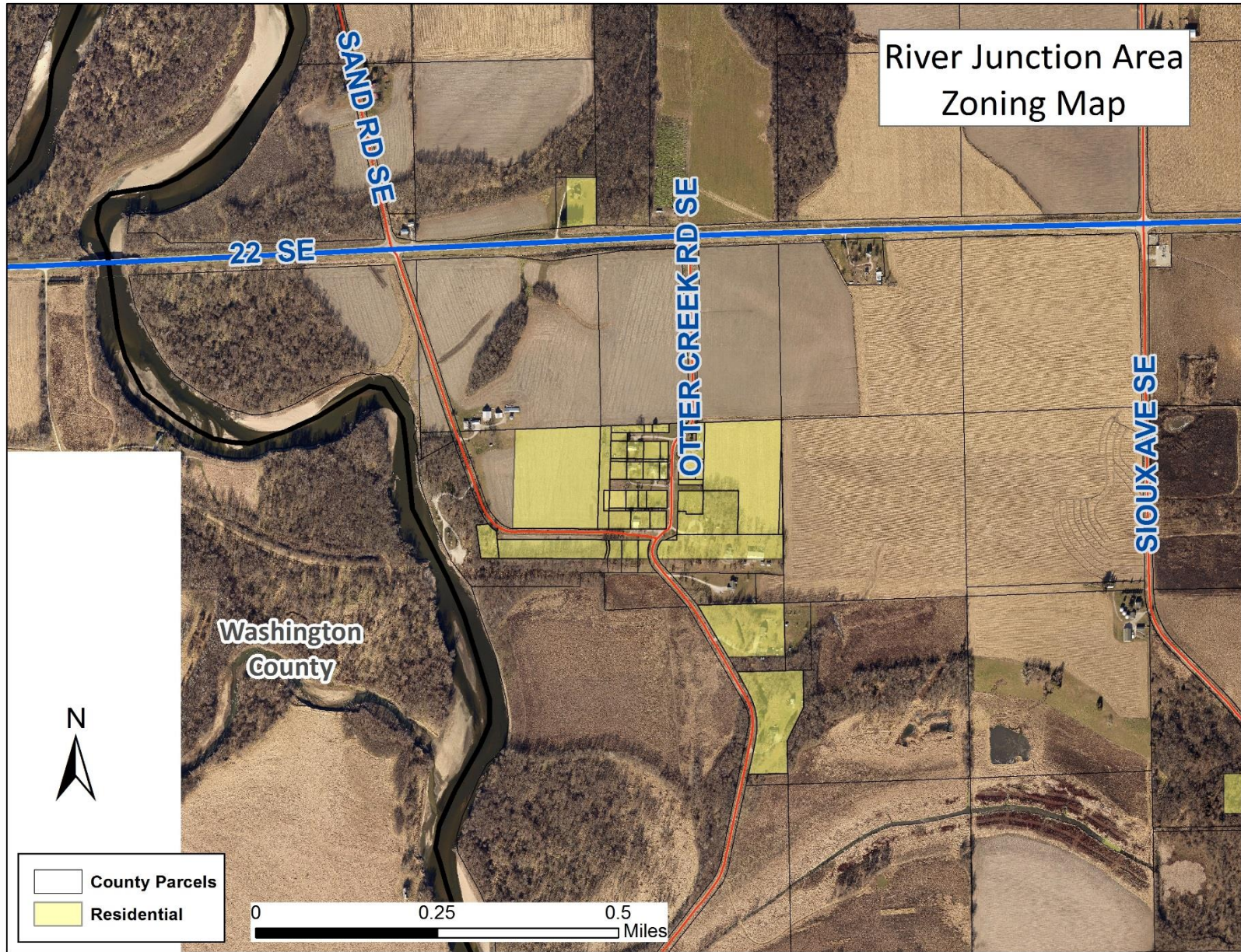
- The priorities discussed in Sustainability (Section 2.2) and Land Use (Section 5.5) identify preservation of the County's environmentally sensitive areas and farmland as a high priority. To minimize sprawl and unwanted residential growth in rural areas of Johnson County, a key strategy is to encourage growth in cities and unincorporated villages.
- The priorities in Local Economy (Section 3.2) state that while higher intensity commercial and industrial development should be located in or adjacent to cities, "there is interest in siting lower intensity nonresidential uses in rural areas with existing commercial or industrial uses, near unincorporated villages, at major intersections, and within two-mile fringe areas of the incorporated cities" (p. 68 of the comprehensive plan).
- Local Economy Goal 4 includes strategy 3, thus focuses on directing, in conjunction with livability and compatibility, smaller-scale, less-intensive commercial and individual projects to cities, unincorporated villages, or economic development areas as identified on the Future Land Use Map. This strategy includes two action steps to (1) identify and review any proposed development opportunities within the unincorporated villages and to (2) engage residents and update village plans accordingly (p. 72 of the comprehensive plan).
- Under the Future Land Use Categories of the plan, the Village category includes unincorporated villages that contain developed land with "...a greater density than is found throughout rural and agricultural areas. Development in these areas should be in accordance with any adopted village plans" (p. 114 of the comprehensive plan).

Appendix B: Maps

Map 4: River Junction 1/4 Mile, 1/2 Mile, and 1 Mile Buffers



Map 5: Current Zoning Map of River Junction (2019)



Appendix C: Strengths and Weaknesses

River Junction's strengths and weaknesses were brainstormed by participants at the first planning meeting held on July 18, 2019 and reviewed at the second meeting (Figure 7) on Aug. 8, 2019. Both lists are provided below.



Figure 7: Eighteen participants attended the second River Junction village planning meeting. Photo credit: Johnson County PDS, 2019.

STRENGTHS

- Community spirit
- People help and care for each other
- Peaceful, quiet
- Good relationship between the Conservation Board and Fremont Township
- Two great parks (recreation amenities), river access, view of the Iowa River
- Well cared for cemetery
- Community events (fireworks, Settler's picnic, tractor show, bike ride)
- Residents are proud of the community's history (railroad), replica of settler's cabin at Walker Park
- Good agricultural land
- Good snow removal service by Johnson County Secondary Roads
- Safe neighborhood
- Small businesses, farming businesses
- Good school district
- Pet friendly
- Amount of wetlands, native timber
- Near Lone Tree and Iowa City
- Accessible via Highway 22
- Majority of septic systems are modern

WEAKNESSES

- Current condition of the bottom portion of Sand Road (bike safety issues)
- River Junction Road SE (referred to as main street) is a dirt road with dust issues
- Culverts are not maintained adequately
- Concerning rates of cancer around the area
- The 15 mph speed limit is often ignored, signage could be better
- Overgrown trees along ditches and in wetlands, visibility issues for traffic
- Presence of farm traffic
- Wetlands presents a maintenance issue
- Noise, safety concerns about gunshots nearby
- Presence of junk piles
- River Access Park is patrolled by Washington County