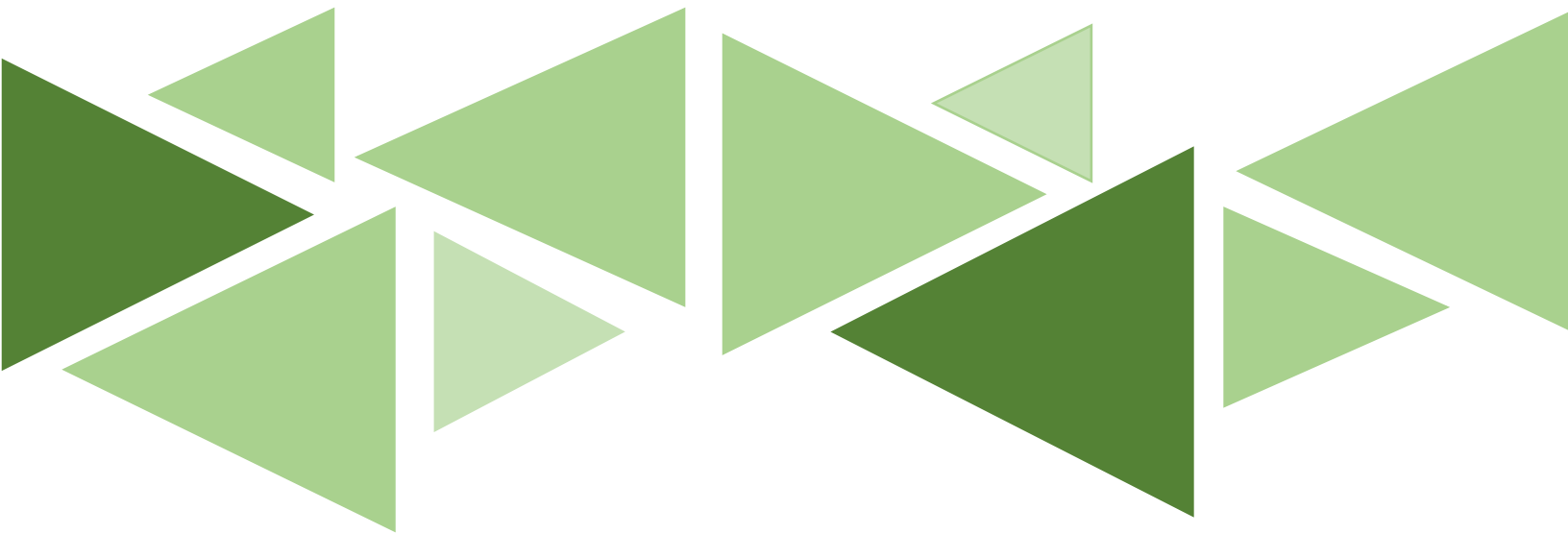


2022

JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

*Opportunities for the Unincorporated
Area, Villages and Smaller Towns*



THE BILL MENNER GROUP



Adopted: January 13, 2022

RESOLUTION NO. 01-13-22-07

RESOLUTION APPROVING THE 2022 JOHNSON COUNTY, IOWA, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN: OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UNINCORPORATED AREA, VILLAGES AND SMALLER TOWNS

WHEREAS Johnson County must take an innovative approach to equitable rural economic development and resilient communities by empowering them to identify, build, and leverage assets for economic advancement; and,

WHEREAS the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crisis, which started in 2020, exposed vulnerabilities and renewed the imperative to invest in rural communities; and,

WHEREAS Johnson County is committed to equitable economic development, which promotes the belief that all communities have the right to exist in a pollution-free, inclusive, and just economic environment that is free from persistent and systemic discrimination; and,

WHEREAS a goal of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan was to adopt an economic development plan; and,

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors' Strategic Plan includes several economic development goals; and,

WHEREAS the Johnson County Planning, Development, and Sustainability Department, at the direction of the Board of Supervisors and in consultation with The Bill Menner Group and the Economic Development Committee, has prepared the *2022 Johnson County, Iowa Economic Development Plan: Opportunities for the Unincorporated Area, Villages and Smaller Towns*; and,

WHEREAS the proposed plan lists recommendations and potential steps the County can take to expand business and employment opportunities, diversify the tax base and improve quality of life in Johnson County; and,

WHEREAS Johnson County, amongst several other efforts to solicit stakeholder input on the plan, hosted 31 different stakeholder entities during the Johnson County Rural Economic Development Stakeholder Meeting on July 13, 2021; and,

WHEREAS the Johnson County Planning and Zoning Commission, the Food Policy Council, and the Economic Development Committee have recommended approval of said plan; and,

WHEREAS, after careful consideration during a public hearing, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors finds that it is necessary to adopt the *2022 Johnson County, Iowa Economic Development Plan: Opportunities for the Unincorporated Area, Villages and Smaller Towns*.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors that the Board of Supervisors hereby adopts the *2022 Johnson County, Iowa Economic Development Plan: Opportunities for the Unincorporated Area, Villages and Smaller Towns*.

It was moved by Heiden and seconded by Green-Douglass the Resolution be adopted this 12th day of January, 2022.

Roll Call: Green Aye Green-Douglass Aye Heiden Aye Porter Aye Sullivan Aye


Royceann Porter, Chairperson
Board of Supervisors
01/13/2022
Date

ATTEST:

Travis Weipert, Auditor
Johnson County, Iowa

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAN PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW4

 Goal Highlights 6

INTRODUCTION7

 Plan Creation and Engagement..... 8

BACKGROUND8

 2020 Census by the Numbers 8

 Existing Industry, Laborshed and Transportation 9

 Strategic County Development Areas and Villages..... 11

 Grants and Other Economic Development Tools 12

 Roads and Infrastructure Investments..... 13

 Sustainability Policies, Programs and Investments..... 14

KEY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... 15

 Agriculture, Agritourism and Local Foods 15

 Broadband 18

 Economic Development Leadership 20

 Housing, Infrastructure, Partnerships and Resource Deployment 22

 Sustainability and Resilience 24

CONCLUSION26

APPENDICES28

 Appendix A: Johnson County Rural Economic Development Stakeholder Meeting..... 28

 Appendix B: Johnson County Demographic Data 33

 Appendix C: Major Industries in Johnson County 35

 Appendix D: Building Trade Members in Johnson County..... 36

 Appendix E: Strategic Economic Development Areas..... 37

 Appendix F: Johnson County Roadway and Structures Investments..... 45

 Appendix G: Economic Development Financing Tools 46

 Appendix H: Rural and Related Economic Development Resources 47

Acknowledgements

The Johnson County (JC) Planning, Development and Sustainability Department and The Bill Menner Group led this economic development plan initiative with the JC Economic Development Committee. We greatly appreciate the stakeholders who shared their time, experience and expertise: participants in the July 2021 JC Rural Economic Development Planning Stakeholder Meeting; participants in summer 2021 focus groups; JC Planning and Zoning Commission; JC Food Policy Council; JC Economic Development Committee; Iowa City Area Development Group; residents and members of the public who shared comments; elected officials of small towns; and JC Board of Supervisors staff and elected officials. Please see [Appendix A](#) for details on stakeholders and committee members. This report was prepared by The Bill Menner Group and JC Planning, Development and Sustainability Department staff: Josh Busard, director; Luke McClanahan, planner; and Becky Soglin, sustainability coordinator.

Note

In this document, the following convention is used:

- “County” (capitalized) refers to the Johnson County local government as a governing and service entity, including its elected officials and staff.
- “county” (lowercase) refers to the county as the place where people live, work or do business, visit and/or own property.

PLAN PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

Located in eastern Iowa, Johnson County is the second-fastest growing county in the state with a population of 152,854, including 21,884 in the unincorporated area (2020 U.S. Census). This growth presents both opportunities and challenges—and this plan intends to support the places, programming, and most of all the people, adding to the vitality of unincorporated Johnson County, its villages and smaller towns outside of the metro area.

The plan provides a framework for Johnson County local government to advance equitable economic development and opportunity for areas outside of the metro area: develop programs; build capacity for self-sustaining, long-term economic growth; leverage local assets; inform policy-making; and direct resources and technical assistance to specific areas based on community needs and goals. This plan will also build on existing local, regional, state and federal priorities and plans.

Several important principles and themes, which guided the development of this plan, will drive action:

- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Sustainability and resiliency
- Local foods
- Agritourism and rural tourism
- Village and small city partnerships

Equitable Economic Development

Johnson County is committed to Equitable Economic Development, which promotes the belief that all communities have the right to exist in a pollution-free, inclusive and just economic environment that is free from persistent and systemic discrimination. This can be achieved through comprehensive and community-engaged public action and investment that intentionally removes structural barriers and sustainably expands opportunities for all communities. Equitable economic action and planning includes these efforts:

- Use a community-responsive framework grounded in economic and environmental justice principles.
- Foster meaningful local participation, leadership, ownership and control, to include communications that consider both language and cultural assets.
- Invest in and strengthen local ecosystems, community capacity and assets via anchor institutions, public infrastructure and initiatives.
- Incorporate a robust reporting and evaluation framework that identifies, tracks and measures community benefits and equity outcomes.

Plan Focus

This plan focuses on the Johnson County unincorporated area, which includes nine villages and several established economic development growth areas (map p. 10). These areas are identified in the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan. This economic development plan also considers several of the smaller towns that are tied to certain of the recognized economic development areas and other growth areas. Adopting an economic development plan was one of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan goals. The County Board of Supervisors' Strategic Plan January 1, 2020 to June 30, 2022 also includes economic development goals.

In addition, and notably, the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic crisis, which started in 2020, exposed vulnerabilities and renewed the imperative to invest in rural communities. Johnson County must take an innovative approach to rural development and resilient communities by empowering them to identify, build and leverage assets for economic advancement. Collaborating with other jurisdictions and leveraging assets and expertise will be part of realizing certain goals in this plan and help create the best version of Johnson County for businesses and residents to call home and for visitors to enjoy. As noted earlier, "County" refers to the government entity of Johnson County and "county" refers to the county as a geographic and physical entity.

Goal Highlights

The plan elevates recommendations or potential steps the County can take to expand business and employment opportunities, diversify the tax base and improve quality of life.

The recommendations, which include approaches that are “trickle-up” and empower individuals and communities, include:

- Expand the partnership with the Iowa City Area Development (ICAD) Group for rural economic development, to include a rural-focused staff person.
- Leverage available debt capacity to drive local projects.
- Engage with *Think Iowa City* to promote agritourism destinations.
- Fund an economic development focused planner position in Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability.
- Explore the potential use of tax increment financing (TIF) or tax-abatement programs for business incentives, site development, energy incentives, rehab/adaptive reuse of buildings, or other purposes.
- Inventory broadband capabilities and assess various strategies to improve broadband connectivity.
- Invest to fill in gaps that currently prevent access to high-speed broadband.
- Conduct a countywide housing needs assessment.
- Develop and implement a detailed local foods plan, to include measures to support sustainability and resiliency.
- Create a local foods revolving loan fund; investigate creating a grant program.
- Partner with an existing microloan program, or create a new one, to support women, minority and immigrant entrepreneurs.
- Expand partnership opportunities with public and private entities, including rural electric and telephone cooperatives, rural water systems and private developers.
- Consider participating in the state-level Green Certified Sites for sustainable development.
- Learn how climate change may affect business practices and employment, and create an action plan based on findings to ensure resiliency, adaptation, creation of new jobs and training, and other measures.
- Ensure sustainability, resiliency and adaptation underlie other actions and policies related to economic development.
- Support actions that increase the County’s capacity to pursue federal funding and identify local, state and federal opportunities, including, but not limited to, historic preservation, community and small business support, and investments in the arts.

INTRODUCTION

Residents, visitors, organizations and businesses in Johnson County seem to agree: Location matters. The presence of a Big Ten university, including a world-class hospital and medical research facility, as well as retail, recreational opportunities, arts, culture and other amenities make the county a desirable location to live, work and play.

From the Old Capitol in downtown Iowa City, it is a mere 20 miles to the village of Sutliff in the northeast corner of the county. Head northwest from downtown Iowa City, and it is 18 miles to Swisher, the same distance to the village of Joetown in the southwest. From Iowa City to Lone Tree, it is just 16 miles. Depending on traffic, an individual can typically get from any point in the county to downtown Iowa City in 20 to 25 minutes, while it might be up to 35 minutes from just a few locations.

In the case of Johnson County, location equals proximity. And in the mind of many, proximity equals access. But that's not always the case. Residents in some parts of unincorporated Johnson County wonder about access to healthy food, whether from a grocery store or a local grower. Access may require a 20- to 25-minute drive. Others cite a need for child care, even though state estimates indicate a 25% increase in the number of child care spaces in the county. Still others need high-speed internet. State maps tell them they have broadband service, but speed tests indicate those maps are wrong.

In the fast-growing metropolitan areas within Johnson County, services, resources and technical assistance can generally be found. Housing, both owner-occupied and rental, tends to be available but increasingly expensive. Support for businesses and entrepreneurs exists on multiple fronts. Recreational opportunities are relatively accessible and exist across the county. Trail systems are expanding, providing opportunities for cyclists to connect to regional trails that connect multiple counties.

Despite the proximity to these resources that exist in Johnson County, there are opportunities to improve the access for residents outside of the metro. This plan will highlight those opportunities, strategies for consideration and actions that can enhance the places outside the metro core. It will also underscore the role of county government—and the partnerships that exist within the county—in helping to drive meaningful change. That may include engaging those partners in new ways, supporting the development of new efforts, and adjusting approaches based on new information.

In rural Johnson County, agriculture plays a preeminent role. It's easy to sit near a farm field just miles from downtown Iowa City and have no reason to expect an urban area is so close. Agricultural land, in fact, still accounts for 72% of all land in the county (81% of unincorporated land) and its economic impact can't be understated. For that reason, this economic development plan has an eye toward preserving farmland and providing opportunities for producers through new markets, technologies and value-adds. It also acknowledges the value

of easy, affordable access to healthy, locally sourced foods and the economic impact of agriculture that doubles as a tourism destination.

Other key considerations for the rural places in Johnson County are the ability to develop business ventures, especially in the local food and agritourism space; improve sustainability and resilience; and expand development opportunities and outreach to diverse partners and entrepreneurs while providing key services that make life better in townships and small cities. But these are tasks that usually require capacity, both human and financial, and those assets are sometimes less available in more rural places. Johnson County has the chance to address those issues and support the people, businesses and organizations located in the townships, villages and cities outside of the metro area.

Plan Creation and Engagement

The planning process for this plan took nearly one-and-a-half years with an Economic Development Committee providing guidance and working with a contracted consultant, The Bill Menner Group. Notably, work was partly delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a challenge that underscored the importance of ensuring resiliency in communities, institutions, businesses and households.

A July 2021 stakeholder input meeting brought together more than 40 representatives from businesses, nonprofit organizations and other groups as well as nearly 20 County staff and appointed and elected officials (please see [Appendix A](#) for meeting details). In addition, approximately a dozen individualized discussions by the consultant with smaller towns, stakeholders and businesses in the unincorporated areas contributed valuable insights. Review by the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Food Policy Council took place on November 8, 2021, and November 15, 2021, respectively, and the plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors on January 13, 2022.

BACKGROUND

2020 Census by the Numbers

Since its founding more than 175 years ago, Johnson County has seen consistent population growth. With the exception of 1890, Johnson County's population has increased in every decennial census. The population has increased by nearly 18% each decade since 1970 and has nearly doubled to 152,854 since 1990 (78,735). The 17% growth from 2010 to 2020 was primarily a function of expansions in the metro core, which now includes the fast-growing cities of Coralville, North Liberty and Tiffin. Other areas of Johnson County—both smaller municipalities and townships/unincorporated areas—have also seen their populations increase. From 2010 to 2020, Solon's population jumped 48%, Shueyville increased by 27%, and Hills by 23%. But the number of residents in those cities remains relatively small when considered countywide, with the combined populations of the three cities barely exceeding 4,500.

At the same time, Johnson County's 21 townships (unincorporated) collectively remained stable in population from 2000 to 2020, although the population of the unincorporated areas has grown by 28% when comparing data from 1980 to 2020. While new houses were built, annexations of these territories offset new residential population.

Not surprisingly, unincorporated townships with population gains (e.g., Big Grove and Jefferson) occurred in places targeted as residential development areas within the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan, reflecting strategies dating back to 1982 when new housing development was directed toward certain parts of the county's growth areas. The Swisher/Highway 965 area is intended for primarily commercial and industrial development, so its housing growth is less than growth seen in some other areas.

For Johnson County, the key finding of the 2020 U.S. Census is one of overall growth. However, although Johnson County is listed as "prosperous" in the Economic Innovation Group [Distressed Communities Index](#) as of November 2021, it still has income and wealth disparities, including a 17.8% poverty rate (share of individuals living below the federal poverty line). This rate and related conditions, such as food insecurity, motivate economic development planning.

As the county grows both rural and urban, it is becoming increasingly diverse. The 2020 U.S. Census data show that the percentage of people who reported their race as "White alone" changed from 86% in 2010 to 77% in 2020. In addition, the percentages of the population identifying solely as Black, Asian, American Indian / Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islanders were 8.4%, 5.6%, .2%, and .03% respectively. Nearly 6.4% of the population identified as two or more races. The Hispanic and Latino population (of any race) was 10,198 or nearly 6.7% of the population. Data from the 2018 American Community Survey indicated that approximately 11% of Johnson County's population were immigrants. (For additional demographic details, please see [Appendix B](#).) A story map of Black-owned businesses in Johnson County, created in summer 2021, also points to increasing diversity of entrepreneurship and businesses. The opportunity presented is to help all residents have equitable access to resources and amenities so they can be part of Johnson County success stories.

Existing Industry, Laborshed and Transportation

Johnson County has five primary industry clusters driving employment and innovation: education tech and assessment, medical and biotech, manufacturing, local foods and consumer packaged goods, and finance (see [Appendix C](#) for more information).

Of all these industry clusters, manufacturing and local foods are most likely to be part of future economic development growth in the unincorporated areas. Regionally there are several food ingredient, insurance, and logistics and distribution companies, which could provide related support to important industries in Johnson County.

The most frequently posted job openings in the area reflect the strong presence of these clusters or anchors. In addition, the Johnson County laborshed extends far beyond its borders,

encompassing much of southeast Iowa as well as adjoining regions. There is no Johnson County specific laborshed report because the relevant data are based on commuting patterns into a specific employment center, which is Iowa City in the case of Johnson County. However, the findings can be applied to the county since the employment pool is similar.

The regional studies are based on the aggregated results of individual laborshed studies in a region (e.g., Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, Monticello, etc.). The overall findings show the Iowa City laborshed is located within 50-miles of the following metropolitan labor market areas: Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Dubuque and Waterloo/Cedar Falls. The size of that laborshed demonstrates both the workforce needs of Johnson County employers and the relative rurality of the eastern third of Iowa.

Meeting workforce needs is a challenge confronting the entire state. There are efforts underway through state workforce centers, community colleges and K-12 districts, and among employers themselves to train future workers and embed them earlier in the workplace. Apprenticeships and trade-focused training are critical to students seeking alternatives to traditional four-year colleges, and Johnson County government is already exploring ways to collaborate on offering livable wages and quality apprenticeships and trades training. Of note, the building trade members in Johnson County number 461 including 105 electricians, 97 plumber/pipefitters and 83 carpenters (see [Appendix D](#) for a complete listing).

Johnson County benefits from its location along the state's transportation grid. Interstate 80, Interstate 380 and Highway 218 bisect the county, making it ideally situated for business development and workforce access. The county is located in the Iowa City–Cedar Rapids Corridor, also known as "ICR Iowa." The county also borders the south side of the City of Cedar Rapids. Residents have easy access to the Eastern Iowa Airport, as well as general aviation services at the Iowa City Airport. Conversations on expanding passenger rail focus on two lines, the Iowa Interstate line that runs east-west across Johnson County and the Union Pacific line that also runs east-west through Linn County, both of which could open new options for residents and businesses seeking to connect to urban centers in other states.

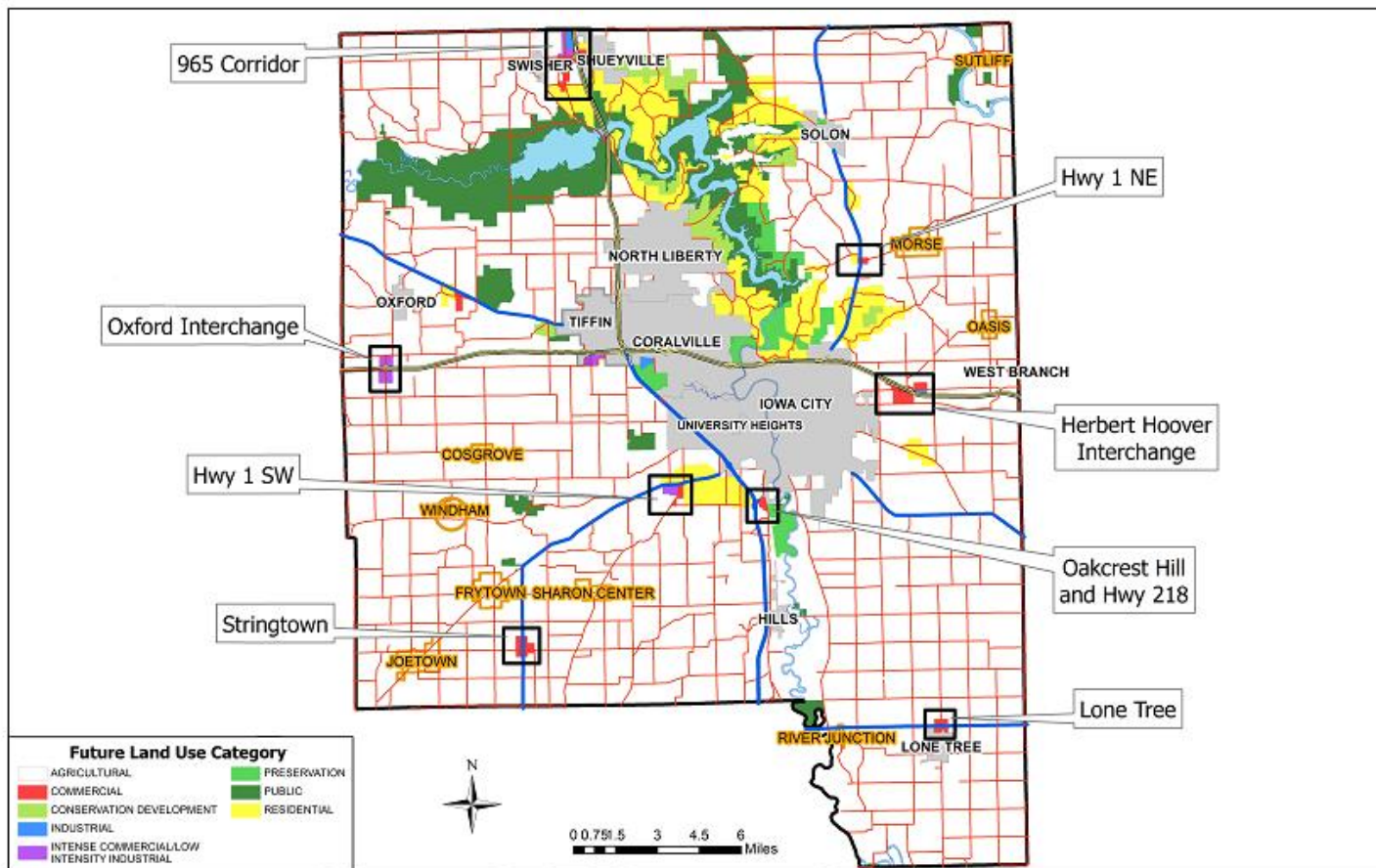
Strategic County Development Areas and Villages

Johnson County local government has identified strategic economic development areas within the county to drive policies and implementation. In addition, of the nine unincorporated villages, eight have land use plans that allow, to varying degrees, for commercial and residential development. Villages are clusters of historical residential and commercial development that remain part of the unincorporated area.

Within unincorporated Johnson County, there are several key locations identified for expansion of commercial and industrial uses. These areas are identified on the Future Land Use Map of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan and share common characteristics that make them ideal locations to establish new businesses or expand existing firms. However, several challenges exist to sustain these areas and help them mature. These are the areas:

- Highway 965/380 Corridor
- Herbert Hoover Interchange
- Highway 1 NE Area
- Highway 1 SW Area
- Oak Crest Hill Road/218 Intersection
- Oxford Interchange
- Stringtown Area
- Lone Tree

Location Map - Strategic Economic Development Areas and Villages



The characteristics described below—strengths, assets and challenges—generally apply to most of the economic development areas. For a detailed analysis and map of each area, please see [Appendix E](#).

Strengths and assets of these areas:

- Accessible from major State roads (I-80, I-380, Hwy 1 and Hwy 218)
- Near population centers
- Access to public services (e.g., emergency management services), existing infrastructure and other businesses
- Access to available, skilled workforce
- Highly visible to would-be customers and visitors and/or located on highly traveled roads
- Contain established businesses and some historic and/or existing commercial or industrial zoning
- Contain significant acreage that could be rezoned to commercial or industrial districts

Complexities and challenges for these areas:

- Some properties need to be cleaned up; storage of equipment should be orderly and neat.
- Existing buildings and infrastructure may need to be updated or renovated.
- Development may require complex collaboration with nearby cities, or concerns may come from nearby property owners.
- Cost and/or type of required infrastructure needed (e.g., roads, stormwater basins, septic systems, wells) may discourage new development from occurring.
- Possibility of annexation may discourage development in the short-term.
- The rural setting or periphery of the cities may not be desirable or appropriate for certain businesses.
- Most are not readily served by public transit and/or recreation trails.
- There is a historical lack of investment by public and private development entities.

Grants and Other Economic Development Tools

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors has provided [grants for economic development and quality of life projects](#), though not necessarily directed exclusively at the specific development areas in the unincorporated area. Awarded annually since fiscal year 2015, the grants have totaled nearly \$3.6 million. Those grants could provide a blueprint for some future action in this arena, as the strategic impact of the grants has been fairly minimal to date. To address this issue, County staff are revising the program into a competitive opportunity for new and existing applicants. The changes will provide quality improvement and make evaluation, decision-making and reporting more informed and robust. The Board of Supervisors Office grants team is led by a grants coordinator and provides support to departments, initiatives and programs.

The County's **Economic Development** Grant Program has sought to achieve the following goals:

- Maintain a fiscally responsible County budget;
- Support general economic development goals as identified in the Comprehensive Plan and to promote rural economic development in particular;
- Create/encourage public/private partnerships;
- Increase and diversify the tax base;
- Maintain or improve the standard of living; and/or
- Improve workforce opportunities for Johnson County residents.

Investments in this economic development-focused program include grants to the Iowa City Area Development Group, Field to Family (a local foods non-profit), the Johnson County Agricultural Association (an entity separate from Johnson County government), and the Workplace Learning Connection at Kirkwood Community College among others.

Meanwhile, the County's **Quality of Life** Grant Program considers these objectives:

- Improve the quality of life for county residents;
- Become a more livable community;
- Maintain a fiscally responsible County budget; and/or
- Create or encourage public/private partnerships.

Quality of Life grants have been awarded to the Johnson County Historical Society, Rural Health & Safety of Eastern Iowa, and the Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County among others. The grants team has the knowledge and capacity to continue its current work building capacity in the rural areas.

Economic development dovetails with quality of life in many regards, impacting workforce, housing, job creation and overall livability. But the investments necessary to drive change and build opportunity are much greater than have been made in the past. A recent example is the adoption of the Naples Avenue **Urban Revitalization** District Plan on Dec. 22, 2021. The plan will allow for property tax abatements for commercial and industrial properties in the area to stimulate economic development and leverage other state grants. The Planning, Development and Sustainability Department worked on this effort in response to a specific local industry request, demonstrating the sort of responsiveness an economic development plan can further foster.

Roads and Infrastructure Investments

Johnson County maintains approximately 320 Farm-to-Market route miles and a total of 920 miles of secondary roads, along with 1,840 miles of roadside vegetation and ditches and thousands of culverts. There are 217 bridges longer than 20 feet, which require bi-annual review.

The Iowa DOT County Five-Year Program and Maintenance Rehabilitation Program for 2020-2024 totaled nearly \$10.5 million with nearly \$1.3 million coming from local and bond sources.

Trail investments and connections have also been significant such as the Mehaffey Bridge connection completed in 2019. Details on roadway and structures investments from fiscal years 2016–2020 can be found in [Appendix F](#).

Sustainability Policies, Programs and Investments

Johnson County considers sustainability and related economic development when creating or updating ordinances, programs and funding opportunities. Johnson County has a soil and water conservation coordinator and a sustainability coordinator, both full-time, and additional staff with related responsibilities. Sustainability benefits and outcomes can range from preserving sensitive environmental areas to ensuring the ongoing viability of businesses, agricultural operations and recreational areas. But environmental benefits can go far beyond simply protecting fragile lands.

For example, in an effort to support renewable energy, Johnson County recently updated its utility-scale solar ordinance to align with best practices and adopted a new battery energy storage systems ordinance. Reducing fossil-fuel use will have a dramatic impact on climate change, and demonstrating a commitment to renewable energy facilities may attract firms that value sustainability.

An adopted floodplain ordinance helps prevent property loss or damage for residents and businesses in the unincorporated area and contributes to stream health. In addition, soil erosion and slope preservation policies ensure stormwater runoff does not create environmental and costly problems at commercial and industrial sites, subdivisions and manufactured housing parks, or on parcels with certain conditionally permitted uses. As a member of the Iowa Stormwater Educational Partnership, Johnson County provides increased access to technical resources for communities, businesses and individuals. Review of stormwater plans and erosion and sediment control plans, along with sensitive areas reporting, is an important part of the subdivision and permitting process. Johnson County also has representatives on several watershed management authorities.

Sustainability has been an important part of County operations since 2009 when leadership decided Johnson County should first act internally before encouraging residents and businesses to do so—progress was made in resource use reduction, recycling, energy savings and more. For the general public and employees, the Johnson County Green Team started hosting many educational events, including an energy fair, where local utilities and Rural Electric Cooperative shared information, and presentations on electrical vehicles, solar and wind energy, stormwater, and alternative transportation among various topics.

In 2016, external-facing efforts increased with a new program to provide sustainability grants to Social Services grant recipient organizations that work primarily in Johnson County. The grants help recipients make buildings or operations more sustainable and/or energy efficient, reduce operating costs and improve bottom lines. Nine nonprofit organizations have used 12 grants totaling nearly \$106,000 for improvements such as LED lighting upgrades, added insulation or

modernized HVAC. For every \$5 the County invested, another \$2 was earned by the organizations in rebates.

In addition, Johnson County hosted three solar group buys in 2018, 2019 and 2021 with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association. People throughout the county learned about solar energy and had the opportunity to add it at discount to their home, business or farm. The programs used local or regional installers, and 147 participants in Johnson County added nearly 1,635 kW of solar to their properties. Energy efficiency and conservation programs and related resiliency efforts remain an opportunity for the unincorporated areas and smaller towns.

KEY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the population growth and the strategic investments, there are barriers to development in Johnson County's unincorporated areas and small municipalities. Some barriers are a simple function of a lack of capacity due to smaller community scope and scale and current staff levels in local government. Other concerns relate to investments that flow to more urban areas, and yet others still can be attributed to a free market system (e.g., supply and demand).

Communications, Marketing and Education

For all the key issues and recommendations presented in this section, communications, marketing and education will be essential. In some cases, reaching out and connecting with others will mean addressing both language and cultural barriers and needs. Using many different platforms (social media, etc.) and venues (meeting people at their locales) will be part of intentional and ongoing outreach. The goal is to do more than just provide information—to determine needs and make sure people are engaged. Two economic development positions are proposed in the recommendations below—one in ICAD and one in PDS. It will be important to have accessible and easy ways for stakeholders to engage.

Agriculture, Agritourism and Local Foods

Johnson County is a recognized leader in Iowa when it comes to local foods, thanks to a strong base of local farmers and their leadership. The presence of a Food Policy Council and a full-time local foods coordinator puts Johnson County ahead of almost every other Iowa county. In addition, the demand for locally sourced foods is strong in Johnson County and the prioritization of it by elected officials has had clear impacts.

From a production agriculture perspective, the County's dedication to good planning that protects and preserves farmland has proven effective. Random, unplanned development that sprawls into and takes over productive agricultural land would have a significant, negative economic impact on Johnson County. Building on the 2018 Comprehensive Plan, the County has maintained a focus on recognized residential, commercial and industrial growth areas.

Johnson County has provided farming opportunities at its Historic Poor Farm located at the very edge of Iowa City. The farm's Land Access Program rents land to local food farmers, and the IC

Compassion Global Food Project, a community garden and building project at the farm, are centered on the needs and aspirations of refugee and immigrant growers. Grow: Johnson County, led by Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development (IVRC&D) at the Historic Poor Farm, addresses food insecurity through charitable food production (additional info about IVRC&D is below). The county also enjoys a robust network of local foods advocates.

Field to Family is a non-profit local foods-focused organization operating a food hub that has received County funding and supports farm to school efforts. This important network currently focuses on wholesale locally grown products and includes 36 institutions, 22 wholesale growers and 35 market growers. Among the institutions, several are based in the unincorporated area including two restaurants, a daycare/preschool, a mobile food pantry and schools. Half of the wholesale growers and just over one-third of the market growers are located in the unincorporated area. Field to Family created an Online Farmers Market for low-contact direct to consumer sales to meet market shifts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Field to Family also created and maintains the Local Food Guide, an online and print resource for community members to find local farms and products (available at <https://localfoodsolutions.org/>).

Iowa Valley Resource Conservation & Development is a non-profit, multi-county organization that has led regional foods efforts including introductory farm training and local food procurement for area schools. IVRC&D plays an important role in diversity and inclusion of farming and shared facilities, including, as noted above, through its Grow: Johnson County program at the County Historic Poor Farm, all of which also need to be considered in economic planning.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, including eight located in the unincorporated area, play an important role in Johnson County by supplying vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, dairy, honey, flowers and other locally grown products. CSAs provide farmers with a certain amount of security and customers with access to fresh, seasonable produce, according to the Field to Family CSA guide, which is updated annually ([2021 version](#)). Farms offering CSA shares in Johnson County have made locally grown products more accessible through offering EBT/SNAP payment options, sliding scale payment models and partnerships with food access agencies to raise funds for cost-reduced shares.

Open Gates is a growing, for-profit company that produces organic dairy goods, runs a destination retail operation (Kalona Creamery) and serves as a distribution hub for local producers to sell wholesale goods and for local producers to package their goods (e.g., hummus and barbeque sauce). This type of success can be a multiplier and harnessed to advance other economic development. And there are many local producers with roadside stands or a presence at farmers' markets. The producers have demonstrated that fruits, vegetables and processed goods have a strong local market.

Bringing together these partners and others in affiliated roles to improve, promote and expand the existing system is a necessary step. Providing new resources to drive that initiative,

recognizing that the economics of local production and health implications of local access are not mutually exclusive, is also required if progress is to occur. These partnerships can include the creation of retail establishments (possibly even mobile) to increase food access in rural areas where the loss of grocery stores is sorely felt (e.g., Lone Tree). A robust local foods plan can determine the specific ways to meet these challenges. Efforts can involve the organizations mentioned above, other entities and partnerships with cities.

Agritourism, meanwhile, presents an array of opportunities and challenges for producers, destination owners and policymakers. As has been demonstrated by successful operations such as distilleries and you-pick operations, ag-based attractions can bring in customers from outside of the county. There is the potential to turn what is currently a handful of destinations into a countywide industry with many players celebrating local products and byproducts. Any expansion must be done thoughtfully. Thoughtfully planned and regulated expansion of the agritourism sector can have a positive, quality-supporting effect for Johnson County's producers, destination owners, visitors and the entire agritourism industry in Johnson County. While the state has taken many tools away from local government to regulate agricultural experiences (ag tourism), one way to ensure success is to promote the County's new agritourism zoning district, which ensures quality site development.

Partners who promote local foods and agritourism destinations include, but are not limited to, Field to Family, Iowa City Area Development Group, and Johnson County Food Policy Council. Johnson County Planning, Development and Sustainability Department, along with the Department of Public Health, provide technical support. There is a sense among some of the destinations themselves, however, that they don't get all the support they need. And there is agreement that the potential to build the agritourism industry to include other destinations, especially the Stringtown area, is tremendous.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Agriculture, Agritourism and Local Foods

Capitalizing on local foods, agriculture and agritourism, the County can be most impactful by targeting resources, making strategic investments, and promoting producers and their places in accordance with development regulations to protect the public's health, safety and welfare. Accomplishing all this, plus related local foods goals such as local food processing and land access, will **require creating and implementing a detailed local foods plan and building a clear pathway for collaboration**. This plan will also build upon existing strategic and comprehensive planning documents and ensure rural residents are connected to programs, resources and funding.

Johnson County can partner with *Think Iowa City* to create a local branding initiative that highlights agritourism destinations, the remarkable organic producer presence and the Amish cultural footprint. Such an effort would be similar to the Bike Iowa City brand, enhancing and promoting businesses and destinations. This is a strategy that will require collaboration that brings new partners together and potentially leverages state resources such as Shop Iowa ([see](#)

[Appendix H](#)). Currently, *Think Iowa City* is focused on attractions and attractors in the metro area, driven primarily by the fact that its funding comes from hotel–motel tax receipts in Iowa City, Coralville and North Liberty. *Think Iowa City* is open to new partners and new targets.

Meanwhile, **the creation of a revolving loan and possibly a grant fund**—seeded by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors—could support local growers seeking to increase production, boost storage and enhance distribution. **A new partnership with a microloan program** such as Kiva, run by NewBoCo of Cedar Rapids or Solidarity Microfinance, from Iowa Community Capital of Des Moines, could provide transformational operating loans to woman, minority or refugee-owned agricultural and other ventures. The Iowa Pollinators Group is another example of an existing micro-lending organization. Details of the microloan program should be addressed in a local foods plan—the timely creation of such a plan is a primary recommendation of this economic development plan.

A balanced growth strategy that protects agricultural and natural resources while allowing for sensible growth is already part of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Given, the intersection of sustainability and adaptation with local food farming, processing and distribution, it should be a principle underlying all economic development, including local foods, policies and actions going forward.

Broadband

At the economic development stakeholder meeting held July 13, 2021, to discuss barriers and opportunities in rural Johnson County, broadband access was an oft-cited barrier. Some rural Johnson County residents have high-speed connectivity. Many do not. And figuring out who has what is incredibly complex due to inconclusive maps and overlapping service territories.

High-speed broadband access is not exclusively a rural issue. There are many urban residents for whom quality high-speed broadband is only a dream because they aren't served by a provider carrying those speeds or can't afford the prices that accompany the connectivity.

But across large sections of rural Johnson County, due to distance and/or population sparsity, many residents lack high-speed broadband (defined as 100MB up/100MB down/25 millisecond latency). That creates equity issues for education, telehealth, business viability and quality of life. There are a number of incumbent providers, from investor-owned companies such as Mediacom and Windstream to rural telecommunications cooperatives, including Kalona Cooperative Technology Company, Liberty Communications, Sharon Telephone Company and South Slope Cooperative Telephone Company (South Slope). Each has its own network, service territory and capacity plus desire to expand its footprint.

There is no doubt that the cost of broadband infrastructure is a barrier in rural areas. The cost of running fiber along a gravel road to serve a handful of potential customers is a losing proposition to many providers, much in the same way rural electrification was until the U.S. government got involved. That's why both Congress and the Iowa Legislature have created grant programs to incent rural broadband deployment.

In the summer of 2021, a \$100 million Iowa grant program awarded just over \$1 million to South Slope for fiber expansion in rural Tiffin. At the same time, however, the state rejected a \$1.89 million request from South Slope to serve areas around Solon and a \$1.45 million request from Sharon Telephone Company to lay fiber in areas around Lone Tree.

Across Iowa, municipalities, counties and regions are choosing to engage in this infrastructure issue. They have decided that some telecommunications companies—especially investor-owned firms for whom a return on investment is paramount—are not willing to provide appropriate broadband services. And these governments are doing the work themselves, either building and operating their own fiber network or building the system and leasing it to an operator. An even simpler model involves a version of the federal and state model: providing grant dollars to networks to incentivize rural infrastructure.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Broadband

A first step for Johnson County in improving broadband access is to **assess the providers, their territories, and plans for expansion and unserved or underserved areas remaining**. By working with existing providers, determining how to fill those gaps and the cost of doing so can be established. The County will be likely to take advantage of state and/or federal funding to carry out this project. It can also choose to make other strategic investments based on Board of Supervisors' priorities and desired outcomes.

At the time of this plan's creation, the County was issuing a Request for Proposals to advance broadband. The proposals sought would assess state grant applications for Johnson County census tracts that were rejected, determining the value of those requests to the residents in these areas, and working with the providers to identify other sources of funding (USDA, FCC, Iowa OCIO, etc.). This information would determine which areas still remain unserved or underserved and **facilitate a strategy to encourage or incent providers to fill those gaps**.

Given the importance of high-speed connectivity at this time and looking ahead, this is among the most impactful efforts the County will make. It will benefit workforce, education, healthcare, equity, entrepreneurship and overall quality of life for thousands of Johnson County residents.

But simply knowing who is connected and who isn't is just a start. The County must **lead a collaborative "broadband" coalition** that includes existing providers; neighboring entities with a desire to extend services into Johnson County; and communities, businesses and residents who see the significance of high-speed broadband. And it must be prepared to invest in the extension of those services, which is important to the long-time viability of places currently struggling with connectivity. American Rescue Plan Act dollars may provide some initial capital, but it's unlikely those dollars—even combined with state broadband grants and other federal sources—will provide the necessary incentives to improve broadband. **Johnson County's significant debt capacity would allow it to make transformational investments in high-speed broadband** in a broad partnership with both providers and customers.

Economic Development Leadership

Investment in economic development is the equivalent of planting a seed and watching a germination process that sometimes takes years to complete. Immediate returns are uncommon, but those who fail to invest risk falling behind in job creation, business retention, workforce development, community development and more.

Johnson County has a well-established economic development entity in the form of the Iowa City Area Development Group (ICAD). ICAD is the primary point of contact for state government, prospects, site selectors, developers and others looking to do business in the Johnson County area. ICAD also has partnered since 2017 with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance through ICR Iowa to attract business and support workforce development in a seven-county area. But ICAD, itself, acknowledges its staff capacity and their ability to serve the townships and small municipalities in Johnson County is limited.

Think Iowa City sometimes promotes rural destinations but is not primarily focused on the unincorporated areas. Other organizations, such as Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, and Iowa Farm Bureau, contribute to rural support. In addition, the East Central Iowa Council of Governments (ECICOG) engages in planning for a seven-county region, including Johnson County, and is just embarking on a new planning process. However, there is no one position or group that focuses on comprehensive economic support to the rural areas or to people, including those of diverse backgrounds, seeking opportunities in the unincorporated areas.

Johnson County's Planning, Development and Sustainability Department (PDS) plays a role in economic development through planning and zoning elements of proposed developments, aligning pieces that support local incentives and ensuring projects fit with permitted uses. The department also has ensured economic development goals are part of the County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan and provided process support for creating this economic development plan. Still, PDS is hampered by the lack of a formal economic development professional among its planners. Its internal processes have also been scrutinized by businesses and entrepreneurs seeking approval for projects and developments requiring County approval.

For stakeholders and policy makers in some rural parts of the county, economic development is something they hear about and hope for but lack the capacity to implement. Technical assistance may be only a phone call away but knowing who to call about what can be a challenge. In many rural areas of the state, an economic development organization or chamber of commerce does that work and provides that support. In Johnson County, the urban core can affect the access available to the rural perimeter. Oxford wants support for trails; Lone Tree needs help expanding housing; Swisher and Hills want to see businesses develop. In each case, elected officials, a city clerk and a handful of volunteers work to make things happen. Yet they collectively need the knowledge and capacity to act. At the same time, actions taken by small municipalities can have a positive impact on developments in the unincorporated areas nearby,

and efforts in the townships can support work in the rural cities. This interconnectedness, apparent in the adjoining metro areas, applies as well to the less populated parts of the county.

Johnson County has at least three options to change this dynamic and empower the smaller cities and townships: create a stand-alone economic development organization focused on providing technical assistance and other support to the townships and small municipalities; hire an economic development professional within PDS; and/or collaborate with ICAD to create a position focused on rural Johnson County.

The ICAD option could be modeled on the successful program Story County developed ten years ago in partnership with the [Ames Economic Development Commission](https://www.amesedc.com) (<https://www.amesedc.com>). That initiative has brought energy and vitality to areas of that county outside the Ames core and helped cities including Huxley, Slater and Story City. The dedicated staff person who directs Story County Community Outreach works with the eleven smallest communities that otherwise would not have an economic development specialist. This contract allows them to take advantage of resources that a larger organization has, while still receiving specialized service. Responsibilities include assistance with housing, filling of vacant commercial spaces, and increasing the number of industrial users to grow the tax base in these communities.

While a specific ICAD role in rural development can be transformational, so too could be the addition of a staff person within PDS to serve as a public liaison to those seeking to develop or expand as well as to the ICAD team as it navigates within villages, townships and rural municipalities. Regardless of who takes on the leadership role for the future of economic development in Johnson County, that organization and partners will be charged with a renewed focus on diversity, equity and inclusion within the County's economic development work. Special consideration should be given to a racial equity and economic development plan that is being developed by Astig Planning and funded by ICAD.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Economic Development Leadership

Expanding the partnership with ICAD to include a rural-specific staff person serving the unincorporated areas and small cities is a crucial step, especially if the alternatives can be seen as duplicative of existing resources. Johnson County is already an ICAD investor, and County staff work with the organization on a regular basis; indeed, the Board of Supervisors should remain as a voting member of ICAD. By increasing that investment to ensure needed services in the rural areas—and addressing issues such as technical assistance (legal, translation services, regulation guidance, etc.) beyond basic business recruitment and retention (housing, facilities, resources)—the County is taking a strategic step that embraces existing skillsets and builds on known partners.

ICAD has, itself, an existing partnership with the Cedar Rapids Metro Alliance. In addition, ICR Iowa is a regional collaboration that links the two metro areas. But between those two urban centers is a rural section of Johnson County poised for strategic growth. With a new emphasis

on rural, ICAD can leverage the proximity of places like Shueyville, Solon, Sutliff and Swisher in its regional collaboration with the Metro Alliance.

That ICAD partnership, on top of what would be a new relationship with *Think Iowa City* to promote food and agritourism, expands greatly the opportunities in Johnson County townships and small municipalities. And it begins to bring resources and capabilities into areas currently seeking assistance.

ICAD also has the capacity through its existing partnership to focus business and entrepreneurship opportunities for diverse populations. Other communities have created targeted revolving loan funds and microloan programs for minority and immigrant-owned businesses, start-ups and entrepreneurial ventures. As was suggested in the agriculture and local foods section of this plan, a new partnership with an existing microloan program such as Kiva, managed by NewBoCo of Cedar Rapids, or Solidarity Microfinance, housed in Iowa Community Capital of Des Moines, could provide transformational operating loans to woman, minority and/or refugee-owned ventures. Those businesses could be launched by rural county residents or serve those seeking to operate in the villages and unincorporated areas.

An ICAD role alone will not fill all of the business and entrepreneurial needs that exist in rural Johnson County. Stakeholders have expressed frustration with the regulations that exist and complain about complexity of the process. **Separate from the proposed ICAD position, an economic development planner within PDS could serve the joint role of public liaison for those planning projects** and work expeditiously with other County staff and County regulations as the position provides a supportive, goal-focused point-of-contact for ICAD's rural developers. That position would enhance the work and the efficiency for both organizations. Both the proposed ICAD and PDS positions should be sure to connect with Johnson County Extension and Outreach, leveraging that service's deep history and expertise in agriculture and rural development.

In collaboration with ICAD, PDS and others, **the County's grants leadership team can pursue federal, state and other funding** in the support of small business efforts and other projects.

Housing, Infrastructure, Partnerships and Resource Deployment

In many Iowa counties, finding housing developers is a struggle and building new homes, whether single-family or multi-family, is difficult. Balancing that development with existing land-use priorities, agricultural traditions and affordability is even more difficult.

That is also the case in Johnson County, though in a different way than occurs in smaller, less populated counties. The challenge Johnson County faces is affordability and, in some places, availability due to high demand.

The Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan provided important direction on the specific issue of housing development, from the need for a countywide housing needs assessment to

adherence to Future Land Use Development Guidelines. In addition, the Board of Supervisors' 2020–2022 strategic goals includes strengthening partnerships with affordable housing stakeholders.

Regarding the previously mentioned issue of local capacity, addressing housing needs is not something easily done by a single city clerk or part-time elected officials. The financial capacity of the smaller cities also poses challenges for strategic, sustainable housing development. Tax increment financing, tax abatement or other means by which governments encourage housing require local leaders to lean heavily on the expertise of bond counsel and sometimes the developers themselves. (See [Appendix G](#) for additional information on tax abatement, TIF and revolving loan funds.)

Incorporating the expertise of an entity like ICAD into the mix of technical assistance providers, housing advocates, housing staff at ECICOG, leaders at the Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County as well as PDS staff, positions the smaller cities for success. In addition, given how child care access also figures in to housing and work location choices, including child-care advocates and providers in that conversation can add insight and build capacity.

In some places, local elected officials have identified new housing development as a priority. But a lack of human and financial capacity prevents action. The gap between access to available land that is appropriately zoned, and other necessary resources, including infrastructure and debt capacity, is a barrier facing some small municipalities.

Johnson County, itself, could provide critical support to places seeking to develop housing and exploring other significant appropriate developments. A comparable existing strategy has been launched by Marion County in regard to projects in the cities of Knoxville and Pella. There, the county board of supervisors leveraged its debt capacity to invest \$4.7 million of the required \$5.6 million in infrastructure costs for a Pella subdivision that will add \$31 million in new valuation. The impact of that new debt is approximately \$1/month/\$100,000 residential valuation. In Knoxville, the Marion County leadership stepped in with \$11 million to pay for the demolition of the former VA Hospital to allow a proposed \$96 million development on that long-vacant site. The cost to property taxpayers is \$2/month/\$100,000 residential valuation.

Together, those investments obligated just over 11% of Marion County's available debt capacity. The Pella project might have eventually taken shape without Marion County's engagement. But the VA hospital campus demolition has been decades in the making. Without Marion County's leadership, it would likely remain abandoned for decades more. For comparison's sake, Johnson County is utilizing between 1% and 4% of its \$800 million in available debt capacity.

In another sense, Marion County has been strategic in its approach. It has been convening all of its communities on a quarterly basis to discuss projects and the county's potential role. Recognizing that there is a scale necessary to maximize the use of county debt capacity (\$1

million minimum), the supervisors there have been transparent about their willingness to partner with and support impactful projects in the municipalities.

Despite the obvious differences in population and overall assessed valuation, the Marion County approach can serve as a model for Johnson County as it considers opportunities for growth and development—both in the metro area and across the townships and smaller municipalities. Opportunities can range from a conceptual housing development in the northwest part of Lone Tree, one of the identified strategic areas in this plan, to the extension of the bike trail to Oxford to development near Frytown. In each case, the County can help make the project a reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Housing, Infrastructure, Partnerships and Resource Deployment

Johnson County has the capacity to make strategic investments that can transform rural communities and townships. To get a sense of what is needed, the County **must conduct a housing needs assessment** called for in the 2018 Comprehensive Plan. With the information generated, **it can leverage its substantial debt capacity** in a strategic and transparent way that engages partners and highlights the interconnectedness of growth and development across the county. These resources can be applied, as well, to prospective developments related to resources referenced frequently at the July 2021 stakeholder meeting: child care, rural water, transportation and recreation/wellness.

Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability involves using today's resources fairly in order to ensure enough for future generations. Resilience is the ability to withstand expected and unexpected challenges in a timely and collaborative way. Adaptation is making changes to how we build structures or operate a business to account for the changes that are bringing more high heat days, periods of drought and other impacts.

Altogether, sustainability, resilience and adaptation practices can contribute to economic well-being and development and quality of life through new or rehabbed structures that last longer and add property value, protection of human health and environmental assets, job creation, and business practices that help save money, energy, water and resources. Sustainability can also contribute to equity and vice versa, especially through intersections with public health and access to job creation in growing sustainable industries. During the stakeholder meeting in July 2021, preservation of current assets, including the environment, was a highlighted need.

The Iowa Economic Development Authority has a Green Certified Sites program, which fills a demand for project-ready industrial sites. Current projects range from approximately 50 acres to 1,000 acres and tend to be used for siting headquarters rather than heavy industrial uses. The advantage of a certified site is that the due diligence is in place so that a company can

“start digging” within six months and there are no surprises. Consequently, certified sites benefit by having higher visibility to site selectors.

To date, Johnson County has responded to certain residential and business requests for energy, renewable or sustainable resource use or procurement advice on a case-by-case basis, aside from the solar group buys provided in 2018, 2019 and 2021. There may be ways to broaden support directly or by partnering with others to do so.

Some good ideas can be seen locally. The economic development coordinator for the City of Iowa City has engaged with businesses about their sustainability goals and practices. Iowa City has provided online educational sessions on energy efficiency and rebates in conjunction with the gas and electric utility (MidAmerican Energy). Creating a similar program series focused on the unincorporated areas, villages and smaller towns would be more challenging, since multiple utilities serve those regions; however, it could be worthwhile. Iowa City has also adopted a TIF-funded climate action incentives program. Eight projects have been funded in three districts for a total of nearly \$748,000 with plans to expand into other districts.

For residential housing support, several cities in Iowa, including Iowa City, have an energy efficiency grants program and use Green Iowa (GIA) AmeriCorps for in-home energy audits and basic energy upgrades. Johnson County’s PDS Department has started exploring ways to bring energy efficiency education to the smaller communities and unincorporated areas. Ideally, energy efficiency is completed before adding renewables. In addition, while GIA provides an important service, their audits are basic. There is a “missing middle” of affordable, more detailed energy audit services, which could be a job growth area in the county and corridor. When utilities decreased rebate programs a few years ago, it also reduced the energy efficiency jobs, which could be built back.

One of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan goals under Local Economy is to “encourage sustainable agricultural practices.” These practices include in-field and edge-of-field best management practices on lands used for row crop production. Agricultural services firms in the county can build their capacity for precision agriculture, for example, using new technologies to greatly reduce the amount of crop spraying yet still effectively grow crops.

In terms of resources more generally, at the state level, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has convened stakeholders to provide a roadmap for improvements in handling four prioritized waste streams: organics/food, plastics, construction and demolition waste, and renewable energy equipment. As these plans are developed, they will point to potential business growth areas. In particular, there is a goal to reduce food waste in the first place—to find ways to improve farm to table delivery and capacity planning.

The effort to improve broadband has implications for reducing travel and thereby lowering greenhouse gas emissions while, concurrently, increasing data needs. In terms of actual physical connectivity, Johnson County’s ever-increasing trail system is both a commuter and

recreational resource. Plans to encourage more destination visits should also consider how the travel can be greener, including through increased use of electric vehicles, carpooling and more.

As we see job growth in certain industries, there may be certain jobs that decrease in need in the coming decade. As part of sustainability transitions and in general, the County should be thinking about how to help with job transition and training for those whose livelihoods may be changed due to climate change or industry changes. In addition, the County must help ensure equitable access to job training in not just existing but also newer occupations as renewables and other technologies develop.

RECOMMENDATIONS for Sustainability and Resilience

Broadly, the County should find ways to **replicate or partner with existing state, regional and local programs, as well as other public and private entities, on furthering sustainability and resilience**. In particular, if a County-level Economic Development position is created in ICAD, then **the Green Certified Sites program should be explored**. Typically, a local economic development authority is involved in the program. Also worth exploring is how to leverage funding from a **tax-abatement program to rehab and reuse buildings and further leverage other grant programs**.

In the future, **TIF should be considered as a basis for incentives or for tax abatement for a sustainable or energy-efficiency upgrade of structures or operations**. As previously noted, other potential financing tools are urban renewal and revolving loans (see [Appendix G](#)). Some of these tools can help businesses leverage statewide programs that require matching funds.

It may be worthwhile to **conduct a study on local job shifts and transitions** already being or expected to be caused by climate change and resulting industry changes in order to help provide equitable job transitions. Linn County's sustainability manager has explored this topic and could be a helpful resource. Related, as the County goes through its own operational adaptation planning (in progress), it can consider how best to assist businesses and residents.

CONCLUSION

Johnson County is a remarkable place that is growing and innovating. Its abundance of assets countywide makes it both a destination and an envy. Progress, to an extent, has been a byproduct of institutions such as the University of Iowa, ACT, Stutsman and Heartland Express. Those anchors have hired workers who continue to push the county's population higher. They provide services that make the metro area and the county a destination for many lowans.

Despite the success, there remain opportunities for Johnson County to evolve in a way that benefits residents in every township, village and city. That will require some targeted action, strategic investments and broad-based collaboration.

This plan highlights some possible steps the County can take to expand economic development in the rural areas. While it includes recommendations for action, another key element that will

need to be developed is the setting of clear expectations and measurable outcomes, including qualitative and quantitative metrics. Policies can enable countywide development while corresponding actions will put those policies to work.

Action is already occurring. A focus on broadband options is being developed and outreach to existing experts has begun. That work will identify unserved and underserved areas and begin to engage partners who can extend high-speed connectivity to every corner of the county. Quick action is necessary due to the immediate availability of state and federal grant dollars.

Other steps can happen quickly. ICAD is eager to engage in a discussion that could lead to a dedicated rural economic developer in that Iowa City-based organization. County leaders and ICAD can structure a position and a set of deliverables that provide immediate benefits to the small cities, townships and villages.

A new partnership with *Think Iowa City* can also be implemented quickly. The capacity of the convention and visitors bureau to promote rural destinations and drive visitors and customers to businesses, agritourism operations and restaurants/entertainment venues is significant. An intentional focus on micro-lending to women-, minority- and refugee-owned businesses can enhance existing opportunities and build a more equitable economy. It can also build on existing local foods efforts, especially in relation to the Johnson County Historic Poor Farm.

Perhaps the biggest, most impactful thing the Board of Supervisors can do is to review the actions of Marion County and consider ways it can leverage existing debt capacity and identify opportunities for investment. From broadband to housing to business development, the County can choose where it can make the biggest impact and act decisively.

This plan puts forward options for action. Some are relatively simple and can be quickly addressed. Others will require study and sizeable financial commitment. Collectively, they must be confronted in a timely fashion to allow the County to respond to emerging issues and opportunities. Just as important, this is a unique opportunity for residents in rural areas who are seeking to find a home, start a business or enjoy quality of life in a diverse, equitable setting. That's something that can't be understated.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Johnson County Rural Economic Development Stakeholder Meeting

Overview

On the evening of July 13, 2021, 42 individuals along with 17 Johnson County officials, both elected and appointed, gathered to discuss rural and unincorporated county areas and opportunities/challenges for economic development in those areas.

PDS Director Josh Busard provided an overview of the County's 2018 Comprehensive Plan and why the BOS has identified development in strategic non-metro areas as a high priority. Consultant Bill Menner from The Bill Menner Group explained the importance of rural–urban partnerships and the benefits each provides to the other.

Attendees then broke into eight groups and discussed a series of questions that focused on their perspective on the assets, issues, opportunities, and ideas for future development – with an emphasis on diversity, equity, entrepreneurship, agriculture, agritourism and local food systems, resilience, and sustainability.

Stakeholders in Attendance

Bur Oak Land Trust	Spartan Hollow Housing Development
Cedar Ridge Winery and Distillery	Stringtown Grocery / Produce Barn / Central Grocer
Center for Worker Justice of Eastern Iowa	Sustainable Iowa Land Trust (SILT)
Community Foundation of Johnson County	University of Iowa School of Planning and Public Affairs
EA Investment Properties	Walker Homestead
Farmers Electric Cooperative	Water Shop (Village of Frytown)
Farmers Henhouse	
Field to Family	County engagers/facilitators/note-takers:
Fox Ridge Farm	Elected officials and staff from Board of Supervisors as well as the departments of Planning, Development and Sustainability; Public Health; Secondary Roads
Geyer Farm	
Graber Heating & Cooling (Village of Cosgrove)	Economic Development Committee members:
HerBet Farms Inc.	JC PDS Staff: Josh Busard, Luke McClanahan, Becky Soglin
Hillcrest Academy	JC BOS Supervisors: Lisa Green Douglass, Pat Heiden
Housing Trust Fund of Johnson County	JC BOS Staff: Donna Brooks, Ilsa DeWald, Keshia Fields, Mike Hensch
Iowa City Area Development (ICAD)	JC Public Health: James Lacina
Iowa City Business Partnership	ICAD: Tom Banta, Austin Korn, Kate Moreland, Jody Josten
ISU Extension and Outreach, Johnson County	
Iowa Valley RC&D	
Johnson Clean Energy District	
Johnson County Food Policy Council	
Kirkwood Community College	
Lucky Star Farm	
MMS Consultants	
Morse area residents/business owners	
Multi-Cultural Development Center of Iowa	

Questions Discussed in Small Groups

1. What do you like about where you live in Johnson County?
2. What don't you like?
3. What do you wish you had or had access to?
(Follow-up questions)
 - Where do you currently go to get that?
 - Is it reasonable to think that is possible in rural Johnson County or one of the very small towns outside the metro?
4. What future developments – think of a new business or new housing or entertainment or recreation or utility – would have the greatest impact on you?
5. If you're a business owner or an entrepreneur, what interest do you have in expansion or new ventures?
(Follow-up questions)
 - What would it get to convince you to move forward?
 - What barriers are there that might prevent that?

Assessment of Small Group Discussions

With a total of 59 people, including attendees, facilitators and notetakers, spread across eight tables in one big room, the scene was a busy and noisy one. To the roving individual, random words like “opportunity” and “quiet” were juxtaposed with “internet” and “gravel,” among many others.

The facilitators were instructed to move methodically through the assigned questions and complete them in a 45-minute window. Group assignments were done intentionally to assure a diverse collection of individuals in each, yet the issues and ideas raised were similar throughout.

And key themes recurred throughout, regardless of which question was being asked and at which table. Issues listed below have those most commonly voiced toward the top.

WHAT DO WE HAVE?

- Proximity to Iowa City and other larger cities of the county
- Quality of life
- A rural setting with natural amenities
- Great landscapes
- Wide open spaces
- Safety and family-focus
- Recreational opportunities and outdoor activities
- A thriving agricultural community

That recurring theme of “proximity” can also be defined as “access” and can be interpreted much more broadly. It can mean “access to the metro,” “access to services,” “access to the University of Iowa and UIHC,” “access to diverse cultures,” and “access to arts and culture.”

Another asset that was identified more than once was the prevalence of farm stands and farm experiences. That included berry-picking opportunities, a chance to purchase fresh local foods and experiential businesses, such as the various orchards and wineries.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

- High-speed broadband
- Quality roads, both hard-surface and gravel
- More active recreation options/trails
- Affordable housing
- Child care
- Rural Water
- Transportation
- Preservation of current assets
 - Agriculture
 - Environment
 - Education
- Retail
- Technical assistance/support for small businesses
- Access

While the first question focused on assets, the second sought needs. In many cases, attendees were taking items of their own wish lists for inclusion, but as with the first question, there were many recurring thoughts.

While proximity to the metro area was perhaps the most prevalent asset that emerged during discussion of the first question, “access” was the underlying word associated with many of the needs. Access, according to attendees is lacking in terms of a variety of ways.

- Access to an affordable place to live
- Access to high-speed broadband that allows distance learning, telehealth and remote work
- Access to land (affordability); young, beginning farmers have limited access to capital
- Access to legal assistance (translation, regulations, business entities)
- Access to child care in smaller cities and rural areas
- Access to basic services without traveling
- Access to fresh/healthy foods
- Access to capital

It should also be noted that there is an interesting dichotomy between what many attendees saw as *assets* in the first question and *needs* in the second. The proximity that was celebrated doesn’t overcome distance frustrations highlighted in those access-related issues.

WHAT BUSINESS/BUSINESS SUPPORT DO WE NEED?

As the County considers an economic development plan for the unincorporated areas, attendees were asked to focus on the needs of local businesses, business owners and entrepreneurs. Recognizing that not every attendee at the meeting was a business owner, there was some conjecture – though based on personal observations and knowledge.

The prevailing need expressed by the attendees was related to the *access* theme of Question 2: access to technical assistance!

- Business incubator outside of the metro
- Increased STEAM education options
- Support for home-based businesses
- Business resource center
- Small town Main Street investments
- Revolving loan fund/access to equity
- Marketing platforms to promote rural businesses (a “destination identity”)
- Strong engagement of County in support of business
- Transportation that connects people to rural business
- Targeted support for ag-based business and producers

In reality, many of the identified needs for business expressed in the small groups align with the overall needs: transportation, broadband, housing (for the needed workforce), and child care. More importantly, the consensus of the attendees – though they were unaware of their shared thoughts – was that a critical need for Johnson County rural businesses and business concepts is access to and promotion of them within the metro area.

WHAT IS THE COUNTY’S ROLE?

This question, asked at a meeting convened by the County to discuss a rural economic development plan for the County, was an attempt to pinpoint steps Johnson County can take to help facilitate or encourage development and growth in the unincorporated areas (and by extension the small municipalities outside the metro area).

Some suggestions fell outside the County’s purview (e.g., it cannot build a grocery or discount store in areas lacking one). Others sought solutions that are only available through the state and federal governments. But many identified reasonable approaches Johnson County can play in supporting future development in the vast rural spaces outside the urban core.

- Provide capital to businesses and developers
- Create programs/technical assistance to support business development and expansion
- Build partnerships to expand access to key needs
- Extend broadband to underserved areas

- Improve communications related to zoning and permitting; create a liaison/point-person
- Develop special programs related to beginning farmers
- Address the high cost and limited availability of child care
- Support opportunities to incent expanded processing and storage space for local foods
- Promote agritourism as a growth industry

The discussion of the appropriate County role followed by a question about what needs to be done to make an impact generated many of the same responses. But the process of narrowing the small-group focus began to underscore a rational set of priorities helpful for planning.

WHAT DO WE NEED/WHAT WOULD MAKE AN IMPACT?

The final question provided attendees with a chance to suggest solutions to the overriding issues of development in rural Johnson County. Some solutions appear obvious: spend money to improve infrastructure. Others are nuanced or more complex to resolve: provide services not currently offered.

The groups, when their thoughts are aggregated, were very much in agreement on directing efforts and resources to positively impact the unincorporated areas.

- Support small businesses and entrepreneurs (including through the development and permitting process)
 - Possible liaison to “demystify the process.”
 - Website platform could ease access and information
- Invest in public infrastructure (roads/internet/rural water)
- Think strategically about rural tourism/agritourism, create a brand and support it
- Create a destination identity related to local foods (wine, cider, organics, unique)
- Invest in affordable housing and improve/update aging housing stock
- Invest in affordable day care
- Invest in public transportation that serves rural areas
- Develop a rural arts initiative

Also, an important component under which many of these impactful steps recommended is the expansion of PDS capacity to guide and support existing and prospective business of the development and permitting process. It was not explicitly discussed at the stakeholder meeting, but an eventual initiative or collaboration that can lead economic development for the areas outside of the metro area may become necessary.

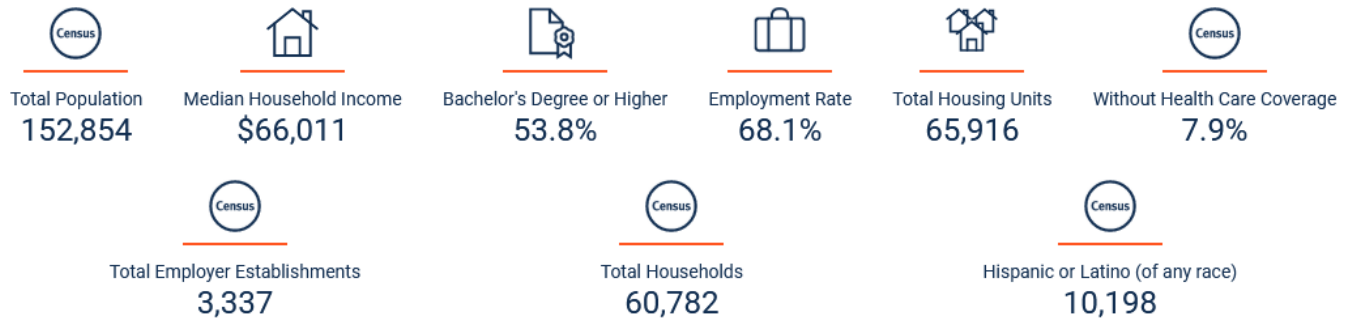
Conclusion

The 42 community members who attended the July 13th meeting were part of an information-gathering process. They were told they are going to provide important input and seed the development of a rural economic development plan. They did just that.

Appendix B: Johnson County Demographic Data

(Note: Additional demographic data can be found in Volume 2 of the Johnson County 2018 Comprehensive Plan)

Johnson County U.S. Census 2020 Overview



Data on Race and Hispanic/Latino Identification. Source: U.S. Census 2020

Race and Hispanic/Latino Identification	Number in Johnson County	Percentage of County Population (May not total 100% due to rounding)
Total Johnson County Population	152,854	
American Indian and Alaska Native (alone)	322	.2%
Asian (alone)	8,599	5.6%
Black or African American (alone)	12,847	8.4%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (alone)	43	.03%
White (alone)	117,090	76.6%
Other race (not identified)	4,204	2.8%
Two or More Races	9,749	6.4%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)	10,198	6.7%

Data on Immigrant Population. Source: New American Economy Research, 2018 American Community Survey

Year 2018 Estimates

- Number of Immigrants: 16,240
- Immigrant Share of Population: 11%
- Immigrant Taxes Paid (in millions of dollars): \$124
- Immigrant Spending Power (in millions of dollars): \$302
- Number of Immigrant Entrepreneurs: N/A
- Number of Eligible Immigrant Voters: 4,326

Source: ACS 5-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample 2017–2019 Weight used: PWGTP Selected geographies: Johnson County--Iowa City		
Year	Immigrants (count)	% Change
2017	15,779	
2018	16,240	2.92
2019	16,656	2.56

Languages Spoken at Home

Source: 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles

Language Spoken at Home

18.1% +/- 3.6%

Language Other Than English Spoken at Home in Johnson County, Iowa

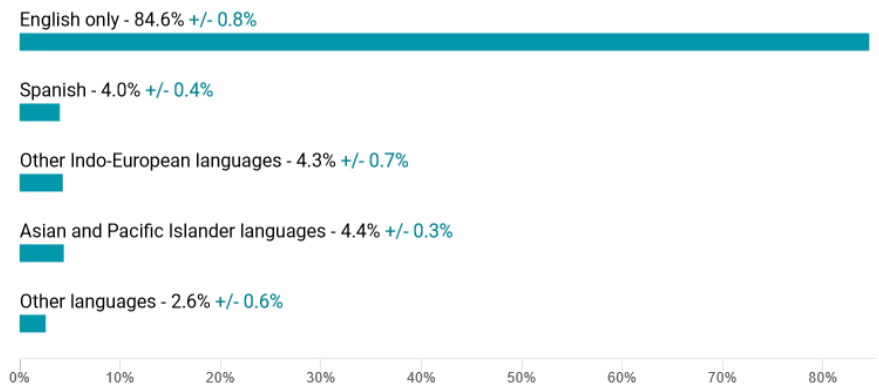
8.9% +/- 0.4%

Language Other Than English Spoken at Home in Iowa

Table: S1601

Table Survey/Program: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Types of Language Spoken at Home in Johnson County, Iowa



Appendix C: Major Industries in Johnson County

Source: ICAD (Austin Kornis)

Iowa City-Cedar Rapids (ICR) is a center of innovation, especially around our core industry clusters of EdTech, MedTech, food, finance, and engineering/automation. Globally recognized brands like Collins Aerospace, ACT, Pearson, GreatAmerica Financial, United Fire Group (UFG), Proctor & Gamble, and General Mills have a significant presence in the region. We also have a thriving group of mid-size firms and startups, leveraging the research and expertise at the University of Iowa to grow big. Four primary industry clusters driving employment and innovation in Johnson County are education tech and assessment; medical and biotech; manufacturing; and local foods / consumer packaged goods.

Education Tech & Assessment: ACT & Pearson

A newer industry cluster gaining support statewide and locally. This industry cluster first gained strength from the three major research universities in Iowa and ACT & Pearson in the private sector. However, we are now seeing rapid growth in the startup community with companies like PearDeck, Higher Learning Technologies, and MZD. This will be an important cluster for the future of Johnson County.

Medical & BioTech: IDT, Digital Diagnostics, Cardinal Health

A well-established cluster within the County with still room to grow. This cluster is strengthened by the research from University of Iowa and the associated University of Iowa Hospital and Clinics. It has grown by targeted tech-transfer from university research to commercialization and has the potential to maintain and expand on that growth.

Manufacturing: P&G Oral & Beauty, Collins Aerospace

A historic and essential cluster with a large base throughout Johnson County. This cluster has modernized over time to become much more than the classic idea of manufacturing. These are often high-tech facilities which require a well-trained and capable workforce. Johnson County has space for many midsized manufacturing facilities and the workforce to occupy them.

Local Foods/Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) emergent): Kalona Super Organics (Open Gates)

An emerging cluster with a primary focus on unincorporated county land. This cluster presents a huge opportunity for Johnson County that has been brought to the forefront by the COVID-19 Pandemic. The already robust local foods system has room for rapid growth that would directly serve the residents of Johnson County on both ends. It also offers the prospect of reutilization of property that may have been once thought of as less than desirable for projects like indoor agriculture, local food distribution facilities, and “agrihoods.”

Appendix D: Building Trade Members in Johnson County

Source: North Central States Regional Council of Carpenters, February 2021

Building Trades Members in Johnson County				
Trade:		Member Count:		
Boilermakers				
Bricklayers		6		
Carpenters		83		
Electricians		105		
Elevator Constructors				
Glaziers				
Ironworkers		26		
Laborers		26		
Mechanical Insulators		0		
Milwrights		8		
Operators		9		
Painters		63		
Cecment Masons				
Plumbers & Pipefitters		97		
Roofers				
Sheet Metal Workers		38		
Teamsters				
Total		461		

Appendix E: Strategic Economic Development Areas

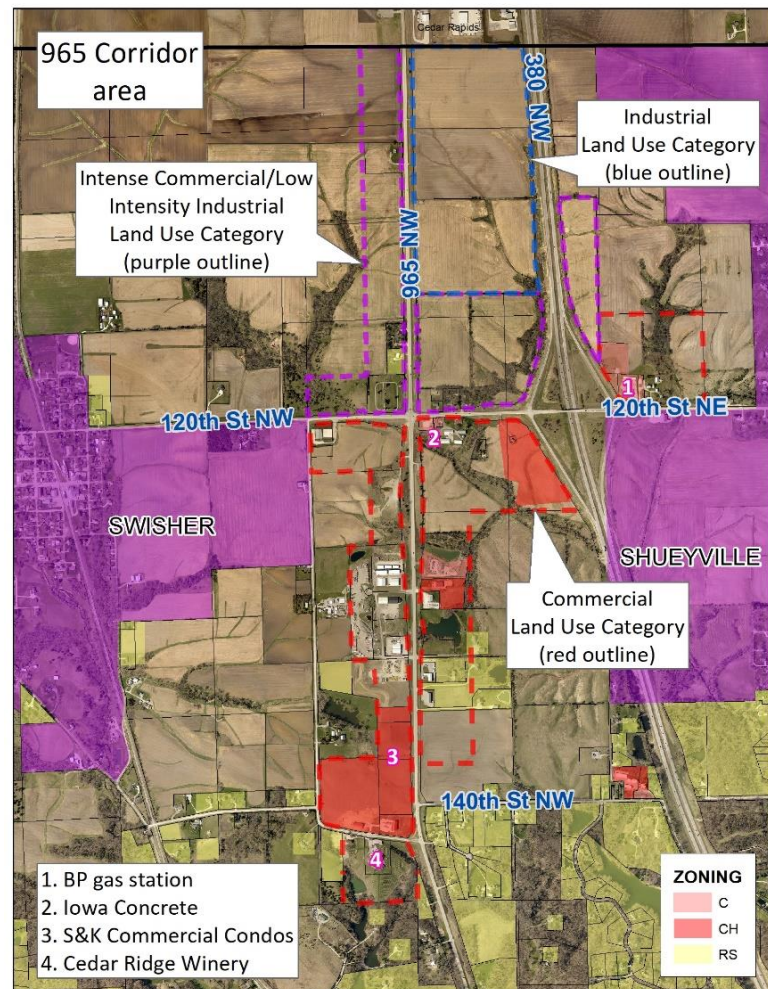
Information prepared by Luke McClanahan, PDS Planner, and Maya Simon, PDS Intern
Highway 965/380 Corridor

Location: This area runs, generally, along Highway 965 NW from Marak Road NW to the Linn County border, and along I-380 from the 120th Street interchange to the Linn County border.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 131 acres in this area are zoned as commercial or industrial. Based on the Future Land Use Map an additional 379 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.

Strengths and Opportunities:

- Served via paved road systems
- High visibility to traveling public
- Near large populations, including the cities of Shueyville, Swisher, and Cedar Rapids
- Contains sizeable acreage that is currently undeveloped



Complexities and Challenges:

- Some environmental features may be affected by development (e.g., wetlands, streams).
- Development may require complex collaboration with nearby cities.
- IDOT imposes a Highway Preservation Corridor along 380, where the State may acquire property or property rights for future road expansion projects.

Potential Land Uses:

- Event centers
- Food and beverage establishments
- Commercial condominiums
- Gas stations
- Repair shops
- Manufacturing facilities

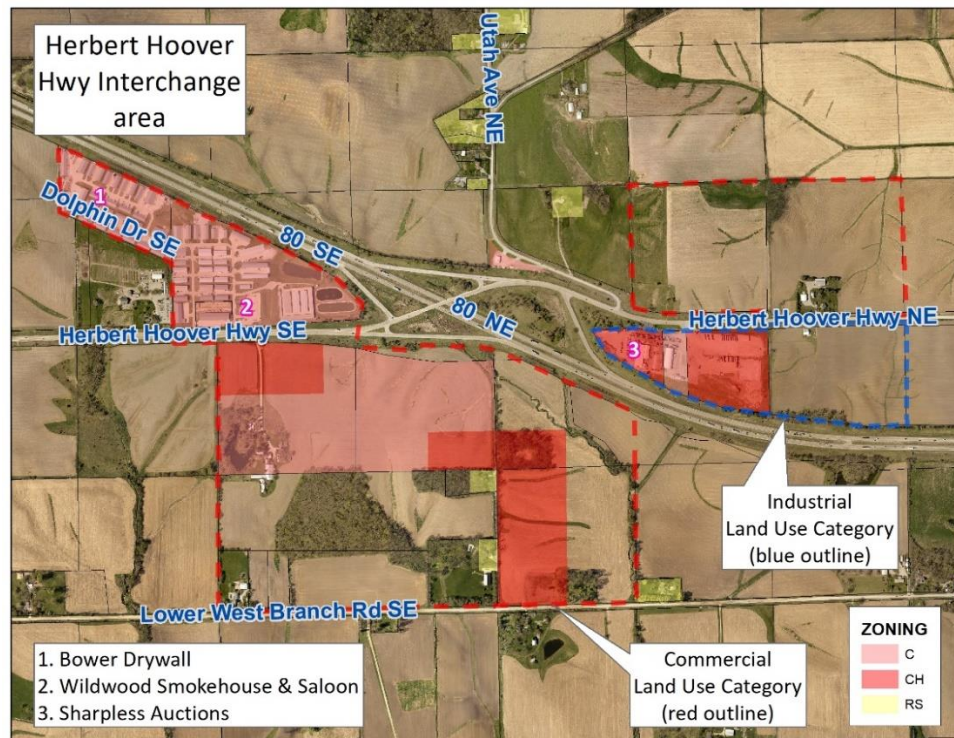
Herbert Hoover Interchange

Location: This area is east of Iowa City, next to the I-80/Herbert Hoover Highway interchange, and extends to Lower West Branch Rd SE.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 154 acres in this area are zoned as commercial. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 220 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.

Strengths and Opportunities:

- Near Iowa City and large workforce population
- Serviced via paved roads
- High visibility, along I-80, where signage can be effective
- Contains sizeable acreage that is currently undeveloped
- Potential gateway to Iowa City



Complexities and Challenges:

- Rezoning in this area is subject to Iowa City's extraterritorial review (subdivisions would be subject to compliance with the City's Urban Design Standards)
- Lower West Branch Road is a gravel surfaced road system
- Lack of accessibility to the acreage south of Herbert Hoover Highway
- Some environmental features may be affected by development (e.g., wetlands, streams)

Potential Land Uses:

- Commercial condominiums
- Dealerships
- Food and beverage establishments
- Manufacturing

Highway 1 NE

Location: This area is at the intersection of Highway 1 NE and Morse Road NE. It is approximately 3 miles north of Iowa City and 4 miles south of Solon. Notably, the Celebration Farm event center is located in this area.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 7.7 acres in this area are zoned as commercial. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 45 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.

Strengths and Opportunities:

- Accessed via state highway; Morse Rd NE is a paved road
- Approximately equidistant from Iowa City and Solon
- Existing turn lanes off Highway 1
- Near an existing event venue and an agritourism operation

Complexities and Challenges:

- Limited commercial growth area boundary (53.6 acres total)
- Rezoning may be perceived as intense uses located near existing residential property
- Expansion may be opposed by nearby residents and property owners
- Some environmental features may be affected by development
- Several miles from city services

Potential Land Uses:

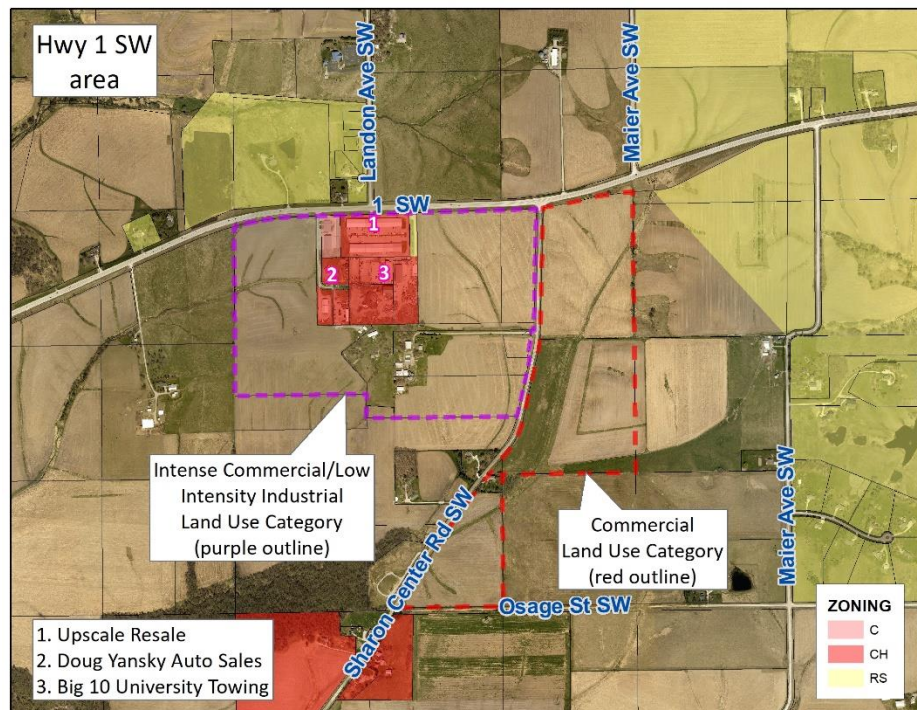
- General construction services
- Child care centers
- Repair shops
- Animal services



Highway 1 SW

Location: This area is located approximately 1.5 miles southwest of Iowa City, on the south side of Highway 1 where it intersects with Sharon Center Road SW.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 23 acres in this area are zoned as commercial. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 183 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.



Strengths and Opportunities:

- Significant acreage could be rezoned (183 acres)
- Relatively low impacts to environmental features
- Near workforce populations

Complexities and Challenges:

- Lack of turn lanes off Highway 1
- Existing commercial properties require extensive clean up
- Rezoning in this area is subject to Iowa City's extraterritorial review (subdivisions would be subject to compliance with the City's Urban Design Standards)
- Agricultural land will be taken out of production

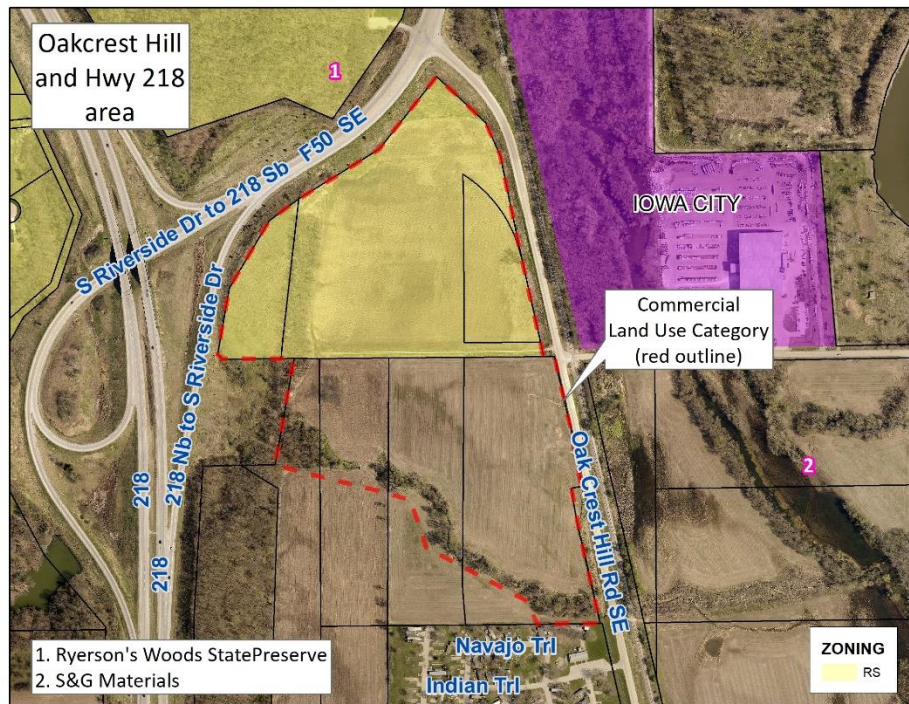
Potential Land Uses:

- Commercial condominiums
- Repair shops
- Manufacturing
- Dealerships
- General construction services

Oak Crest Hill Road SE

Location: This area is adjacent to the south side of Iowa City, on the south side of the 218/Oak Crest Hill Road SE interchange.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 33 acres in this area are zoned as commercial (a commercial rezoning was approved and is effective upon completion of an associated subdivision). Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 29 acres could be rezoned to commercial.



Strengths and Opportunities:

- Accessible off 218
- Accessible to nearby workforce population
- Relatively low impacts to environmental features
- Currently preliminary platted to accommodate a future commercial development

Complexities and Challenges:

- Rezoning in this area is subject to Iowa City's extraterritorial review (subdivisions would be subject to compliance with the City's Urban Design Standards)
- Low visibility to traveling public due to terrain features
- Acreage that is able to be rezoned to commercial is limited (29 acres)

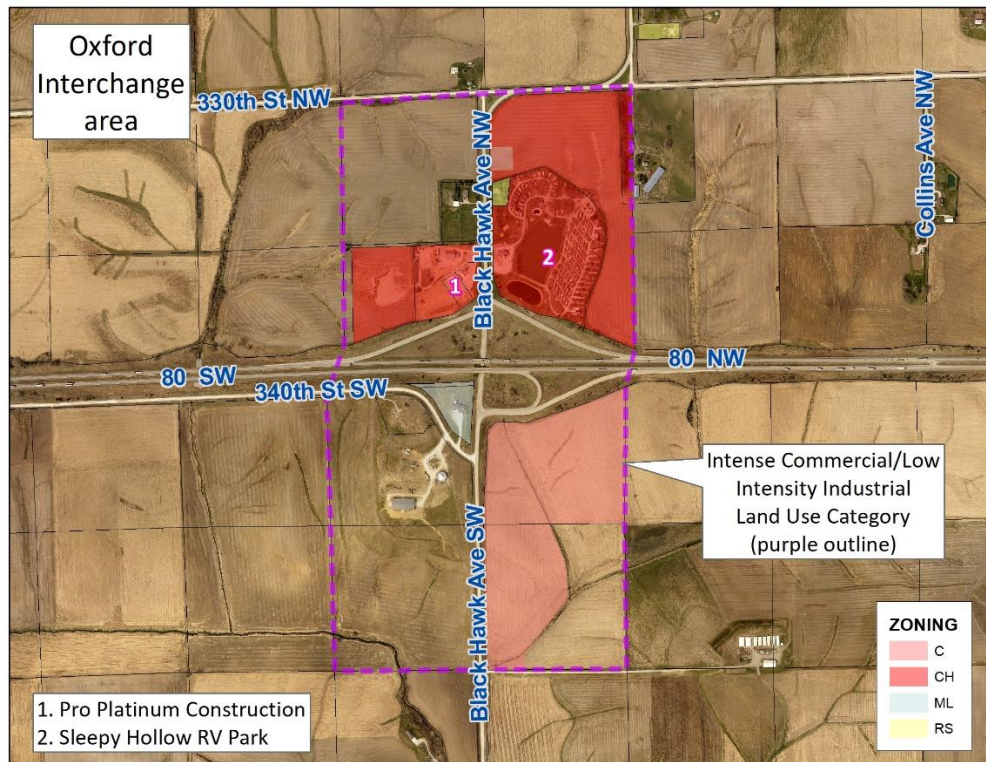
Potential Land Uses:

- Manufacturing
- Commercial condominiums
- General construction services
- Repair shops
- Heavy equipment / implement dealership / repair

Oxford Interchange

Location: This area is approximately 1.3 miles south of Oxford. It is adjacent to the interchange of I-80/Black Hawk Avenue NW.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 132 acres in this area are zoned as commercial or industrial. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 130 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.



Strengths and Opportunities:

- High visibility to traveling public along I-80
- Significant acreage could be rezoned (130 acres)
- Relatively low impacts to environmental features

Complexities and Challenges:

- Rezoning in this area is subject to Oxford's extraterritorial review
- Relatively distant to workforce populations (with the exception of Oxford)
- Few existing businesses in the area

Potential Land Uses:

- Event centers
- Gas stations
- Food and beverage establishments
- Manufacturing

Stringtown Area

Location: This area is approximately 2.75 miles north of Kalona and 1.5 miles southeast of the Village of Frytown. It is at the intersection of Highway 1 and 540th Street SW.

Zoning Profile: To date, approximately 38 acres in this area are zoned as commercial or industrial. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 189 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.

Strengths and Opportunities:

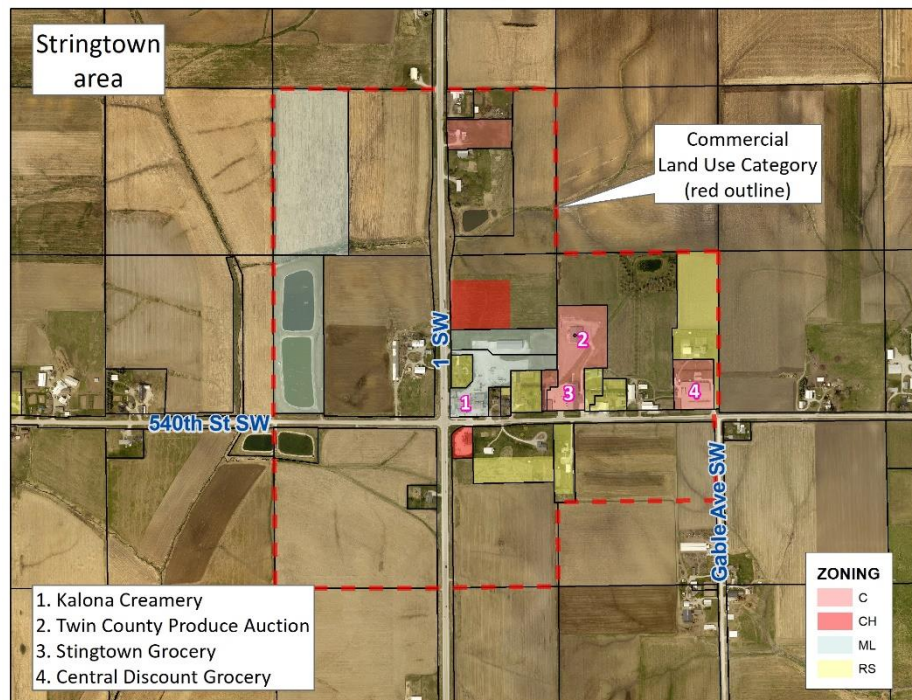
- Unique community identity
- Well known/established businesses
- Significant acreage could be rezoned (189 acres)
- Relatively low impacts to environmental features
- Visible to traveling public along Highway 1

Complexities and Challenges:

- Relatively distant to workforce populations
- Lack of turn lanes off Highway 1
- Potential issues with ground water – potable water provisions

Potential Land Uses:

- Food and beverage establishments
- Distribution warehouses
- Repair shops
- Ag product processing



Lone Tree

Location: This area is immediately north of the City of Lone Tree. It is bisected by Highway 22 SE and Wapsi Avenue SE.

Zoning Profile: To date, one acre in this area is zoned as commercial, while the remainder is zoned as agricultural. Based on the Future Land Use Map, an additional 150 acres could be rezoned to commercial or industrial.

Strengths and Opportunities:

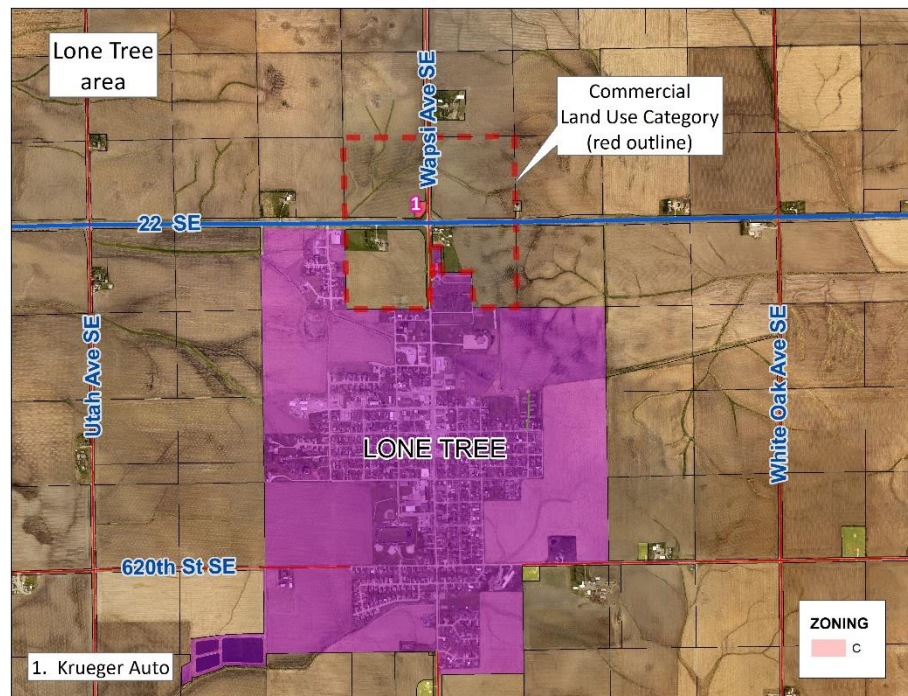
- Near workforce and city services
- Visible to traveling public along Highway 22
- Minimal impacts to environmental features
- Contains sizeable acreage that is currently undeveloped

Complexities and Challenges:

- Agricultural land would be taken out of production.
- Rezoning in this area is subject to Lone Tree’s extraterritorial review.
- Expansion may be opposed by nearby residents and property owners.

Potential Land Uses:

- Food and beverage establishments
- Event centers
- Distribution warehouses
- Repair shops



Appendix F: Johnson County Roadway and Structures Investments

Source: Johnson County Secondary Roads

	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020
Structures	\$ 161,515.00	\$ 1,351,158.00	\$1,666,017.00	\$ 1,114,123.83	\$ 1,358,322.71
Roadway	\$ 1,697,363.00	\$ 4,533,995.43	\$ 6,891,192.63	\$ 1,227,563.43	\$ 903,158.17
TOTAL	\$ 1,858,878.00	\$ 5,885,153.43	\$ 8,557,209.63	\$ 2,341,687.26	\$ 2,261,480.88

Appendix G: Economic Development Financing Tools

Property tax abatement (authorized by both Chapter 404 and Chapter 427B of the Code of Iowa) provides an incentive for property owners to make improvements to property by exempting the resulting increase in valuation from property taxation for a period of time. The new valuation is "abated" and is, therefore, not subject to tax by any local taxing jurisdiction.

Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) is a gap financing measure primarily used for development and expansion of small businesses. It is a self-replenishing pool of money, utilizing interest and principal payments on old loans to issue new ones. While the majority of RLFs support local businesses, some target specific areas such as healthcare, minority business development, and environmental cleanup.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) (authorized by Chapter 403 of the Code of Iowa), is a method of reallocating property tax revenues which are produced as a result of an increase in taxable valuation above a "base valuation" figure within a tax increment area. Until the tax increment debt within an area has been repaid, tax revenues produced by property tax levies imposed on the increased taxable valuation by a city, county, school district, area school or any other taxing jurisdiction are all allocated back to the city or county which has established the tax increment area, and must be spent by that jurisdiction for projects within that area.

Tax increment financing areas are created as a means to maximize property tax dollars within particular areas, in order to pay the cost of public improvement projects (streets, water, sewer, etc.) or to make direct economic development grants or loans to private enterprise as an incentive to locate within the tax increment financing area. The funds must be spent within the area and may not be used by cities or counties to supplement their general operations.

Appendix H: Rural and Related Economic Development Resources

Center for Rural Revitalization (Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA) [2020 Task Force Recommendations](#)

EPA Smart Growth Strategies for rural communities to achieve their goals for growth and development while maintaining their distinctive rural character (EPA Resource):

https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2016-01/documents/small_town_econ_dev_tool_010516.pdf

Enhance Iowa Program (IEDA) provides grant funds to assist projects that provide recreational, cultural, entertainment and education attractions as well as sports tourism. Funds must primarily be used for vertical infrastructure such as land acquisition and construction, major renovation or repair of buildings, site development, recreational trails and more.

Iowa Downtown Resource Center offers community assessments that provides short and long-range recommendations to inform planning efforts. These resources help communities learn more about the importance of downtown development, public engagement, and how to implement strategies to make “small town Iowa” more viable.

Main Street Iowa Program helps small communities capitalize on the unique identity, assets, and character of their historic commercial districts. Locally-developed strategies are implemented through comprehensive work in four broad categories: Economic Vitality, Organization, Promotion, and Design.

Shop Iowa Program is an initiative of the IEDA with support from the Iowa Small Business Development Center and provides small retailers to have an online shopping platform for free. Shop Iowa is built and managed by an Iowa-based company, Member Marketplace, Inc. of Marion. The company offers similar marketplaces through the U.S.

USDA Rural Development Grant Funding for Community Improvement Projects in Rural Iowa Provides examples of projects funded and leadership models.

USDA Rural Development office leads the federal effort to promote rural well-being by disbursing guaranteed and direct loans (as well as grants) to rural organizations, businesses, and individuals. How are other local governments investing in their rural communities? Success stories to consider.