

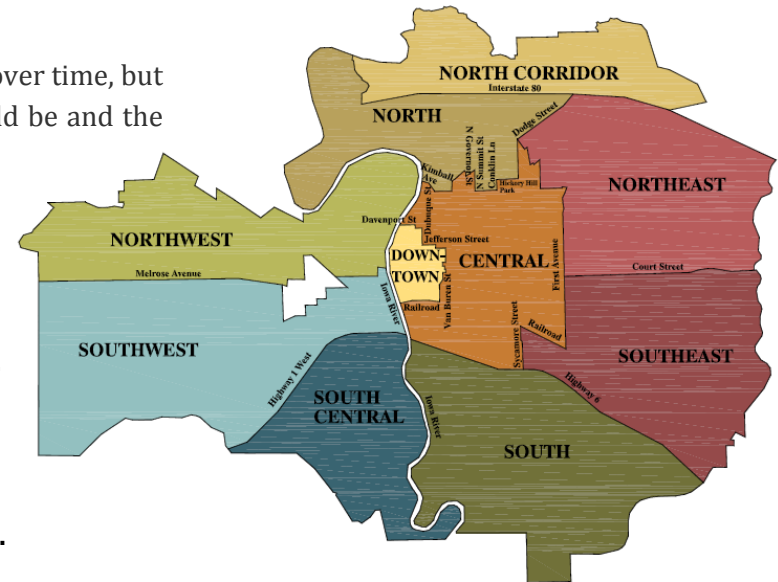
# Introduction

## What is the Comprehensive Plan?

The Comprehensive Plan is often referred to as a roadmap for directing growth and change over time, but it is more than that. The plan describes a vision for the kind of community Iowa City should be and the steps necessary to get there.

### The Comprehensive Plan should . . .

- **Reflect shared community values and aspirations.**
- **Provide a broad set of goals and objectives for both preservation and change.**
- **Set a foundation for policies, strategies, and other actions.**
- **Articulate priorities—it is our community's “to-do” list.**
- **Build consensus and confidence about the future direction of our community.**



The “Beyond 2000” Plan, adopted in 1997, focused on creating a vital and attractive downtown, preserving the unique character of the community, protecting the natural environment, encouraging diverse housing and alternative forms of transportation, and ensuring neighborhood safety, character, and connectivity.

The 1997 Plan divided the city into ten “planning districts,” and called for the creation of detailed plans that would take into account the unique challenges and opportunities of each district, as well as the aspirations of the residents and business or property owners who live or work there. Since 1997, the City has worked with the community to complete plans for eight of the ten districts. The District Plans continue to be part of the Comprehensive Plan and reflect the shared vision and goals of the plan.

Plans for the North Corridor, which is located north of Interstate 80, and the Northwest District, much of which is owned by the University of Iowa, remain to be completed. The Downtown and Riverfront Crossings Master Plan was carried out simultaneously with this update and was adopted in January 2013. These plans are also considered part of the Comprehensive Plan.

Two areas—one located to the east of Gilbert Street and north of Burlington Street; the other located north of Iowa Avenue and west of Dubuque Street—were not included in the Downtown Master Plan or

Since adoption of the 1997 Comprehensive Plan, the City has completed plans for eight of its ten identified planning districts: Southwest, South Central, Downtown, South, North, North-east, Central and Southeast District. In addition, master plans for the Downtown and Riverfront Crossings and Towncrest have been completed. These adopted district and master plans are part of the Comprehensive Plan.



Photo of the Pedestrian Mall fountain © Jbeyer Photography, courtesy ICAD Group.

Public investments in Downtown Iowa City's Pedestrian Mall, including the playground and fountain adjacent to the Iowa City Public Library, have made this public space a popular destination for informal gatherings and play as well as a site for concerts and festivals.

the Central District Plan. While both areas have the potential to redevelop at higher densities due to their proximity to the Downtown and University, both should comply with policies and goals of the Central District Plan in order to ensure quality design and appropriate transitions to the lower-density residential neighborhoods that border them. Staff recommends a process be initiated to appropriately address how these areas redevelop over time. Once a redevelopment plan is completed, both areas should be added to the Central District Plan map.

## IC2030: Refining a Vision for the Next Twenty Years

The Iowa City 2030 (IC2030) planning process provided an opportunity for the Iowa City community to revisit the vision and goals of the 1997 Plan and assess our progress. The vision set forth in the 1997 Plan and woven through the eight completed District Plans led to many substantive policies and actions, including the following:

- A complete overhaul of the Zoning Code (2005) and Subdivision Regulations (2008).
- Adoption of a significant update to the Iowa City Historic Preservation Plan (2008).
- Designation of six historic districts: College Hill (1997), Longfellow (2002), Longfellow and Moffitt (2003), Brown Street -Ronalds expansion (2004), Northside-Gilbert & Linn (2009), Jefferson Street (2013).
- Investments in the Downtown Pedestrian Mall and support for the formation of the Downtown Business District.
- Changes in the City's alcohol policies.
- New occupancy limits and parking requirements for residential development in the Downtown.
- Design standards for multi-family buildings.
- Infill development of remaining Downtown Urban Renewal sites, including the Plaza Towers.
- Establishment of the UniverCity Neighborhood Partnership Program—a joint effort of the University of Iowa and the City of Iowa City to stabilize near campus neighborhoods.
- Adoption of the Metro Bicycle Master Plan (2009) and a Complete Streets Policy.
- Construction of McCollister Bridge connecting Mormon Trek Boulevard with Southeast Iowa City.

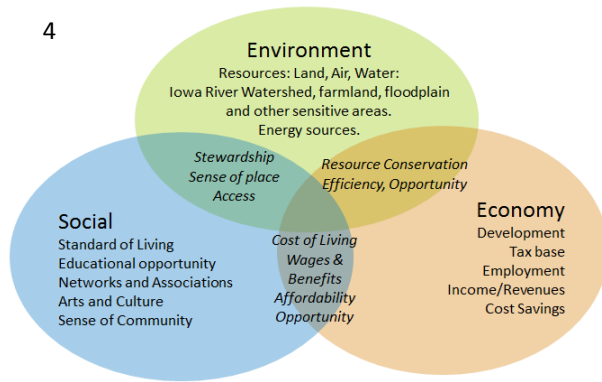
- Extensive additions to the Iowa River Corridor Trail, creating a continuous trail system from Iowa City to the Coralville Reservoir.
- Creation of the Court Hill Trail, running from Creekside Park through Scott Park.
- Establishment of Iowa City's fourth fire station, serving northeast Iowa City.
- Creation of the Public Art Program.
- Acquisition of Sand Lake and establishment of the Terry Trueblood Recreation Area with trail connections along the Iowa River.

While the values that define Iowa City have in most ways remained constant over the years, some new challenges and opportunities make a re-examination of the Comprehensive Plan particularly timely:

- Impacts from the 2008 flood on the Iowa River as well as opportunities for redevelopment of riverfront and adjacent areas.
- Changes in the housing market due to changing demographics (aging Baby Boomers, Gen Y).
- Crisis in the U.S. financial system.
- Continued growth of the University of Iowa and Kirkwood Community College.
- Competition with surrounding communities for economic development and the resulting debate regarding the appropriate use of incentives, including Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
- Growth in the school district and the strong support for neighborhood schools.
- Fluctuating cost of energy, including gasoline.
- Decreased federal and state funding.
- Concerns over global climate change and domestic energy security.
- Impacts and opportunities brought about by new technology, especially electronic communication and social media.
- Designation of Iowa City as a UNESCO City of Literature.
- Increasing interest and support for local food production.
- Increasing interest and support for energy and resource conservation, including alternative energy and green buildings.



The flood of 2008 has had a significant impact on planning for the future of Iowa City. The City has responded by strengthening floodplain regulations, and removing buildings at risk of flooding through the flood buyout program. Planning for the Riverfront Crossings District is also a direct response to the flood. The North Wastewater Treatment Facility will be relocated and replaced by a riverfront park that will help encourage redevelopment along both sides of the river between Highway 6 and the Downtown.



## Measuring Sustainability

An over-arching strategy for a sustainable community requires quantifiable targets and measurable goals. The Iowa City Sustainability Assessment, which is due to be released in Summer 2013, will set Iowa City on a path for establishing thoughtful strategies and measures to foster and achieve a more livable, viable, and equitable community.

Data for nearly 60 sustainability indicators have been compiled and analyzed as part of the assessment. These indicators focus on the economic, environmental, and resource management and social/cultural categories of sustainability. The Assessment will report meaningful and measurable information about the current status of the Iowa City community with respect to sustainability.

Comparisons between Iowa City, the state of Iowa, and national totals are provided for each indicator wherever data is available and applicable. A simplified rating system measures the status of each indicator in the community and allows us to assess whether Iowa City is within or exceeding the acceptable level, below the desired level, or unclassifiable due to complexity or other factors such as insufficient data.

## Focus on Sustainability

Sustainability can be defined many ways and means different things to different people. The IC2030 Plan uses a holistic definition of sustainability: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The plan considers three inter-related factors that together create healthy and thriving communities: environment, economy, and society.

### Planning goals for the Riverfront Crossings District demonstrate this triangular relationship:

**Environment:** In 2008 the Iowa River flood inundated properties in an area south of the Downtown. Preliminary plans for this area propose to move infrastructure and urban development, including Iowa City’s north wastewater treatment facility and other quasi-industrial uses, out of the floodplain and transform the riverfront into a public park and trail system that can better withstand floods.

**Society:** There is a desire by many Iowa City residents to establish a stronger connection with the Iowa River—to make the riverfront a focal point, gathering space, and recreational amenity for the entire community. Establishment of a public park along the will allow better access and views of the river from adjacent urban neighborhoods and the University campus.

**Economy:** Public investments to remove the wastewater treatment facility from the floodplain and to create a riverfront park will encourage private redevelopment of surrounding properties for higher and better uses. Encouraging the development of a new walkable urban neighborhood will help the city proactively respond to the shift in the housing market as Baby Boomers retire and the next boom generation (Gen Y) demands a more urban lifestyle. The proposed urban infill neighborhood presents a more efficient model of development by reinvesting in existing public infrastructure (streets, sewers, waterlines, rail lines, bus lines), rather than extending new roads and waterlines at the city’s edge.

The IC2030 Comprehensive Plan sets forth a vision and broad set of goals describing a more sustainable community. A forthcoming Sustainability Assessment will identify specific activities, measures, and indicators of progress that are essential to attaining these broad sustainability goals.



## Public Participation

Public input and support are integral to any planning effort. Beginning in 2009, as a part of post-flood recovery efforts, the City received a grant of technical assistance through the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Smart Growth Assistance Program. Working with EPA representatives and private planning consultants, staff gathered input from stakeholders in the Riverfront Crossings area, including business and property owners. There is broad public support for this area to serve as an example of sustainable infill development that would take advantage of proximity to the University and Downtown and for shifting our approach to the riverfront and floodplain, treating these areas as essential open space resources that enhance urban development.

Building on this effort, the City competed for and was one of only five cities in the nation to receive a grant from the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, a joint initiative of the EPA, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). The grant aided the City in completing a more detailed plan for a sub-area of Riverfront Crossings, which included those areas most impacted by the 2008 flood. This initial planning effort received wide support from the community and led to an expanded planning effort to include both sides of the riverfront as well as the Downtown. This resulted in the Downtown and Riverfront Crossings Master Plan (adopted January, 2013).

Simultaneous with the above planning effort, staff held two public workshops—one on the east side of the river and one on the west—in February 2012. Participants were invited to re-examine the vision and goals of the 1997 plan and to review the progress that had been made in achieving those goals. Discussion focused on land use and growth, economic development, transportation, and environmental protection. Participants were also invited to engage in small group discussion focused on arts and culture, local foods and urban gardening, and energy conservation and recycling.

These workshops were supplemented with an extensive outreach and an on-line participation tool. The “Good Ideas,” campaign invited Iowa City residents to answer a brief survey and suggest ideas for how Iowa City could be improved. Ideas for improvement were posted on the Good Ideas web page where other respondents could vote to support any ideas they liked. This effort not only generated “good ideas” but fostered general support for establishing a shared vision for the future of the city.

There was much consistency in the input from the public workshops and the on-line survey. Both indicate a tension between the small-town character that people value and identify as being quintessentially Iowa City and the uncertainty that comes with change in a growing community. There is a strong and vocal de-

For a better Iowa City . . .



**When asked what they like best about Iowa City, participants in the on-line “Good Ideas” survey most often said:**

Small-town feel with big city attractions.

Distinctive and charming neighborhoods.

Ease of getting around town: walking, biking, and appreciation for bus transit.

Vibrant Downtown and Northside Marketplace.

Good schools: especially neighborhood schools.

Friendliness: opportunities to meet people.

City services: including Public Library, Senior Center, recreation centers, recycling.

Parks, trails, and public spaces, esp. Hickory Hill Park, City Park, and the Pedestrian Mall.

Locally-owned and independent businesses.

A lively and diverse arts and culture scene.

Great food: unique places to eat, emphasis on fine, ethnic, and healthy cuisine and local foods. Also, the Farmers Market.

Active and informed citizenry: people who care about and are committed to their community.

A diverse population: age, income, background, lifestyles.

Access to quality healthcare: UIHC and Mercy.



In addition to the IC2030 workshops and on-line survey, the IC2030 Plan draws from a decade of community input, including the following planning efforts:

- Towncrest Redevelopment Plan
- Iowa City District Plans (8 completed)
- Historic Preservation Plan
- Long-Range Transportation Plan
- Metro Bicycle Master Plan
- CITY STEPS: Iowa City's Five-Year Consolidated Plan for Housing, Jobs, and Services for Low-Income Residents
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan
- Hazard Mitigation Plan

sire to preserve what is unique about Iowa City—older neighborhoods and buildings, independent and small businesses, the ease of accessibility in getting around town, and green space. At the same time, respondents express a desire for things that are supported by growth—arts and cultural offerings, diversity in our population, employment and business opportunities, redevelopment of the Riverfront Crossings and Towncrest Areas, etc. The question seems to be how and where to strike a balance between preservation and change.

Most participants asked for more of the things that they like: trails, tree-lined streets, bike facilities, parks and greenspace, and preservation of older neighborhoods. Many would like to see Iowa City's curbside recycling program expanded.

There is broad support for riverfront improvements—making our riverfront more attractive and accessible and a focal point for the entire community. Redevelopment of Towncrest and addressing the loss of the Von Maur department store at Sycamore Mall were also high on people's lists of needed improvements. Competition with Coralville and North Liberty due to over-use of tax increment financing (TIF) was also a concern, along with a desire for more support for Iowa City's schools.

There was a call for more diverse housing options, including more affordable housing options; more housing attractive to non-students in the Downtown area; and better quality buildings and architecture for apartments, condos, and townhomes throughout the community. Some respondents expressed concern over the concentration of low-income housing in certain neighborhoods.

Many participants value and wish to see greater support for small and independent businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups. Suggestions included affordable rents for small businesses and live-work units. Others see a need to attract some national chains to anchor or augment what Iowa City has to offer.

# Community Vision Statement

**Iowa City is an energetic and friendly community, renowned for its arts and culture, healthcare and education, and distinctive local businesses. The small-town character of our neighborhoods combined with the big-city vitality of our Downtown and university campus make Iowa City a unique and appealing place for people of all ages. These assets define our sense of place and are the foundation of our stable economy.**

We will strive to preserve and build upon these aspects of our community while supporting compatible growth and investment that contributes to the overall sustainability of Iowa City by:

- Fostering a resilient local economy that increases the tax base, stimulates job growth, and promotes the overall prosperity and progress of our people;
- Protecting and enhancing the environment and encouraging the responsible use of our natural and energy resources;
- Providing safe and efficient modes of travel for all in order to ensure the opportunity for full participation in community life and efficient use of resources;
- Creating attractive and affordable housing for all people—housing that is the foundation of healthy, safe, and diverse neighborhoods throughout our city;
- Promoting opportunities for civic engagement and human development for all who call Iowa City home; and
- Encouraging and supporting collaborative efforts with the University of Iowa, the Iowa City Community School District, Johnson County, and other neighboring jurisdictions for the mutual benefit of all communities.

*A shared community vision is the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. This vision statement was drawn from a number of public processes, including the IC2030 workshops, the Good Ideas web survey, recent district planning processes (including the Southeast District and Central District Plans), a series of workshops for the Downtown and Riverfront Crossings Master Plan, and from community responses to recent events, policy debates, and development activities, especially those in the central and near campus neighborhoods.*

