



IOWA CITY

South District Plan

DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

ADOPTED OCTOBER 20, 2015

Prepared by: Sarah Walz, Associate Planner, 410 E. Washington St., Iowa City, IA 52240 (319) 356-5239

RESOLUTION NO. 15-335

RESOLUTION AMENDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO UPDATE THE SOUTH DISTRICT PLAN, FOR PROPERTY GENERALLY LOCATED WITHIN THE IOWA CITY GROWTH AREA, SOUTH OF HIGHWAY SIX AND EAST OF THE IOWA RIVER.

WHEREAS, the Iowa City Comprehensive Plan, including specific district plans, serves as a land use and planning policy guide setting forth a vision, goals and objectives for future development or redevelopment throughout the city and for preserving valuable assets already present within established neighborhoods and by providing notification to the public regarding intended uses of land; and

WHEREAS, as a component Iowa City's Comprehensive Plan, the South District Plan is intended to promote patterns of land use, urban design, infrastructure and services that encourage and contribute to the livability and sustainability of Iowa City and its neighborhoods. These plans are advisory documents for directing and managing change over time and serve as a guide for decision-making, public deliberation and investment (public and private).

WHEREAS, originally adopted in 1997, the South District Plan is the oldest of Iowa City's ten district plans; and

WHEREAS, following the announcement of a new elementary school to be constructed along South Sycamore Street, the City Council directed planning staff to update the existing plan to ensure that new neighborhoods surrounding the school develop in a sustainable manner in accordance with the IC2030 Comprehensive Plan and in accord with the priorities of the City's Strategic Plan; and

WHEREAS, the planning process for this South District Plan included a series of interviews with neighborhood advocates and representatives of community groups, realtors and property owners, as well as gathering input from neighborhood workshops and an online survey over the course of eighteen months; and

WHEREAS, the South District Plan reflects the planning principles of the IC2030 Comprehensive Plan update with regard to developing sustainable neighborhoods; and

WHEREAS the South District Plan provides consideration of the unique history, context, and existing conditions in the South Iowa City; and

WHEREAS, the South District Plan sets forth the goals, objectives, and plan maps for housing and residential development; neighborhood quality; streets and transportation; parks, trails, and open space; and commercial areas that will serve as a framework to guide future public and private investment in a manner that will benefit citizens living or working in the South District as well as citizens in Iowa City as a whole; and

Passed and approved this 20th day of October, 2015.


Mayor

ATTEST:


City Clerk

Approved by:


City Attorney's Office

Resolution No. 15-335

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It was moved by Dobyns and seconded by Payne the Resolution be adopted, and upon roll call there were:

AYES:

NAYS:

ABSENT:

X
X
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X

X

Botchway
Dickens
Dobyns
Hayek
Mims
Payne
Throgmorton

South District Plan

City of Iowa City, Iowa

City Council

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Rick Dobyns

Terry Dickens

Matthew Hayek

Susan Mims

Michelle Payne

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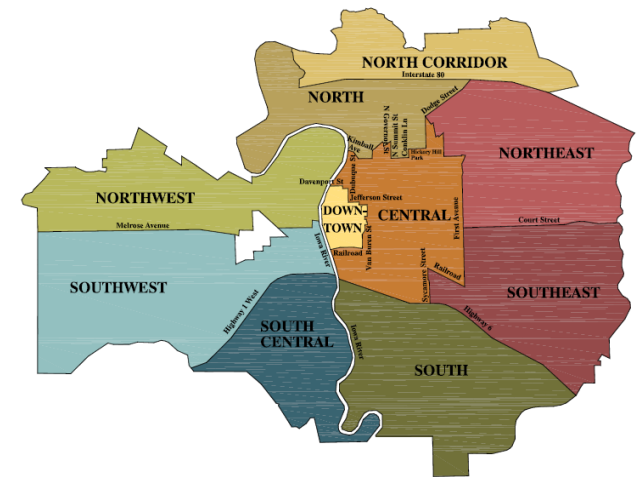
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Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to promote patterns of land use, urban design, infrastructure, and services that encourage and contribute to the livability and sustainability of Iowa City and its neighborhoods. As elements of the Comprehensive Plan, district plans relate specifically to the history and existing conditions at a more local, neighborhood level. The goals and objectives in the district plan addresses issues of housing and quality of life; transportation; commercial development; and parks, trails, and open space particular to specific areas of the community. These plans are advisory documents that are intended to direct and manage change over time. They serve as a guide for decision-making, deliberation, and investment for both the public and private sector.

Originally adopted in 1997, the South District Plan was Iowa City's first completed district plan. Following the Iowa City Community School District announcement that a new elementary school, Archibald Alexander, would open in South Iowa City in 2015, City Council directed planning staff to update the existing district plan. The updated plan would consider new neighborhoods surrounding the school that would develop in light of the sustainability goals of the IC2030 Comprehensive Plan and the priorities of the City's Strategic Plan (November, 2013).

The new elementary school and the road extension and infrastructure that serve it represent a substantial investment made by the taxpayers of our community. It is therefore in the public interest to plan proactively for the long-term health and stability of new and existing neighborhoods to ensure the full benefit of that investment. The update to the South District Plan therefore focuses on creating walkable neighborhoods served by a network of interconnected streets that enhance opportunities not only for alternative transportation but for neighborhood cohesion and social interaction. The plan calls for the integration of a variety of housing options to accommodate a range of household types and to support the extension of transit and support for small neighborhood commercial nodes. It seeks to strengthen and enhance existing neighborhoods and improve access to parks, commercial areas, and employment centers. Finally, the plan recognizes the opening of the new school as an opportunity to re-envision South Iowa City—to foster a positive identity and sense of community based on its environmental and recreational assets and its culturally diverse population.



The South District is one of ten planning districts in Iowa City.



The Iowa City Community School District hosted a groundbreaking for the new Archibald Alexander Elementary School in June, 2014. The new school is scheduled open in fall 2015 and will have a capacity of 500 students. The City of Iowa City Parks and Recreation Department partnered with the School District, contributing funds to enlarge the school gymnasium so that it can serve the community after school hours.



The public workshop for the South District Plan took place on October 6 at Grant Wood Elementary. The workshop was an opportunity for residents, property owners, developers, and other interested members of the community to meet face-to-face to discuss the future of South Iowa City. It was also a chance for members of the public to engage with City staff to better understand development processes, provision of services, extension or improvements to infrastructure, as well as preservation of open space and zoning.

Public Participation

Public input is vital to any comprehensive planning effort. Residents, property owners, area businesses, community organizations, public service agencies, and other interested citizens helped formulate the goals and objectives for this update to the South District Plan through their participation in one or more planning activities.

To initiate the process, staff conducted a series of interviews with neighborhood advocates and representatives of community groups, realtors, and property owners. Additional feedback was gathered at a series of neighborhood events—Wetherby’s Party in the Park, National Night Out, and Grant Wood Elementary School’s back-to-school event. An online survey gathered additional information from 70 respondents. From these interviews and events, a set of common themes emerged.

A community workshop held at Grant Wood Elementary on October 6, 2014, gathered additional information on what makes the South District attractive and livable as well as what is challenging about living, working, or doing business in South Iowa City. Workshop participants discussed how to build on the assets of the area, including the many environmental and recreational assets and the new south elementary school.

Other Sources

The South District Plan also draws from outreach and interviews completed by the Broadway Neighborhood Center, including a set of strategies formulated as a result of community workshops and surveys conducted by that agency in (2008). Information also came from the *Broadway Neighborhood Community Assessment*, a 2004 report authored by Julie A. Spears M.S.W., M.A. and Miriam J. Landsman, Ph.D., M.S.W. (University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice). These reports represent substantial input from minorities and renters, two groups that may have been underrepresented at the community workshop.

Plan Implementation

The South District Plan will be used as a guide for future development or redevelopment within the district and for preserving and improving valuable assets of the area. Achieving the goals and objectives included in this plan will take time and the combined effort of the City, area residents, property owners, businesses, community nonprofits, and neighborhood organizations.

- City staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Adjustment, and the City Council will rely on the plan as a guide when reviewing development and rezoning requests and setting funding priorities for public infrastructure, services, or programming.
- Neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and other interested organizations within the community may use the plan to design programming and events and to advocate for investment (including grants), improvement, and preservation.
- Property owners, businesses, real estate professionals, and developers should use the plan as a framework for their own decision-making and investment as they plan to purchase, sell, or develop property.

The Iowa City Comprehensive Plan

Any effective planning effort must be grounded in reality—it must take into account the existing local conditions and any community-wide goals and policies that have already been agreed upon. The Iowa City 2030 Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2013, presents a vision for Iowa City, provides goals and objectives for realizing that vision, and sets policies for the development and growth of the City. This district plan addresses the unique characteristics of a specific area within the city, but it must also meet the goals and policies adopted as a part of the larger Comprehensive Plan.

Neighborhoods are at the heart of what makes Iowa City a great place to live. What follows is a set of general principles for maintaining and building healthy neighborhoods. New development and redevelopment should adhere to these principles, as well.

Preserve Historic Resources and Reinvest in Established Neighborhoods: Adopting strategies to assure the stability and livability of Iowa City's historic and established neighborhoods helps to preserve the culture, history, and identity of Iowa City. Investing in the neighborhoods that are closest to major employers preserves opportunities for people to live close to work, school, and shopping; promotes walking and bicycling; and reduces vehicle miles traveled. In addition, many established neighborhoods contain affordable housing options along walkable, tree-lined streets where City services and infrastructure are already in place and elementary schools and parks are the focal point of neighborhood activity and identity.



MAKE NO SMALL PLANS . . .

The goal to repurpose a retired sand dredging pond as a natural amenity was drawn from public input during the original South District Planning effort in 1997. It would take another 15 years to make the vision reality.

In 2006, the City purchased 158 acres, including “Sand Lake,” from S & J Materials. An additional 49 acres were later acquired to extend the park to the river-front. A master plan was drafted for the park with community input. The City covered half of the \$6.5 million park development with general obligation bonds; the remainder was covered by private donations and grants, including a \$1.2 million CAT Grant from Vision IOWA.

The park officially opened in 2013 as Terry Trueblood Recreation Area, and features bike and pedestrian trails, water craft rental, fishing, birding, picnicking, and ice skating as well as a popular lodge for receptions and other events. The successful process of transforming this former quarry site into a natural feature is the result of a collaborative effort with the Parks and Recreation Department, community advocates, businesses, individual donors, and grant agencies.

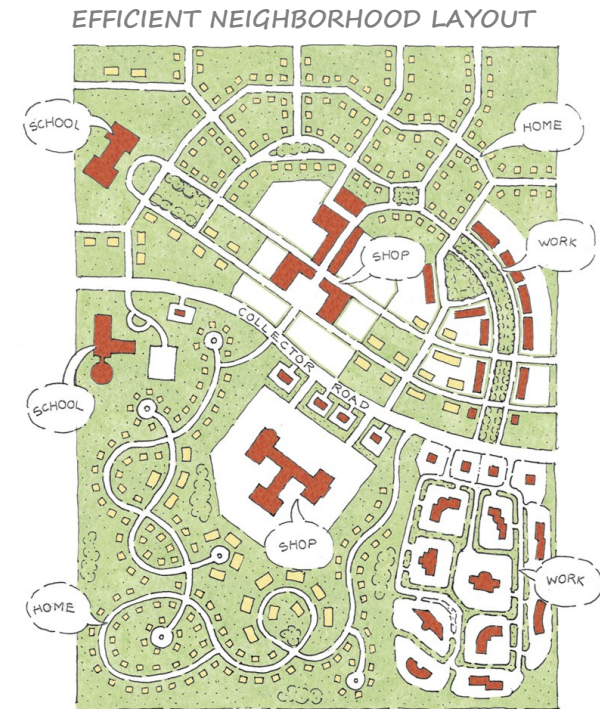
Neighborhood Commercial Areas: Neighborhood commercial areas can provide a focal point and gathering place for a neighborhood. The businesses within a neighborhood commercial center should provide shopping opportunities within convenient walking distance for the residents in the immediate area. The design of the neighborhood commercial center should have a pedestrian orientation with the stores placed close to the street, but with sufficient open space to allow for outdoor cafes and patios or landscaping. Parking should be located to the rear and sides of stores with additional parking on the street. Incorporating apartments above shops and preserving public open space are two ways to foster additional activity and vitality in a neighborhood commercial area. Some aspects of commercial development, such as auto-oriented uses, parking lots, bright lights, and signage, need to be located, screened, or buffered so that they do not detract from nearby residential uses.

Interconnected Street System: Grid street systems help to reduce congestion by dispersing traffic, allowing multiple routes to get from point A to point B. In addition, by providing more direct routes, interconnected streets can reduce the vehicle miles traveled each day within a neighborhood, provide more direct walking and biking routes to neighborhood destinations, and reduce the cost of providing City services.

Streets as More than Pavement: Streets and adjacent parkways and sidewalks can be enhanced and planned to encourage pedestrian activity. Trees, benches, sidewalks, and attractive lighting along the street help create pleasant and safe public spaces for walking to neighborhood destinations and for socializing with neighbors. Streetscape amenities help establish a sense of distinction, identity, and security for neighborhoods. In residential neighborhoods, narrower street pavement widths slow traffic, reduce infrastructure costs, and allow for a more complete tree canopy over the street.

Shallow Front Yard Setbacks: Placing homes closer to the street allows more backyard space and room for garages and utilities if there is also an alley located behind the home. Shallow setbacks (15-20 feet is the code standard for residential uses) combined with narrower street pavement widths, create a more intimate pedestrian-scale public space along the street, which encourages walking and social interaction.

Use of Alleys: Providing parking and utilities from a rear alley or private lane is particularly advantageous in neighborhoods with narrower lot frontages. This arrangement reduces driveway paving and interruptions to the sidewalk network, allows more room for front yard landscaping, and increases the availability of on-street parking for visitors. In addition, when garages are accessed from alleys, vehicular traffic and congestion on residential streets is reduced.



URBAN SPRAWL

GETTING FROM HERE . . . TO EVERYWHERE

An interconnected street system is integral to making a neighborhood walkable and to ensuring that all residents have access to the amenities and services within the neighborhood. An interconnected street system also reduces travel times, provides alternative routes, and allows more efficient provision of services.



CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE

As new development occurs, small parks or pocket parks (less than one acre in size) could help preserve the sense of open space that residents consider a defining characteristic of South Iowa City.

Small public or private open space may be used to preserve environmental features or provide stormwater features. These spaces may also provide opportunities for social interaction and neighborhood identity. Pedestrian or bike connections between residential areas and schools or parks will help enhance walkability in the district.

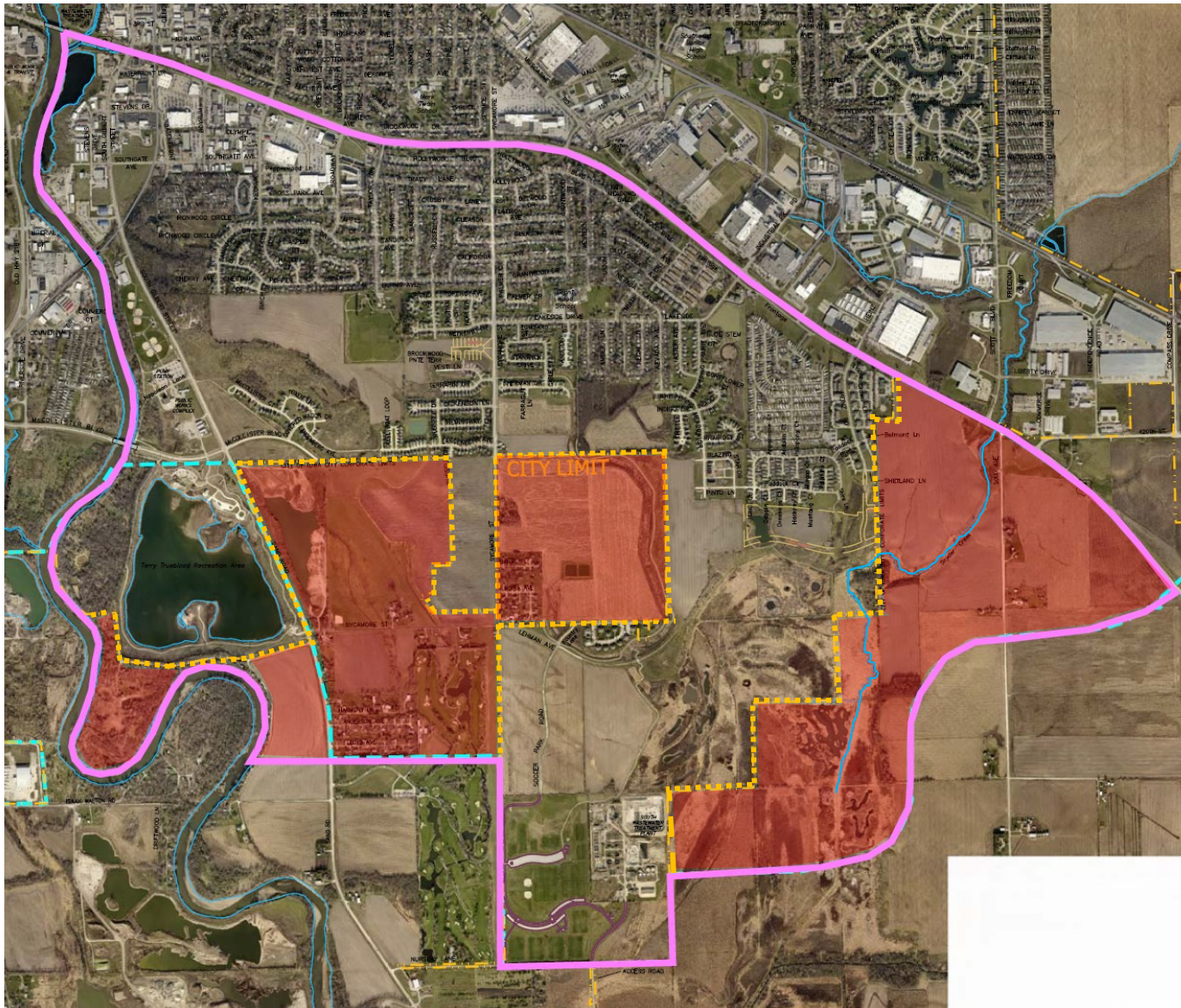
Pedestrian/Bikeway Connections: Important neighborhood destinations, such as parks, schools, bus stops, and neighborhood shopping centers, should be readily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. This requires a continuous sidewalk system, strategically located trails, and on-street bicycle facilities. Bike routes that intersect with key neighborhood destinations may be aligned along neighborhood streets or constructed in stream buffer areas or within major sanitary sewer easements. A pleasant streetscape with trees and appropriate building setbacks and ample driveway separation creates an environment that is safe and appealing for pedestrians and cyclists.

Parks, Trails and Open Space: Neighborhood parks are small, one- to seven-acre open spaces that provide a focal point for informal gatherings and recreation within easy walking distance from most homes in the neighborhood. Neighborhood parks should be centrally located or situated adjacent to a school or a neighborhood commercial area and designed as an integral part of an interconnected system of open space with trails or wide sidewalks to connect with larger community and regional parks. Preservation of sensitive areas, such as wetlands, woodlands, and stream corridors and their buffers, provides an opportunity to shape and enhance a neighborhood, while maintaining scenic and natural resources and wildlife habitat. Wherever possible, natural features, such as waterways and woodlands, should be incorporated as key amenities within parks and along trail systems.

Buffer Residential Development from Incompatible Uses: To help ensure the long-term livability of neighborhoods, provide sufficient buffers between residential uses and activities, such as the waste water treatment plant, highways, etc.

Public Safety: Iowa City works to ensure public safety throughout the community. The establishment of Fire Station 4, the Police Substation at Pepperwood Plaza, and cooperative efforts with neighborhood groups, schools, and the University of Iowa demonstrate this commitment. Resources are directed toward education, crime prevention, and enforcement to enhance the quality of life in Iowa City.

HOW WE DEFINE THE SOUTH PLANNING DISTRICT



The South Planning District includes all land within the Iowa City growth boundary south of Highway 6 and east of the Iowa River. The growth boundary is drawn to indicate the area of land that can be served by the south sanitary sewer facility without need for lift stations. Thus, the boundary does not extend further south than the south wastewater treatment facility.

A large wetland conservation area located east of the Sycamore Greenway and south of a future extension of McCollister Boulevard cannot be developed and thereby serves as a natural boundary for urban development.

The South Planning District contains approximately 3,000 acres or 4.7 square miles, including land not currently within City limits. A 2008 Public Works land inventory indicated approximately 1,695 acres of vacant, developable land within the district. If built out at an average of 2.3 dwelling units per acre, the study estimated that another 3,900 households could be established within this portion of the community. Most recently constructed neighborhoods have developed at a density of 3.0 units per acre or greater.

Areas shaded in red are within the district boundaries, but outside current city limits

City Limits

District Boundary



Although few physical signs remain of early human settlement in South Iowa City, archaeological evidence indicates that South Iowa City has been the site of human occupation for millennia. A 2,000 year old dwelling and associated features were excavated at Napoleon Park—the earliest prehistoric structure found in the entire Iowa River Valley.



The McCollister-Showers farmstead is one of the few remaining historic structures in South Iowa City.

Historic Context

Iowa City's historic roots may be traced to areas along the river, south of Highway 6. John Gilbert (the historic figure for whom Gilbert Street is named) was likely the first white man to make a home in this part of the state. In 1826 he set up a trading post near the mouth of Snyder Creek, just south of the planning district boundaries, and began exchange with a Meskwaki Indian Village in the area, thought to have had a population of around 1,000 people.

In 1837, Gilbert laid out the town of Napoleon at or near what is now Napoleon Park. A year later there were 237 white settlers in the area. Napoleon served as the county seat and the location of the first county courthouse and post office, from March 2, 1839, until November 14, 1839, when Iowa City was declared the new county seat. A log cabin and one frame house were the only buildings ever erected on the town site. The log cabin that served as the first courthouse stood across from what later would become the McCollister farmstead. The establishment of Iowa City as the territorial capital and county seat in 1839 marked the beginning of the end for the fledgling town of Napoleon.

Philip Clark was one of the first individuals persuaded by Gilbert to settle in this area. The McCollister-Showers farmstead located at 2460 South Gilbert Street is situated on land that was part of Clark's original 1837 claim. In 1863, the property was purchased by James McCollister and over the next few decades grew to be a farm containing about 750 acres. The McCollister-Showers home was constructed in 1864 and expanded in 1880. The ten-acre farmstead that remains is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. McCollister Boulevard and bridge commemorate the role the McCollister family played in early Iowa City history.

Another mid-19th century home, located on property just to the north of the McCollister-Showers farmstead, sits atop the hill at Friendly Farm at the south terminus of Waterfront Drive. Based on its Greek Revival architecture and design, it likely predates that construction of the McCollister-Showers home. Although little is known definitively about its history, maps suggest the property was possibly owned by Cyrus Sanders, who came to Johnson County in 1839, purchasing the claim of A.D. Stephens on the edge of Iowa City. Sanders held the position of Johnson County Surveyor for nearly fifteen years (1839/40 until 1855). These two farmsteads are the most visible links that remain of the early white settlement in South Iowa City.

Environmental Context

Water plays an enduring role in South Iowa City, presenting both obstacles and opportunities. Flooding along the Iowa River and the presence of streams, wetlands, drainage ways, and hydric soils in other areas of the district limit where and how development may occur. High groundwater levels, especially in areas east of Sycamore Street, make stormwater management a major focus of development plans. In some areas east of the Sycamore Greenway trail, a shallow water table may preclude the construction of basements.

Outside of Iowa City limits, South Gilbert Street becomes Sand Road, a testament to the distinct geology in this part of our community. Much of South Iowa City consists of sandy soils deposited by the Iowa River during the last glacial period. A sand dune that formed during the post glacial period is a prominent geologic feature, now preserved as Sand Prairie Park.

An important industry in South Iowa City during the latter part of the twentieth century, sand dredging left a man-made mark upon the landscape. When dredging activities were discontinued in the 1990s, the Parks Department purchased the “sand lake” and later developed the site as Terry Trueblood Recreation Area—a regional park. Currently, a smaller dredging pond to the east of Gilbert Street is being filled with materials excavated for expansion of the University of Iowa Children’s Hospital. While this might otherwise be an ideal location for residential development, the property will require a geotechnical analysis to determine its development potential.

Snyder Creek forms the district’s eastern limit, meandering south and west toward the river through an extensive system of wetlands known as the Snyder Creek Bottoms. This five-square mile wetland area absorbs and filters stormwater before it reaches the Iowa River, reducing flooding and pollution and supporting wildlife habitat, especially migratory and game birds that rely on wetlands and isolated ponds. Though outside city limits, a unified strategy for protecting and restoring the function of these wetlands would provide an opportunity for an outdoor attraction that would benefit county and city residents alike.

While these sensitive environmental features limit development, they also provide opportunities for public parks and trails as well as private open space, and are defining elements of South Iowa City’s identity and sense of place.



THE SYCAMORE GREENWAY

Each time it rains, stormwater passes over roofs, pavement, and other land surfaces, picking up pollutants such as oil, salt, lawn chemicals, and eroded soil before flowing untreated through the storm sewer system into creeks and rivers. This is how most cities handle stormwater, but a one square mile watershed in South Iowa City relies on an alternative system.

Designed by University of Iowa geoscience professor Lon Drake, the Sycamore Greenway is an example of green infrastructure unlike any other in Iowa. The 52-acre system consists of a chain of 22 intermittent wetlands that flow into a larger series of crescent-shaped wetland cells, effectively holding and filtering stormwater runoff from hundreds of residential properties.

The Greenway also provides wildlife habitat. More than 130 bird species, including sandhill cranes, may be observed along the Greenway, and hundreds of waterfowl visit the area each year during migration season. A popular 2 ½ mile paved trail winds through the Greenway, connecting surrounding neighborhoods to Kickers Soccer Park.

THE GROWTH OF SOUTH IOWA CITY

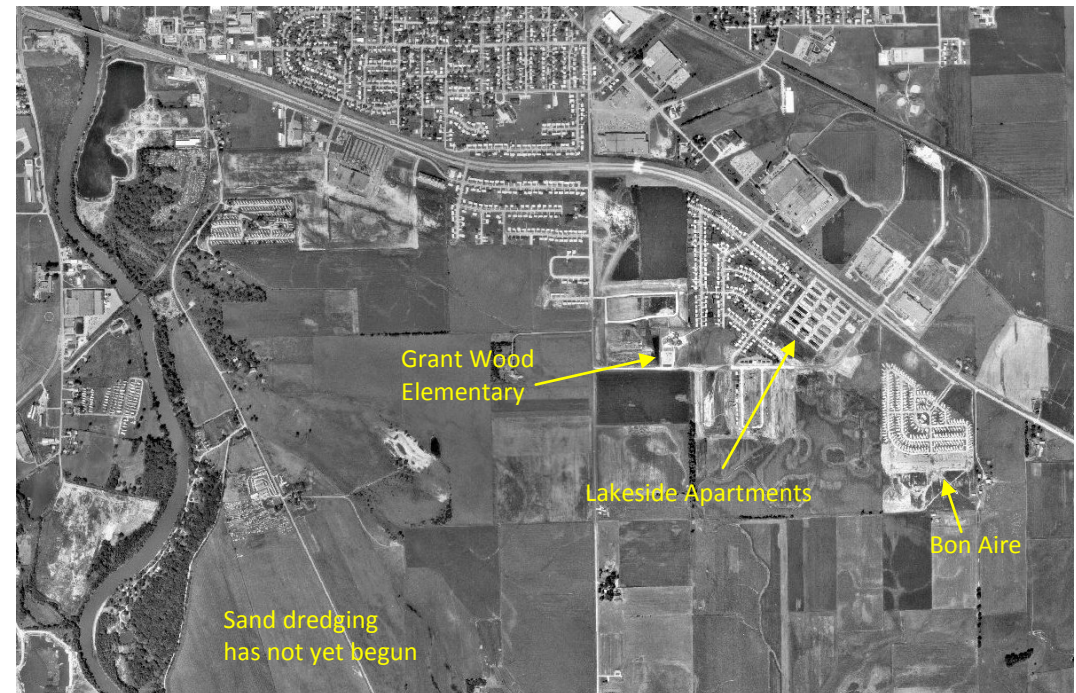
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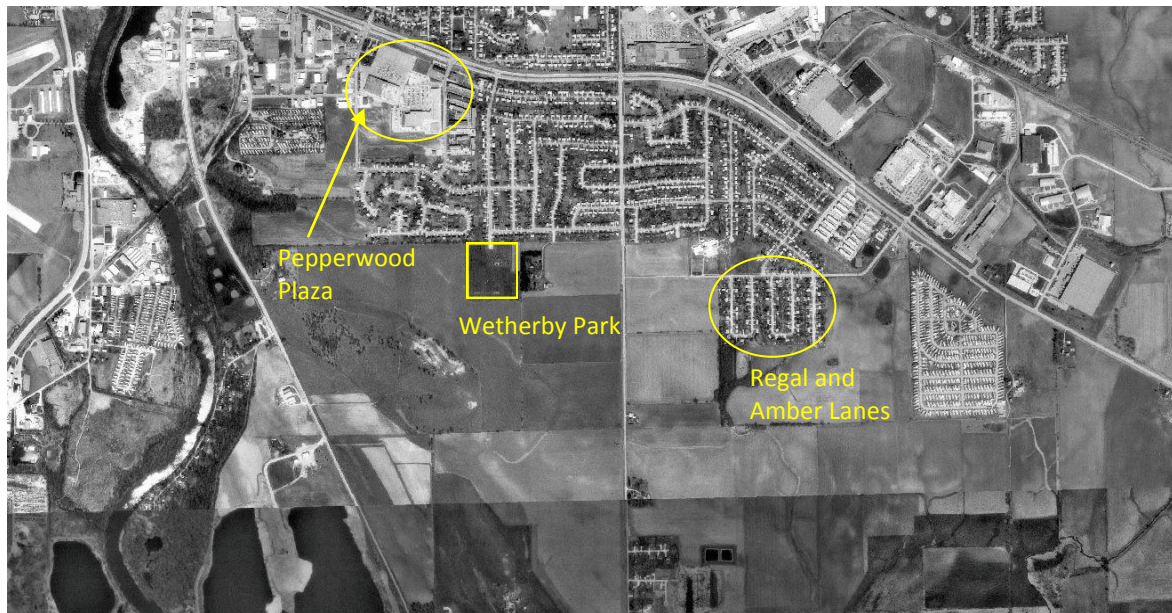
What you can see: Residential development south of Highway 6 began with the Hilltop Mobile Home Park and the area that is now the Grant Wood Neighborhood. Development of modest tract housing along Hollywood Boulevard; Western and Union Roads; and Arizona, California, and Nevada Avenues allowed workers to live near the Proctor and Gamble plant just to the north via Fairmeadows Blvd.



1970

What you can see: Residential development expanded in the 1960s and 1970s to include the Bon Aire Mobile Home Park and single-family detached housing that extended east of Sycamore Street as part of the Hollywood Subdivision and south of Lakeside Drive around Regal Lane. Lakeside Apartments (now called Rose Oaks) was developed as student housing. Commercial centers are visible in the location of Pepperwood Plaza and Sycamore Mall (now Iowa City Marketplace). Outside the district, industrial uses expanded along Highway 6.





1990

What you can see: Residential neighborhood development was more fully built out during the 1980s and early 1990s along both sides of Sycamore Street, as far south as Burns and California Avenues and in the Pepperwood Subdivision. Bon Aire Mobile Home Park expanded. Wetherby and Napoleon Parks were both established along with Grant Wood School. Sand Lake was becoming visible as a sand dredging pond. In this aerial, wetlands are visible in the area west of Snyder Creek.



2014

Residential development is taking shape in the Sandhill Estates subdivision off South Gilbert Street. The Pepperwood Subdivision is nearly fully built out. New subdivisions are being constructed south of Lakeside and Wetherby Drives. Multi-family development is completed south of commercial areas along Keokuk Street and Cross Park Avenue. The Saddlebrook neighborhood, which began with manufactured housing around Paddock Circle in far southeast Iowa City, has expanded to include townhomes, multi-family units, and duplexes along Heinz Road. The Sycamore Greenway is established with a trail connecting south to Kickers Soccer Park. Sand Lake, retired as a dredging area, is transformed into a regional attraction as Terry Trueblood Recreation Area.

Housing

A variety of housing options ranging from manufactured housing, townhomes, apartment complexes, duplexes, and single-family detached homes provide opportunities for people of a variety of income levels, ages, and household types in South Iowa City. This has allowed many residents to start their adult lives here as renters, own a first home, and transition within their neighborhood as their households grew or changed over time.

While more than half of the housing within the South District is detached single-family units, there is considerable variety in home sizes, prices, and styles. Housing development that slowed during the economic recession in 2008 has picked up considerably over the past 3 to 4 years. The announcement of the new school location on South Sycamore Street will add to the demand in this area. As Grant Wood School is relieved of overcrowded conditions, the surrounding neighborhood should once again become more attractive for families with young children.

Single-Family Housing

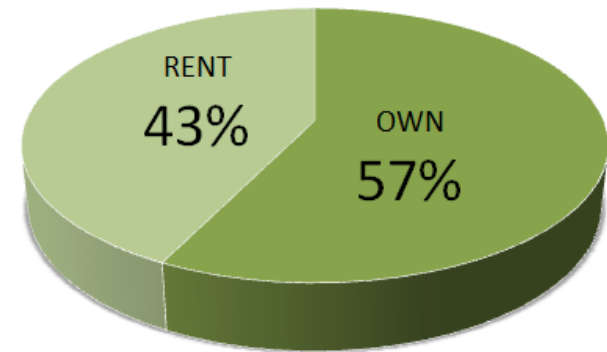
The development of single-family residential neighborhoods in South Iowa City began in the late 1950s with subdivisions south of the Procter and Gamble property. The Fairmeadows and Hollywood subdivisions featured modest tract housing on small lots, providing an affordable option for workers to live close to the Highway 6 industrial area.

Between 1960 and 1990, single-family neighborhoods extended west of Sycamore and south to Amber and Regal Lanes with housing characteristic of the period—a mix of split level and ranch homes with attached garages. By the early 1990s, most of the single-family zone north of Lakeside Drive and Burns Avenue was platted and developed, including the Pepperwood Neighborhood. Neighborhood design is typical of the post-war period, with curvilinear or u-shaped streets and long block lengths or, as in Pepperwood Neighborhood and Whispering Meadows neighborhoods, cul-de-sacs.

By the mid-1990s, development slowed in South Iowa City due to a need for infrastructure improvements. The drafting of the 1997 South District Plan was timed to coincide with construction of the South River Corridor Interceptor Sewer that would provide the necessary capacity for new neighborhoods west of Sycamore Street. Meanwhile construction of the Sycamore Greenway, a regional stormwater facility (completed in 2001), made development of neighborhoods east of Sycamore Street feasible by enhancing drainage in an area that was otherwise susceptible to flooding.

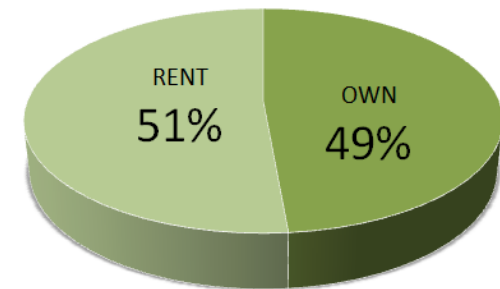
Newly platted lots in South Iowa City continue to be somewhat smaller than those platted in many

South Iowa City



Homeownership

Iowa City



Based on data from the 2012 Five-Year American Community Survey.



Flood Replacement Housing

After the flood of 2008, the Single Family New Construction Program awarded downpayment assistance to 57 homes (single-family, duplex, and townhomes). One third of the homes approved in the program were built south of Hwy 6 and were limited to owner occupants. The homes built under this program more than made up the lost property tax revenues from the flood buy-out program and offered several households an opportunity for homeownership.

other areas of the city. In part this is due to the flat topography, which allows for more development per acre. In some areas of the district, primarily east of the Sycamore Greenway, a high water table limits the construction of basements. These factors have made housing in South Iowa City affordable by reducing land and construction costs.

Many single-family homes in the oldest neighborhoods are small by current standards (less than 1,100 square feet) and lack features considered standard on newer homes, such as attached two-car garages. While these homes provide an affordable option for many homebuyers, including young families and singles, maintenance costs for older homes can be higher. The City's Housing Rehabilitation Program provides no-interest and low-interest loan funds are available for maintenance and rehabilitation for homeowners who fall under certain income thresholds. One objective of the South District Plan is for the City to work with neighborhood associations to make residents more aware of these programs and, in particular, to encourage upgrades that will increase energy and water efficiency, thereby reducing long-term costs of homeownership.

Manufactured Housing

South Iowa City's manufactured housing parks are self-contained neighborhoods, so to speak, with private streets that do not connect to the surrounding public street pattern. There are three manufactured housing parks in South Iowa City. Hilltop Mobile Home Park, established in 1957, was one of the very first residential developments south of Highway 6. Situated on a wooded hillside in the northwest corner of the planning district just south of Southgate Avenue, Hilltop includes 150 lots. Bon Aire Mobile Home Lodge and Paddock Mobile Home Park in Saddlebrook are located in the far east portion of the planning district, along Highway 6. Bon Aire was established in 1967 and includes more than 350 units. The Paddock, now part of the Saddlebrook neighborhood, was established in the mid-1990s and includes 146 units.

Manufactured housing is an important source of affordable housing located close to major employment centers, including the industrial zone just north of the Highway 6. Many residents prefer manufactured housing over multi-family or other rental housing. However, financing for manufactured homes is complicated because the land is leased rather than owned. Since the banking crisis of 2008, mortgages for manufactured housing have become quite expensive, driving down the market for these homes. While it is unknown when the manufactured housing sector will recover, it is in the City's interest to ensure that manufactured housing parks remain safe and welcoming places to live. "If redevelopment of the manufactured housing parks is contemplated in the future, the availability of comparable housing and the impact on the residents should be considered."

Multi-family Housing

As with manufactured housing, most multi-family development in South Iowa City is clustered close to Highway 6. Apartment complexes on large tracts of land are organized around parking areas and, in general, are not integrated with the local street network or block configuration. While this has some advantages in terms of buffering single-family uses from the traffic associated with higher density housing, it also contributes to a feeling of social isolation within the neighborhood. Surveys conducted by the Broadway Neighborhood Center indicate that some residents of large apartment complexes feel less of an association with the surrounding residential neighborhood. Because a large proportion of renters are temporary or new to the area, developing a sense of community, even with immediate neighbors, takes time. For many residents in the multi-family developments, schools provide a vital sense of connection.

Over the years there have been problems associated with some multi-family and rental properties in the South District. These issues have largely arisen due to a combination of poor or inconsistent management, insufficient maintenance and investment, and in some case, poor construction and site design. Building and site design for multi-family development is particularly important for discouraging criminal activity. Targeted code enforcement and requirements for tenant background screening have helped to improve the situation in some of the largest complexes.

In 2011, Southgate Development brought all buildings within what was known as the Broadway Street Condominiums under single ownership. Originally constructed in the 1970s, over the years a number of buildings within the development had come under the control of separate owners such that management and maintenance were inconsistent. Within the development large parking areas and other spaces hidden from view of the street or from apartment windows attracted criminal activity. Conditions within these complexes became a concern not only for residents, but the larger neighborhood and adjacent commercial properties.

Southgate Development invested \$5.75 million, with the City of Iowa City contributing \$900,000 in federal (CDBG) funds, to rehabilitate the apartments. As a condition of federal funding, at least fifty-six of the units must be rented to people making less than 80 percent of the area's median income. These units also have their rents capped at \$802 a month, which is the fair-market value for a two-bedroom apartment in the area. Dwelling units were updated and safety of the site was improved by installing secured entrances, improved lighting, and perimeter fencing. Management also requires background checks for all residents. In response to neighborhood requests, the City located a police substation in nearby Pepperwood Plaza, and engaged in more active patrol of the area, including foot patrol. These changes have been successful in providing a safer, more attractive living environment for residents.



Southgate Development has made substantial investments in the multi-family housing within South Iowa City to provide consistent management, maintenance, and long-term investment in properties that were once neglected or poorly managed.

DESIGNING FOR SAFETY

The physical design of a neighborhood or development has an impact on safety and livability. The balanced application of the following three principles can help to ensure the long-term health and safety of residential areas:

Natural Surveillance. Design and maintenance that allow spaces, both inside and outside buildings, to be observed both by residents and people passing through a neighborhood. Examples include lighting of parking areas, entrances, exits, and other common areas; low or see-through fencing and landscaping; windows overlooking parking areas or entrances.

Territoriality. Creating clear demarcation between public, private, and semi-private spaces helps to convey a sense of “ownership” and an awareness that criminal activity will be noticed by someone. Examples include signage, see-through screening or fencing, gateways, and distinctive paving or landscaping to mark the transition between areas public and private spaces.

Access Control. Decreasing access to areas where a person with criminal intent could hide. Examples include highly visible entrances or gateways through which all users of a property must enter, or the appropriate use of signage, door and window locks, or fencing to discourage unwanted access into private spaces or into dark or unmonitored areas.

Iowa City’s Multi-family Design Standards include some of these principles, such as requiring visible building entrances oriented toward the street, landscaped setbacks around parking areas, and prohibiting sliding glass doors and unenclosed stairways as primary means of access to an dwelling unit. The principles were also applied to the Casey’s site along Highway 6.

The story of Lakeside Apartments—now Rose Oaks—is a cautionary tale of the community impact when a large-scale multi-family project falls into decline. Originally constructed in 1966 to attract University of Iowa students with families, the development did not stand the test of time. By the mid-1980s, tenant complaints about the management of the apartments had become an issue for the city. Over the subsequent decades, a lack of re-investment and maintenance led to further deterioration in the condition of the apartments, which then became vulnerable to criminal activity.

The Iowa City Housing Authority cancelled all contracts (48 in all) and ended Housing Choice Voucher use with Dolphin Lake Point Enclave in October 2012 due to health, safety, and management issues. While the property suffered from poor maintenance, the need for low-income housing in the metro area is so high that units remained occupied despite their condition. The situation has resulted in a concentration of poverty that has implications for the community as a whole as well as the school district.

In Spring 2015, the property sold to a new management company with plans to upgrade the units, however the scope of rehabilitating and/or redevelopment of 400 units remains complex. The City continues its stepped-up code enforcement, but it will take time, attention, and extensive resources to turn the situation around. Meanwhile, with a limited supply of low-income housing in the metro area, many residents have limited options for finding replacement housing.

Objectives of the plan include enhanced code enforcement and well as increased fines or fees as well as coordination of efforts with the Iowa City Police and Fire Departments to identify building issues. The plan also supports rehabilitation or redevelopment of problem properties. Iowa City’s Housing Inspection Division is working proactively with many landlords to ensure effective management of rental properties.



The Lakeside Apartments, recently renamed Rose Oaks, were originally constructed to attract UI students with young families.

The above advertisement appeared the *Daily Iowan* in August, 1967.

HOUSING—GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives for housing were developed from input gathered during the South District Planning process. Achieving these goals may require additional dedication of resources, including staff. Some actions will be implemented by the City. Others will require the effort of landlords, developers, neighborhood associations, community groups, or other agencies.

GOAL 1: Improve and maintain existing housing stock in South Iowa City in order to ensure a healthy balance of long-term residents and owner-occupied housing and to bolster neighborhood stability.

- Continue to make funds available and increase awareness of existing programs available through the City and other agencies that assist with the purchase or rehabilitation of homes.
- Work with the neighborhood associations and manufactured housing parks in South Iowa City to raise awareness of housing rehabilitation programs.
- Identify funds or incentive programs make “green” improvements that conserve water and energy, thereby reducing the long-term costs of owning a home.

EXAMPLES: Explore cooperative efforts with MidAmerican Energy.

Promote benefits of efficiency upgrades, such as door and window improvements, HVAC, insulation, etc.

Investigate opportunities to become a Green Iowa AmeriCorps site.

- Support and promote programs or workshops for new or first-time homeowners to teach basic home repair and maintenance skills.

GOAL 2: Encourage professional management and long-term maintenance and investment in all rental properties for the general safety and welfare of tenants and to preserve property values and promote neighborhood stability in South Iowa City.

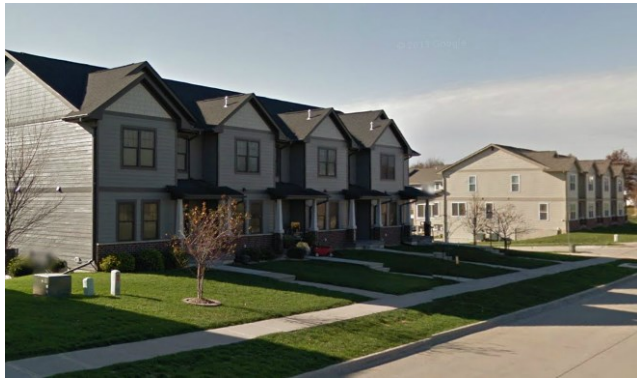
- Encourage the improvement or redevelopment of substandard rental properties.
- Continue to enhance code enforcement to achieve compliance with rental and building regulations for properties that receive a high number of complaints.
- Continue to coordinate communication between the ICPD, Neighborhood Services, and non-profits or neighborhood organizations to identify and address safety and health issues in rental properties.
- Consider opportunities to recognize good property management within South Iowa City.



Iowa City's Housing Rehabilitation Programs provide financial assistance to help homeowners maintain and update residential property and ultimately contributes to the value of Iowa City's housing stock.

CDBG & HOME Housing Rehabilitation Programs and the Targeted Neighborhood Improvement Program provide financial assistance to low- and moderate-income homeowners to make repairs and improvements to their homes. The programs primarily provide low-interest or no-interest loans and/or conditional occupancy loans, depending on the homeowner's ability to make monthly payments on the loans.

The General Rehabilitation and Improvement Program (GRIP) is offered as a complement to the federally funded CDBG/HOME programs without the same level of income targeting. GRIP is designed to stabilize and revitalize neighborhoods through the broader application of Housing Rehabilitation and Historic Preservation programs. This program allows the City to offer low-interest loans that are repayable over a 20-year period, with the money awarded to qualified homeowners on a first-come, first-served basis.



Participants in the planning workshop pointed to the development along Scott Boulevard and Old Towne Village Neighborhood in Northeast Iowa City as a good example of a new neighborhood with an attractive mix of housing. Townhomes face the arterial street and commercial area, transitioning to duplex and detached single-family homes in the interior of the neighborhood. Quality building and site design, and ample open space and landscaping help to make the higher density development an attractive entrance to the area.

New Residential Development

The South District contains more than 1,500 acres of undeveloped land within the City's growth area, which extends as far south as the wastewater treatment facility. Much of the undeveloped land remains in agricultural production (corn and soybeans).

An important goal of the City's Comprehensive Plan is to manage urban growth by encouraging compact and connected neighborhoods. Compact development preserves farmland and sensitive environmental areas for future generations and saves taxpayer money by reducing transportation and infrastructure costs and allowing efficient provision of snow removal, solid waste and recycling pick-up, transit service, fire and police protection, and mail and other delivery services.

The goal of compact neighborhood design is to create village-like neighborhoods with housing for a diverse population, a mix of land uses, public space that is the focal point for the neighborhood, integrated civic or small commercial centers, accessible open space, and streets that are pleasant and safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.

New South District neighborhoods should be built at a density and designed with a level of connectivity that enables families with children to walk to school and supports the extension of transit service. Trail sections should occur with development in order to provide connections between neighborhoods, new and old, to the many parks in South Iowa City and to provide convenient commuter routes for those who wish to bike to school, work, or to the Downtown.

While the predominant land use in South Iowa City's new neighborhoods will remain detached, single-family housing, new neighborhoods should provide opportunities for townhomes, duplexes, and accessory apartments, as well as multi-family buildings in order to serve residents throughout their lifetimes. Integrating a variety of housing types that are compatible in scale throughout a neighborhood is ideal. For example, single-family homes on lots interior to a block with duplexes and attached single-family homes on corner lots creates a mix that remains similar in scale while providing a range of unit sizes and price points within a neighborhood.

Along busier street frontages or where single-loaded streets border public open space, "Middle Housing"* types such as townhouses, small apartment buildings (3-10 units), or cottage or bungalow courts may be built at a scale and mix that is compatible with the single-family neighborhoods. The additional density achieved through this mix can improve feasibility for transit service and enhance market potential for commercial uses in the district, including the small-scale neighborhood commercial corners identified in the plan.



MissingMiddleHousing.com is powered by Opticos Design.
Illustration © 2015 Opticos Design, Inc.



Getting the mix, scale, and parking placement right is essential to integrating a variety of residential types into a neighborhood. Buildings should be designed to be similar in scale (width, depth, height) to single-family homes. Unit sizes may need to be smaller, but should be designed with similar attention to detail and quality construction. Parking should be located to the rear with access from alleys, private rear lanes, or similar shared drive solutions. Concentrations of one housing type in any one area should be avoided as this may create an obstacle to connectivity and can upset the balance of long- and short-term residents. Though the *Middle Housing* concept may currently be achieved through the planned development process, the City should consider a form-based code to help ensure that a true mix of housing at a compatible scale can be achieved.

Higher density *Middle Housing* types must be thoughtfully designed so that they maintain an attractive residential character along streets and provide safe and inviting living environments for the residents. Landscaped front yards or courtyards with parking in the rear will provide a boulevard or park-like setting along streets with uninterrupted sidewalks that encourage walking and biking.

Multi-family developments of a higher density should be considered along Gilbert Street for proposals that provide a unique housing option in South Iowa City, such as senior housing. Proposals should be of exceptional design and construction quality, meet universal design standards, and high energy efficiency standards, including alternative energy or siting for geothermal or passive solar. The community's substantial investment in Terry Trueblood Recreation Area as a regional park should result in a sensitive transition between the man-made and natural environment with appropriate building and site design.

*"Missing Middle" is a term coined by Daniel Parolek of Opticos Design, Inc., in 2010 to define a range of multi-unit or clustered housing types compatible in scale with single-family homes that help meet the growing demand for walkable urban living. These include duplexes, townhouses, triplexes and fourplexes, courtyard apartments, bungalow courts, and small apartment buildings (5-10 units). To learn more about "missing middle" housing, see <http://missingmiddlehousing.com>.

The following areas may be candidates for clustered density:

- West of the Pepperwood Subdivision, wooded slopes make traditional development impractical. In this area, the 2 to 8 dwelling units per acre envisioned on the land use map on page 53 could be clustered through an overlay planned development. Such development would rely on an extension of Cherry Street, which will provide improved connectivity and circulation for the single-family neighborhood to the east by allowing residents more direct street access to South Gilbert Street.
- Areas south of Lehman Road and east of Pleasant Valley Golf Course fall within 1,000 feet of the Wastewater Plant, an area in which the Iowa Department of Natural Resources recommends careful scrutiny of residential development. Reductions of development potential on these properties might be ameliorated by allowing the 2 to 8 dwelling units per acre envisioned in the land use map to be clustered along Lehman Road or for density to be transferred to nearby properties. A limited number of multi-family buildings may be considered near the Sycamore “L” and at the intersection of Lehman and Soccer Park Roads.

Any larger multi-family buildings should be integrated into the neighborhood by extending the established street pattern and block size of surrounding residential development. Careful attention should be given to site design, landscaping, and parking location as well as opportunities for usable private open space. This will assure that higher density housing does not diminish connectivity or detract from the overall quality of the neighborhood. Building and site designs should be evaluated to ensure that they provide optimal safety while supporting social contact among residents. (See Designing for Safety guidelines on page 16.)

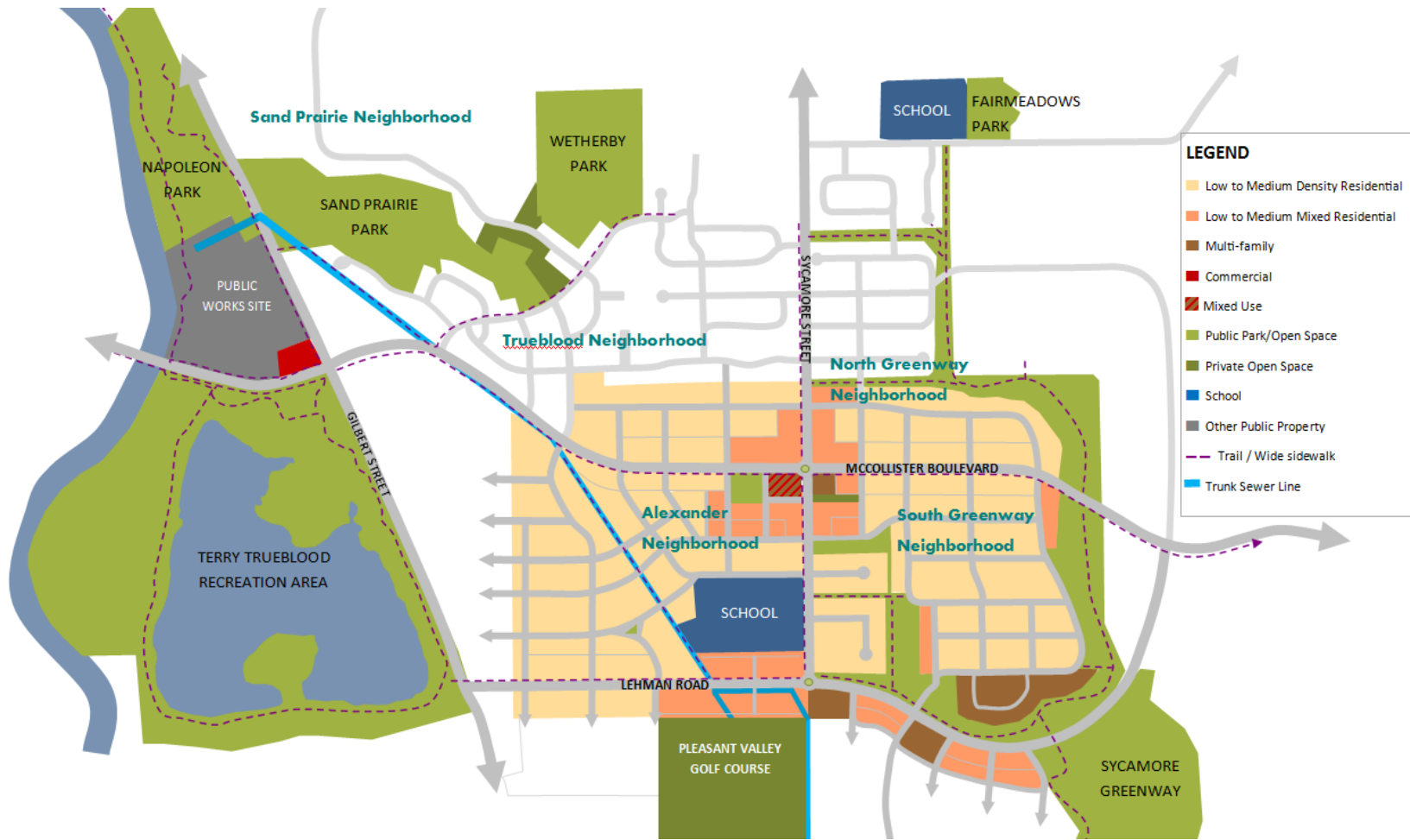
Universal design should be encouraged in most housing types to maximize opportunities not only for people with disabilities but to allow people to age in place.

Opportunities for additional density:

Property located along the east side of Gilbert Street, south of the railroad, may be appropriate for townhome or other small lot or duplex development. Multi-family units may be considered on property directly adjacent to the intersections of Gilbert Street and McCollister Boulevard and Gilbert and Sycamore Street (future Lehman). Sites near the McCollister intersection may be attractive for senior housing with views of surrounding open space (Sand Prairie and Terry Trueblood Recreation Area) and access to the trail network and transit routes. Additional density may be considered for projects that add a unique housing element or that enhance housing diversity for the South District or that otherwise contribute to the connectivity and sustainability of the neighborhood, including developments that improve connectivity within the neighborhood or enhance visibility and street access to public parks and other open space.

As noted elsewhere in the plan, property on the east side of Gilbert Street that formerly served as a sand dredging pond has recently been filled with excavated material. Before development can occur on this site, the City will require a geotechnical analysis. If the soil is found to be suitable for development, higher density development should be considered along Gilbert Street, transitioning from multi-family at the arterial street intersections, to townhomes and/or duplexes, to predominantly detached single-family at the core of the neighborhood.

Properties located around the intersection of McCollister Boulevard and South Sycamore Street may also be appropriate for higher density development. A mix of townhouses, triplexes, fourplexes, or cottage/bungalow courts may be considered along both sides of the arterial streets near this intersection. Small apartment buildings (5 to 10 units), live-work units, and low-scale mixed-use buildings may be integrated with the small mixed-use corner identified on the plan map. Density should step down, transitioning from commercial uses to multi-family to townhome or duplex toward the interior of the neighborhood where detached single-family housing will predominate.



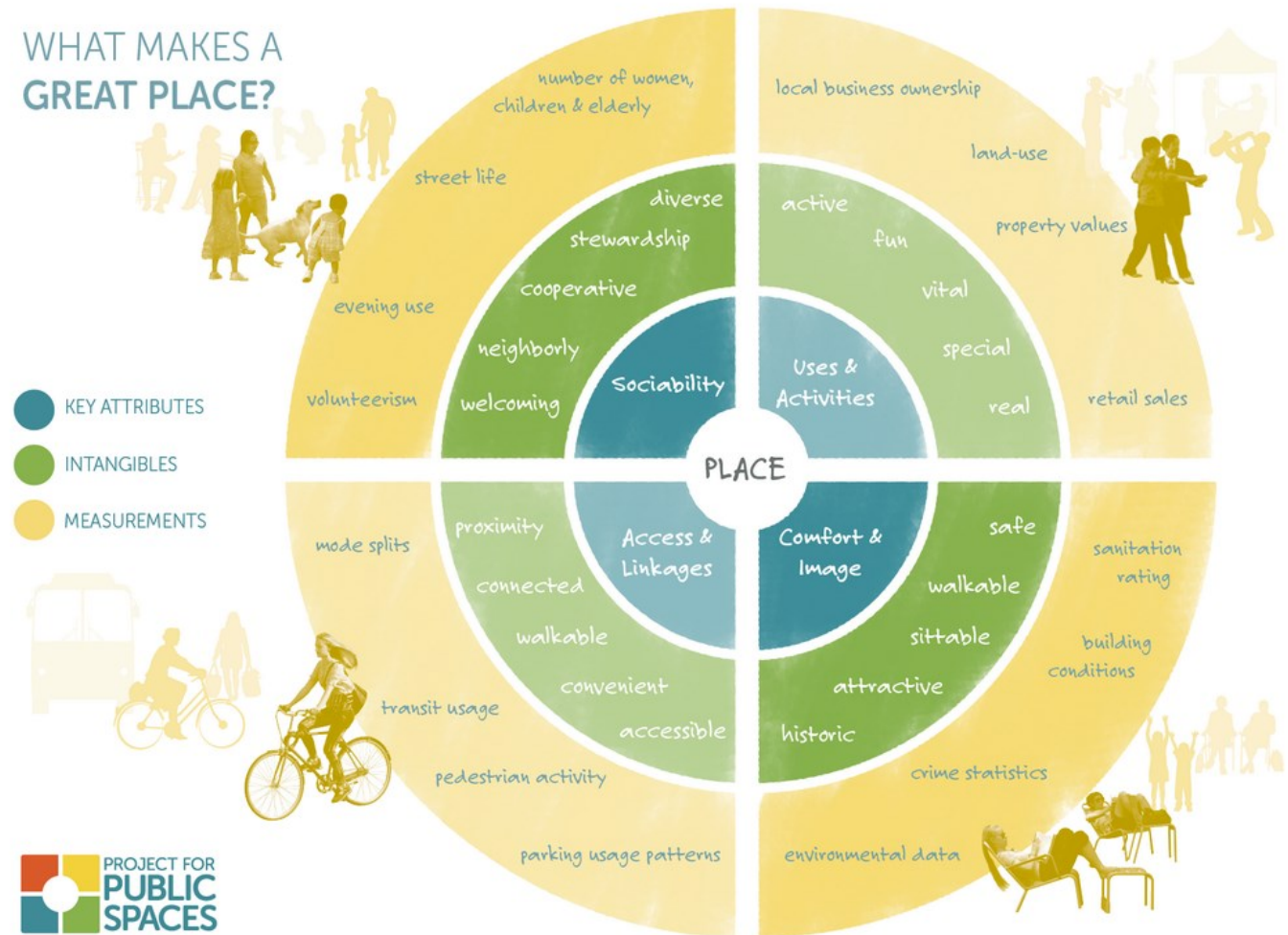
FUTURE NEIGHBORHOOD SCENARIO

The Future Neighborhood Scenario offers an example of one possible way that new neighborhoods could develop in an area immediately around the new Archibald Alexander Elementary School. The purpose of this exercise is not to prescribe a precise layout and mix of uses that are required for future development or to preclude development in other areas of the district. Rather, the scenario is meant to demonstrate how, based on topography and existing features (easements, major roads, and established trail or street connections) the area could develop in accord with Iowa City's subdivision regulations, zoning code, and the goals for walkability and sense of place included in this district plan. The scenario illustrates a potential street network and a mix of housing types, locations of parks, open space, and trails, as well as commercial or mixed use areas.

As development occurs, each subdivision will contribute to the overall quality and sustainability of the entire district by enhancing walkability and connectivity. Preserving opportunity for a small neighborhood commercial or mixed use development at the intersection of McCollister Boulevard and Sycamore Street may help to create a community anchor for the surrounding neighborhoods.

This **Neighborhood Scenario** illustrates a concept for maximizing connectivity to allow greater access to neighborhood assets such as parks, trails, and schools. Residential areas provide an attractive and vibrant mix of well-designed housing types and densities. The neighborhood concept is anchored by a small, mixed-use commercial area.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT PLACE?



WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL PLACE?

Great public spaces are where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges take place, friends run into each other, and cultures mix. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions—libraries, parks, houses, neighborhood schools—where we interact with each other and the government. When the spaces work well, they serve as a stage for our public lives. (From the Project for Public Spaces. <http://www.pps.org/reference/grplacefeat.>)

Neighborhood Quality

When asked what they like best about living in South Iowa City, participants in the planning work-shop and on-line survey most frequently noted convenience, affordability, access to open space and trails, and the diversity of its population and neighborhoods. While work, shopping, and schools (kindergarten through 12th grade) are just a short car trip away for most residents of the district, South Iowa City's neighborhoods feel like a retreat from the hustle and bustle of life in areas closer to the Downtown and University Campus. Respondents frequently used adjectives such as quiet, green, and family-friendly to describe their neighborhoods.

However, the broader public perception of South Iowa City is something altogether different. Residents point to media reports, real estate agents, and public debates over school district boundaries and affordable housing as frequently perpetuating a misperception about what life is like in this part of the community. Through a variety of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, the Broadway Neighborhood Center has engaged residents in identifying the particular challenges and opportunities that exist in South Iowa City, especially for renters and low-income or minority residents. The results of their efforts, along with the planning process undertaken for this district planning update, coalesce around three priorities:

- Fostering a stronger sense of community—one that embraces renters and other residents who are new to the community.
- Expanding organized activities for the high population of youth and children, including mentoring for low-income and minority teens.
- Projecting a positive image of South Iowa City reflective of its many assets, especially its many environmental features.

The opening of Archibald Alexander Elementary is widely regarded as a pivotal event for achieving all of these goals. The school and the development anticipated around it provide a catalyst for transforming the image of South Iowa City and strengthening the sense of community for those who live here. Also, reducing the strain on Grant Wood, which the Iowa City Community School District considers overcrowded, will help make the existing neighborhood more attractive to families with school-age children. The density of single-family development and a well-connected street system that surrounds Grant Wood Elementary make it one of the most walkable neighborhood schools in the entire school district.

WHAT RESIDENTS LIKE ABOUT SOUTH IOWA CITY:

**“Near enough to get
whatever I need, but far
enough away to enjoy my
life.”**

**“Diverse, affordable,
close to schools.”**

**“Natural landscapes,
close to downtown, quiet.”**

**“I like the mix of residents—age,
ethnicity, income, education,
homeowners, renters, singles,
couples, families.”**

**“Near several parks and close
enough to downtown to
commute by bus, bike, or
walking.”**

**“Lots of families.
Friendly, inclusive attitude.”**

NEIGHBORHOOD QUALITY—GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives for neighborhood quality were developed from input gathered during the South District planning process. Achieving these goals will require a cooperative effort. Some actions may be implemented by the City, however many are more appropriately initiated by residents, neighborhood associations, community groups, schools, businesses, or other stakeholders in South Iowa City.

GOAL 1: Foster a strong and inclusive sense of community in South Iowa City neighborhoods.

A. Create or support opportunities for residents and neighbors to get to know each other.

- Continue support for block parties, “Party in the Park” events, and other neighborhood gatherings—movies, music, art, etc.
- Support Blue Zones efforts to get people active by hosting regular walking and biking events on the South District trails. Encourage the establishment of festivals or other special events that celebrate the unique qualities of South Iowa City, including its cultural diversity. For example: commercial areas could encourage social activity by hosting special events—farmers markets, food truck night, live music, dance, roller derby, etc.
- Support special events that reintroduce the larger community to South Iowa City. For example: encourage nonprofits to host run, walk, and bike events on South Iowa City’s trails.

B. Reinforce a shared experience of place.

- Identify areas within the district that can be enhanced with public art, community gardens, improved bus stops, lighting, or other features that encourage social gathering or interaction.
- Reinforce local identity through the consistent use of identifiable visual elements in street signs, bus stops, kiosks, streetscape improvements, banners, etc.
- Establish an inventory of names that reflect the unique history and geography of South Iowa City to be used for future street and place names (e.g. park or trail names) within the district.
- Consider using mailbox clusters as space for neighborly interaction, working with developers to include trail maps, bulletin boards, seating, plantings or other features that encourage neighbors to get to know one another. (This may involve PIN grants.) Locate mailbox clusters in areas that are appropriate and welcoming for neighbors to linger (e.g. pocket parks or adjacent to private open space or trails).

C. Welcome new residents and help orient them to their new community. Such an effort should involve a broad collaboration of neighborhood groups, businesses, realtors, and developers.

- Consider updating the Newcomer's Guide on the City's website, and actively promote the site as one-stop-shopping for new residents, including links to neighborhood groups and programming.
- Continue to improve outreach to minorities and non-English speaking residents to encourage their active participation in neighborhood events and awareness of City programs and processes. This may require translation services.

D. Encourage and support residents, neighborhood organizations, and business and property owners to advocate for the continued improvement of Southside neighborhoods in keeping with the goals of the Comprehensive Plan.

- Provide open and proactive communication between the City and Southside neighbors through the timely dissemination of information on grant opportunities, capital improvements, development proposals, and zoning applications.
- Continue support for Neighborhood Outreach as an essential resource for neighborhood information and organization efforts.
- Continue support for community policing and encourage bike and foot patrols to make police officers a friendly and visible part of the neighborhood.

E. Create and sustain vibrant social gathering spaces.

- Explore the potential for a community center as an anchor for neighborhood activity/identity. This will likely require partnerships (and fundraising) between organizations that have a need for expanded facilities—local non-profits, Bike Library, local foods organizations, arts organizations, etc.
- Consider opportunities for community use of the resource center and gymnasium space at Grant Wood Elementary and the expanded gym at Archibald Alexander.
- Explore opportunities for a satellite library or other services or programming.



Participants at the South District planning workshop were invited to suggest a tagline or motto to convey a true sense of what makes living in South Iowa City great. One group came up with the phrase “Start here, stay here” to express the many opportunities that exist in South Iowa City for people of all ages, especially young families.



Photo: Anne Duggan

Youth Off-Road Riders is a program focused on competitive and recreational cycling sponsored by the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County.



Photo from Diversity Focus

Youth Performance Arts Academy is sponsored by The Dream Center.

Nonprofit organizations like the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County, The Dream Center, and The Spot are providing unique opportunities for children and youth in South Iowa City, including training, tutoring, mentorship, and recreational programs.

F. Promote community stewardship and investment by engaging residents in improving their neighborhood.

- Encourage annual volunteer events to bring neighbors together—park improvement events, street or yard clean-ups, recycling days, neighborhood garage sale or swap events, etc.
- Engage neighborhood groups in planning for the improvement of the south portion of Wetherby Park as development surrounds the park. Design this process as an opportunity to strengthen community connection.
- Involve youth groups in planning for and undertaking improvements and advocacy efforts in the district. For example: trail/park clean-ups, tree planting, public art, special event organizing, community gardens.

GOAL 2. Expand opportunities for children and youth in South Iowa City.

A. Support the establishment of quality, affordable daycare and preschool in South Iowa City.

- Encourage childcare services as development and redevelopment occurs in both commercial and residential zones, especially in areas near Grant Wood and Archibald Alexander Elementary Schools.
- Consider incentives to attract daycare to the area identified for future neighborhood commercial and promote availability of daycare as an asset to attract new families to the district.

B. Continue support for before- and after-school programming at Grant Wood and Archibald Alexander and elementary and summer programming at Southside parks and schools.

C. Support efforts to address the needs of children and youth in South Iowa City.

- Identify and address obstacles to participation in existing programs.
- Identify potential funding sources—public and private—to expand programming or support participation among area youth.
- Pursue partnerships and scholarships with existing arts, athletic, and other community programs to ensure that children can participate in extracurricular activities.
- Explore feasibility of a Youth Corps program to engage young people, especially low-income and minority youth, in neighborhood improvement, skill training, etc. For example: a Youth Green Corps could assist with programs focused on improving the district and create opportunities for young people to meet, learn from, and complete projects for various City divisions as well as neighborhood groups and businesses.

GOAL 3. Focus on South Iowa City as a sustainable district by promoting its many advantages: housing affordability and choice, access to work and recreation, cultural diversity, neighborhood connectivity and walkability, alternative transportation, and environmental conservation.

A. Acknowledge and promote the environmental, social, and economic benefits of walkability for South Iowa City.

- Support the principles of compact, walkable development in all new neighborhoods.
- Actively plan for bus service expansion, ensuring a density of development that will support extension of bus routes along major arterials.
- Extend the Highway 6 trail system and create better pedestrian connections to commercial and industrial properties along both sides of the highway.
- Complete the circuit of trails that connect South Iowa City's parks and neighborhoods as development occurs.
- Ensure that future commercial nodes located south of Highway 6 are pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly and enhance opportunities for extension of public transit.

B: Accentuate South Iowa City's connection to the environment and outdoor recreation.

- Incorporate trees and other landscaping features along major rights-of-way as part of infrastructure improvement projects.
- Provide distinctive landscaping, including low-maintenance native plantings at major entrances to South Iowa City and at intersections of arterial streets.
- Consider unique signage, public art, and other amenities such as bus shelters, seating, and wayfinding along major rights-of-way.
- Collaborate with developers and realtors in promoting South Iowa City's environmental and recreational assets.

C. Maximize resource conservation in South Iowa City.

- Consider recycling receptacles at public parks and other public facilities, especially high-use areas such as Terry Trueblood Recreation Area and Kickers Soccer Park.
- Offer incentives or assistance for planning "no-waste" events that make use of recyclable/compostable materials.
- Encourage all City-sponsored events in the district to maximize use of recycling and local purchasing.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"Place names are also symbols to which people attach meaning and from which they draw identity. . . They are one of the most fundamental ways in which people connect with places."—Derek Alderman

"Place Names." The Encyclopedia of Human Geography. Sage Publications (2006)

A list of potential street names for South Iowa City:

Geologic: Sperry, Garwin, Walford, Zook, Colo, Ely, Ackmore, Houghton, Elvira, Loess, Lake Calvin, Dune, Swale

Birds: Dowitcher, Sandpiper, Avocet, Pelican, Plover, Scaup, Grebe, Merganser, Teal, Bittern

Other animals: Bullfrog, Peeper, Chorus Frog, Sandshell, Heelsplitter, Papershell, Slider, Box Turtle, Painted Turtle

Plants: Puccoon, Penstemmon, Vervain, Trefoil, Switchgrass, Bluestem, Lobelia, Sedge, Anemone, Wild Iris, Arrowwood, Buttonbush

Environmentalists: Ding Darling, Leopold, Carson, Pammel, Hayden, Madson, MacBride, Rhodes, Seiberling

Mesquakie names: Wacochachi, Poweshiek, Bear, Fox, Thunder, Wolf

Historic: Trading House, Ripple, Trowbridge, Morford, Felkner, Sanders, Howard, McNeil



Yellow Velo is a concession stand and bike rental that operates in City Park during the summer as part of the Neighborhood Centers of Johnson County's youth employment program. The program provides employment and job skill training for neighborhood youth to sell simple, healthy food (much of it locally produced). A similar program might be considered for a park in South Iowa City.



In the City of Literature, access to reading materials is a priority—one that the Antelope Lending Library takes seriously. The mobile library was founded (and driven) by Cassandra Elton, a graduate student in library science who works at Grant Wood Elementary's after-school program. For many families, getting to the library downtown is difficult, so Antelope Library brings the books to them, providing service at area parks in South Iowa City and other neighborhoods.

- Promote energy and water conservation features of new development. Identify buildings or sites that could benefit from solar arrays, reflective rooftops, and other energy/conservation upgrades such as new windows, lighting, entryway improvements, plug-in stations, and improved bike, pedestrian, and bus facilities.
- Recognize private sector investment in energy conservation efforts.

D. Initiate a multi-year effort to draw visitors to South Iowa City focusing on area parks, trails, and environmental areas.

- Partner with organizations to host seasonal park-to-park bike or running events showcasing the Iowa River Corridor Trail.
- Maximize use of Kickers Soccer Park, including tournaments, club and recreational soccer, ultimate Frisbee, etc.
- As part of Blue Zones efforts, organize walking clubs at Terry Trueblood Recreation Area for targeted demographics—senior walk days, mommy meet-ups, etc.
- Promote events that focus on South Iowa City's environmental assets, such as bird watching, fishing, prairie restoration, etc.

F. Incorporate local foods, art, and culture as part of revitalization efforts.

- Extend the City of Literature and other arts programming to South Iowa City.
- Support efforts to celebrate South Iowa City's unique cultural diversity.
- Consider affordable or underutilized sites for potential indoor or outdoor facilities for arts and cultural programming or local food production or distribution, and encourage partnerships between such programs to enhance funding opportunities and shared resources.

Parks, Trails, and Open Space

Open space is, perhaps, the defining feature of the South Planning District, which has nearly 380 acres of public land, including eight parks—more than any other planning district in the city. An additional 200 acres of wetlands are preserved in a private conservation area just south of the Saddlebrook development in the far eastern portion of the planning district. South Iowa City is also home to Friendly Farm—Johnson County’s only urban organic farm—and Pleasant Valley Golf Course.

Community members, neighborhood groups, nonprofits, and athletic organizations have participated in shaping and improving South Iowa City’s parks and trails—including advocating for preservation of environmentally sensitive areas, fundraising for improvements, designing new features, and sponsoring programming. Many participants in the on-line survey and planning workshop noted that ready access to parks, trails, and unique natural features is what drew them to the area.

Existing Parks

Terry Trueblood Recreation Area: Developed on the site of a former sand dredging pond just east of the Iowa River, Terry Trueblood Recreation Area (TTRA) is one of Johnson County’s premier nature areas, a birding “hotspot,” and the crown jewel of South Iowa City’s “emerald necklace” of parks. The idea for developing the former sand dredging pond as park was a goal included in the 1997 South District Plan. The 207-acre recreation park, which opened in 2013, encompasses a 95-acre lake that includes a beach, fishing jetties, and boat ramps. In addition to operating a concession stand, a private vendor provides canoe, kayak, and paddleboard rental during warm weather and ice skate rental during the winter. The Park Lodge has become a popular venue for weddings, parties, and other events and meetings. The two-mile bike/pedestrian trail that circles the lake links to the Iowa River Trail, providing a safe and pleasant off-road commute to the UI campus and Riverfront Crossings District. With the purchase of riverfront land to the west of the lake, there are plans to add camp sites and related facilities in the future.

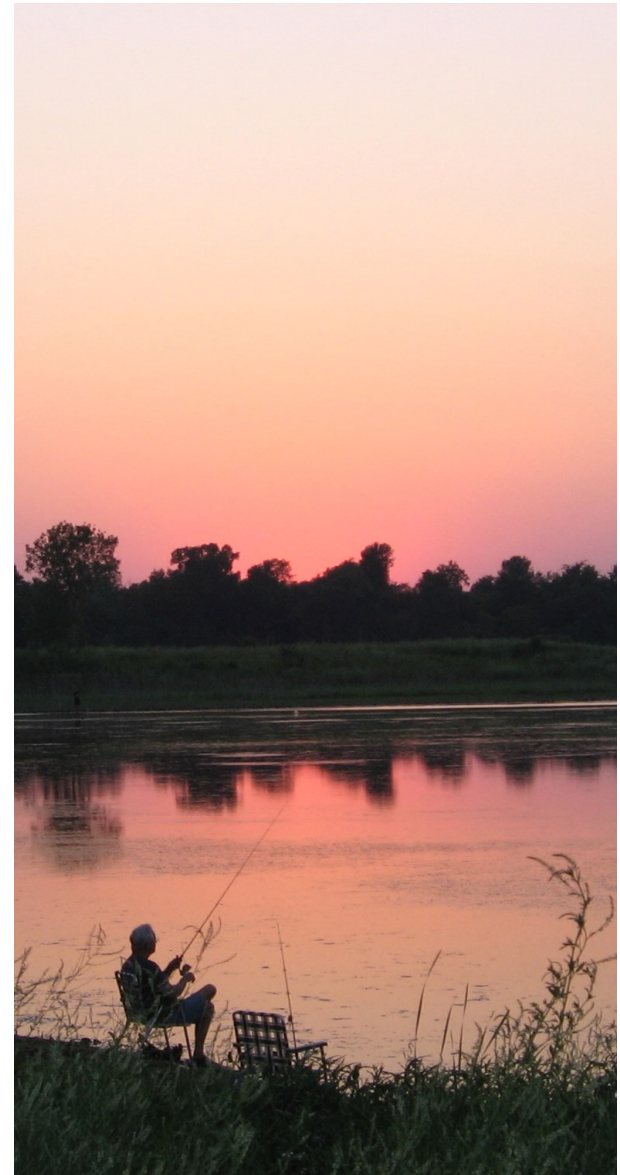


Photo by Cyndi Ambrose

Open space and access to unique natural areas are two defining characteristics of South Iowa City. Above, a sunset view of fishing at the Terry Trueblood Recreation Area.



A view of the pond at Sand Prairie.



Kickers Soccer Park draws hundreds of players from throughout eastern Iowa to south Iowa City during the playing season. Both recreational and club leagues use the site.

Sand Prairie Park: A remnant of a very rare type of prairie, Sand Prairie Park provides an attractive entrance to the residential neighborhoods south of the Crandic Railroad, and affords impressive sunset views over the Iowa River. The property was once home to the Ornate Box Turtle, a protected species in the state of Iowa. In anticipation of development that would reduce the area in which turtles could forage for food, more than 50 turtles were relocated to another site by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Forty-six acres were preserved, thanks to the cooperative effort of neighborhood residents, naturalists, the Iowa City Parks Department, and Southgate Development. Concerned Citizens for Sand Prairie Preservation (CCSPP), a local nonprofit formed to preserve the site, and provided detailed research on its ecological significance. Working with Randall Arendt, a nationally renowned conservation landscape architect, Southgate Development designed a residential subdivision that clustered housing in order to preserve the prairie, setting aside 18 acres for permanent open space. The remaining land was acquired by Iowa Natural Heritage and transferred to City ownership in 2005.

Whispering Meadows: Whispering Meadows Wetland Park is a 17-acre park constructed on property donated to the City by a local development company. The land was previously used for row crops, but was poorly drained and contained 3 wetlands. Geoscience professor Lon Drake worked with the City to develop the park concept. The park was established in 1994 and planted to represent three botanical communities: wetland, wet meadow, and mesic prairie. Beaver are occasional residents of the park, which contains a pond with a boardwalk and a trail. Due to lack of maintenance, many of the plants were lost and the park has been overwhelmed by reed canary grass—an invasive species. Regular maintenance is necessary to ensure the park can function as a wetland and to ensure that it does not become an eyesore for adjacent private property owners.

Napoleon Park: Napoleon Park is a 29-acre softball facility and a trailhead for the Iowa River Corridor Trail. The park was established in 1978 as the home to Iowa City Girls Softball, an affiliate of the Parks and Recreation Department. This nonprofit organization provides recreational softball opportunities for K-12 girls. The park currently provides 8 ball fields as well as restrooms and a concession stand.

Kickers Soccer Park: Located on the south edge of the district adjacent to the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Kickers Soccer Park is a 108-acre sports complex with 20 soccer pitches in addition to 2 baseball fields. The park was established on land that was acquired for the wastewater plant and uses graywater to irrigate fields. It is home to the Iowa City Kickers recreational league, a nonprofit organization that provides soccer opportunities for youth (K-12th grade) in Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty, and surrounding communities. The park is connected to neighborhoods to the north by the Sycamore Greenway Trail.

Fairmeadows Park: This 5-acre neighborhood park serving the Grant Wood neighborhood, was established in 1966 on property adjacent to Grant Wood Elementary School. In many ways, the park and school playground function together, serving both the school and the neighborhood. The park includes a splash pad, playground, open playing field, picnic shelter, and restrooms. In 2014 the Public Art Program commissioned a mural at the park. Given its location near the school and high-density multi-family housing, the park serves as much-needed play space for many neighborhood children. The lack of supervision at the park has sometimes created a nuisance for neighbors, but the splash pad has provided a much-needed neighborhood attraction. Residents would like to see additional improvements at the park, including lighting and soccer nets.

Wetherby Park: This 24-acre neighborhood park was established in 1975. In addition to a splashpad, picnic shelter, basketball court, playground, playing fields, and Frisbee golf, the park features community garden plots and is the home to Backyard Abundance Edible Forest. The Wetherby Friends Neighborhood Association was instrumental in securing funds for installation of the splashpad and renovation of the picnic shelter. Wetherby now is one of Iowa City's most actively used parks and has helped to foster the sense of community that residents seek. However, limited street access creates a barrier for park users. Street access is important for visibility—that's how people know a park is there. It also allows such a large park to be more actively supervised, used, and maintained by both the City and neighborhood. While the north end of the park is developed for active uses, the south end is isolated and offers few features. Additional vehicle parking and pedestrian access along with improvements to the south end of the park should occur with residential development. Opportunities to expand street visibility should be explored.

Sycamore Greenway: Though not technically part of the Iowa City park system, the Sycamore Greenway is an important public open space feature of the district. The corridor functions as a stormwater detention and filtration area that reduces flooding and improves water quality for the Iowa River (see page 9). The wetlands are home to a diverse population of woodland, prairie, and riparian species and are a birding hotspot. The 2.2-mile South Sycamore Greenway Trail is anchored at the north by Grant Wood Elementary and Kickers Soccer Park to the south.



Wetherby Park is a major neighborhood attraction, but with street access limited to Taylor Drive, the park lacks visibility and accessibility for both vehicles and pedestrians. Opportunities for additional access points, including active street frontage, should be explored to improve overall awareness of the park and to help foster a sense of ownership by the broader neighborhood.



Splash pads at Fairmeadows and Wetherby Parks are a summertime attraction to South Iowa City neighborhoods.
[photo courtesy the Daily Iowan]



Workshop participants envisioned unique signage to help solidify the image of South Iowa City as a green district and a sort of playground for the community based on its access to parks, open space and trails.



The north trailhead for the Sycamore Greenway is enhanced with two artistic pillars that call attention to and celebrate the trail and the cultural diversity of the Grant Wood Neighborhood. The public art project was jointly sponsored by the Iowa City Public Art Program, Grant Wood Neighborhood Association, and City High School.

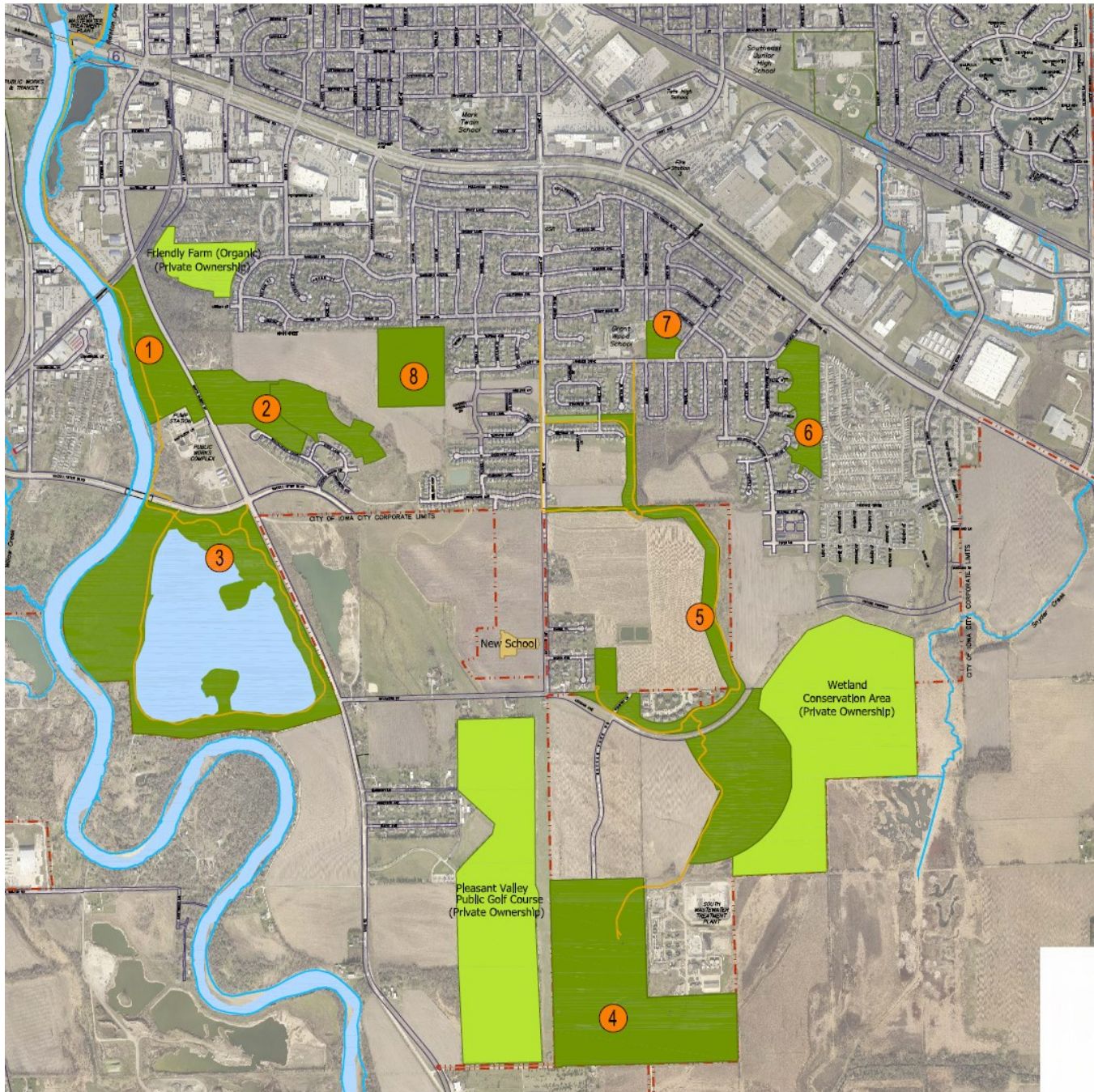
A vision for the future

Broader community awareness of the parks and natural areas in the district could help to improve the image of South Iowa City. One suggestion that received popular support in the public workshop was the idea of promoting South Iowa City as a “green” district. This effort could be extended beyond park boundaries to include wayfinding and aesthetic enhancements (e.g. trees and landscaping) along major street corridors (Highway 6, McCollister Boulevard, South Gilbert and Sycamore Street) or at identified “gateways” to South Iowa City. Participants in the planning workshop envision unique signage, bus stops, bicycle parking, trash and recycling receptacles, and public art to help to solidify this green image as part of a South Iowa City brand.

While residents are supportive of new neighborhood development, they want developers to take a sensitive approach to subdivision design—one that improves connectivity and preserves natural features and a sense of open space. This includes providing logical connections to trails and visible access to parks; preserving and integrating unique environmental features as central components in new subdivisions (as was done with the Sand Prairie Preserve); and ensuring long-term maintenance and health of private open space, a responsibility that ultimately falls to homeowners’ associations, by educating new homebuyers about the function and value of shared open space.

Creating small pocket parks (1 acre or less) allows residential neighborhoods to develop with a healthy density while providing opportunities for the kind of social connection that fosters a sense of community. Providing visible access to public parks and open space, including single-loaded streets or well-designed pedestrian routes, helps to ensure that parks benefit the entire neighborhood and can have safety benefits as well.

Volunteer projects and educational outreach are seen as useful ways to connect residents to environmental and other outdoor resources in the district and to encourage a sense of stewardship for communal spaces. Participants in the planning process strongly support efforts by the Parks Department, local organizations, and neighborhood associations to engage the public (especially school-age children) with the natural environment, including South Iowa City’s unique geology and natural history.



The Parks and Recreation Department Master Plan (completed in 2009) includes community interest inventory for park and recreation facilities and services. Respondents indicated a desire for walking and biking trails (79%), nature center and trails (68%), small neighborhood parks (68%), large community parks (66%), and wildlife and natural areas (64%). The South District is unique among Iowa City's 10 planning districts in that it provides all of these facilities.

South District Public Parks

1. Napoleon Park (softball)
2. Sand Prairie Park
3. Terry Trueblood Recreation Area
4. Kickers Soccer Park
5. Sycamore Greenway
6. Whispering Meadows Wetland Park
7. Fairmeadows Park
8. Wetherby Park



Management of natural areas, such as the Sand Prairie and Sycamore Greenway, require controlled burning. Because the use of fire can raise concerns among neighborhood residents, it is important to engage the public with the many benefits of fire as well as the precautions taken to ensure its safe use.



The Edible Forest at Wetherby Park is being established through a collaboration between the Parks Department and Backyard Abundance, a nonprofit community group.

PARKS, TRAILS, AND OPEN SPACE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives were developed from input gathered during the South District planning process. Some actions will be implemented by the City. Others will require the effort of residents, neighborhood associations, community groups, or other agencies or interested parties.

Goal 1: Create broad community awareness of South Iowa City's extensive park and trail system and its unique environmental areas.

- Support a collaborative partnership between neighborhood organizations, realtors, and other interest groups to build a "brand identity" for South Iowa City based on its parks and natural features—a "green district." [See the Neighborhood Quality section of the plan, page 23.]
- Encourage neighborhood associations, property owners, developers, and realtors to promote South Iowa City's green elements and to ensure the long-term maintenance of its parks and open spaces. This could be achieved with signage, brochures, educational outreach, web or other on-line efforts, etc.
- Enhance major street corridors and public rights-of-way to build a unified identity for South Iowa City based on its recreational and natural features. For example: trees, native landscaping, unique gateway signs, transit stops, or art reflective of the area's green components.
- Choose street, subdivision, and other place names that refer to natural features of the district, such as plants, animals, soils, geologic formations, local environmentalists, etc.
- As development around Wetherby Park occurs, encourage subdivision designs that maximize visibility and access to the park.

Goal 2. Preserve environmentally sensitive features and ensure long-term stewardship for the benefit of the neighborhood and the community.

- Where possible, incorporate environmental features as integral elements of subdivision designs.
- Encourage developers to collaborate with homeowner or neighborhood associations and realtors to promote these natural elements as integral features of their development.

Goal 3: Plan, create, and improve parks and other open spaces that foster social interaction and a sense of community within the neighborhoods.

- Encourage small pocket parks (1 acre or less) in new neighborhoods as they develop, especially in future neighborhoods east of Sycamore Street.
- Include a small open space or a plaza in conjunction with neighborhood commercial sites to serve as a community gathering spot.
- Encourage usable private open space in association with future multi-family and townhome developments that do not otherwise have direct access to public open space.
- Identify opportunities to establish additional community gardens and partner with neighborhood groups and nonprofits to ensure appropriate maintenance of these spaces.
- Engage the neighborhood in planning for improvements at the south end of Wetherby Park as residential neighborhoods develop along its border, and ensure additional pedestrian and vehicle access to the park with appropriate and safe transitions between residential properties and public space.
- Consider the feasibility of a small off-leash dog area in South Iowa City.
- Explore development potential of the former sand dredging pond on the east side of Gilbert Street. If soil stability is not appropriate for development, consider potential for recreational or community use of the site (e.g. gardens, urban agriculture, outdoor performance space, etc.).

Goal 4: Pursue partnerships with neighborhood and community organizations, nonprofits, and schools to promote stewardship and use of existing parks.

- Support efforts by local organizations to increase appreciation of South Iowa City's natural features among residents, including children and youth, through educational and volunteer programs.
- Inspire neighborhood/community preservation and stewardship of natural areas by promoting its function as wildlife habitat, stormwater filtration, flood control, etc.

Goal 5: Provide appropriate trail links between parks, neighborhoods, and the new school.

- Ensure safe access between the new elementary school and surrounding neighborhoods and parks.
- Provide a connection between Wetherby Park and Sand Prairie Park.



A sand dredging pond located along the east side of Gilbert Street, near Terry Trueblood Recreation Area, is currently being filled. Future development potential will depend on stability of the fill. If it is determined that the site is not suitable for residential uses, the property could be adapted for a park, recreation, or another community use.

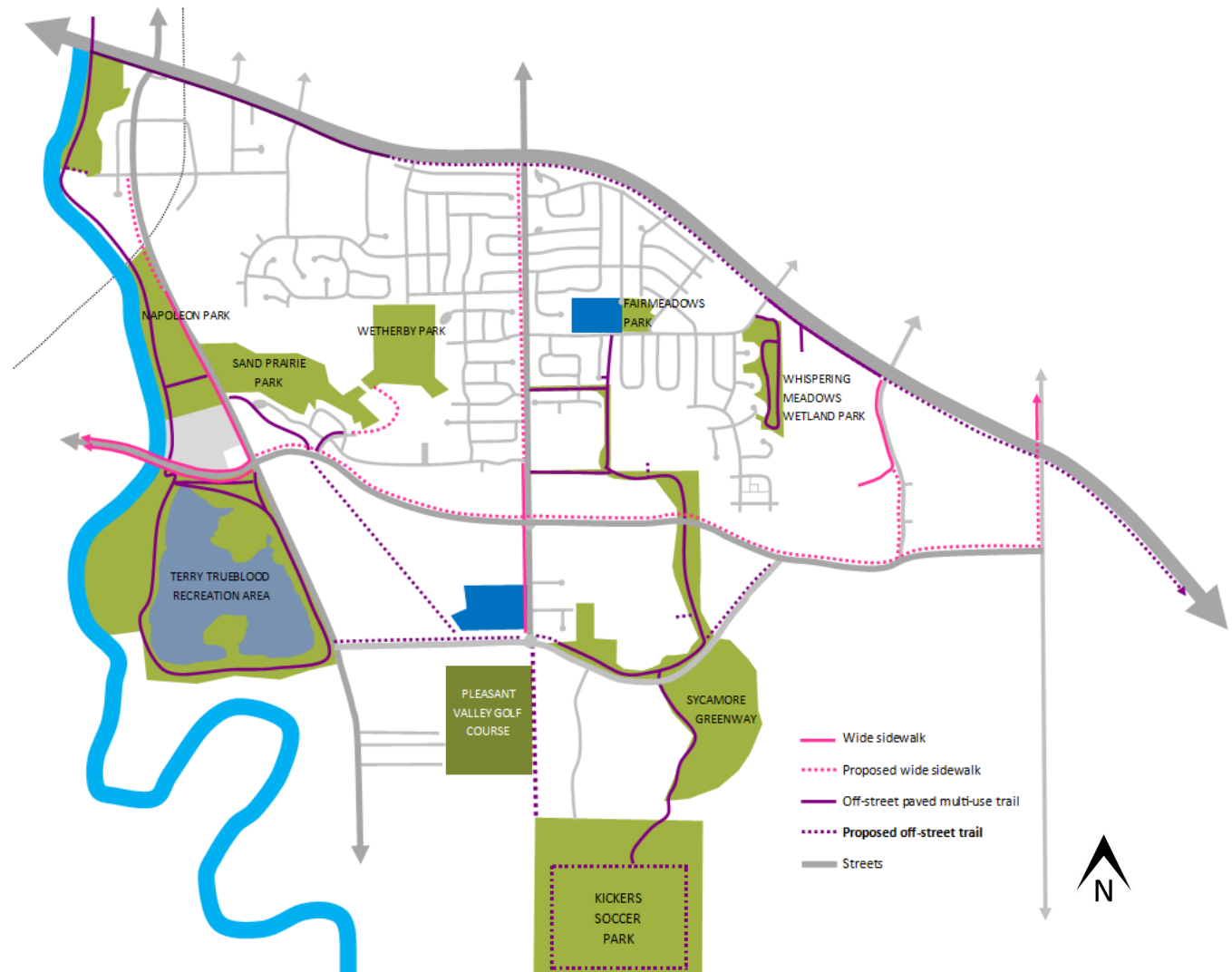
PLANNED MULTI-USE TRAILS & WIDE SIDEWALKS

As development continues in the South District, the accompanying map will help guide property acquisition for trails that connect with the existing network of trails and other bicycle facilities.

Wetherby Park will be at the heart of new development in the area and trail connections to Sand Prairie, Trueblood Recreation Area, and the Sycamore Greenway will provide residents with unique recreational opportunities, access to local natural resources, and indirectly encourage physical activity.

The Sycamore Greenway could expand into the Kickers Soccer Park to improve access for disabled visitors and provide a loop for walking and biking. Extending connections to the Greenway from Paddock Circle or as wide sidewalks along the future alignment of McCollister Boulevard will also increase use of this resource.

Another important addition to the transportation network is the planned trail extension along Highway 6, which will connect residential, commercial, and manufacturing land uses, allowing residents to walk and bike between these destinations.



Streets, Trails, and Sidewalks

Arterial Streets

Arterial streets are the main travel corridors of the city, the primary function of which is to carry traffic through and between neighborhoods. In general, maintaining efficient automobile traffic flow on arterial streets helps to prevent cut-through traffic on local residential streets. Modern arterial street design is intended to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians as well as motorized vehicles. Trees and other landscaping in the right-of-way, between the sidewalk and the street, provide additional separation, creating a safer and more inviting environment for pedestrians and a welcoming entrance into the adjacent neighborhoods.

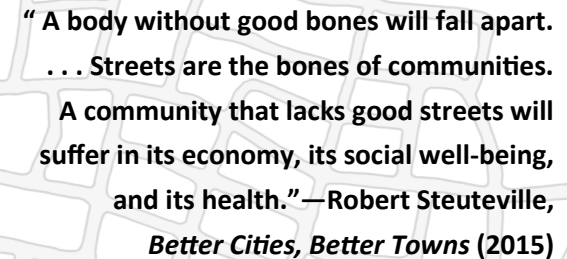
While the design of any specific arterial street is dependent on its context, the basic principles remain the same: provide adequate infrastructure to accommodate anticipated traffic volumes, including comfortable and safe environments for pedestrians and bicyclists.

The South District is served by four arterial streets: U.S. Highway 6, McCollister Boulevard, South Gilbert Street, and South Sycamore Street. Due to a lack of connectivity within the local street system, South Iowa City's arterial streets have taken on a heightened role as travel corridors for all modes of transportation.

U.S. Highway 6, a divided four-lane roadway, crosses the entire Planning District, forming its northern boundary. As a federal highway, it functions as a regional vehicular corridor connecting surrounding communities. Because it is the sole east-west travel route for South Iowa City, Highway 6 is an integral connection between residential neighborhoods and commercial and employment areas. Many residents of south-side neighborhoods rely on the highway for their daily trips, even within the district. Much of South Iowa City's identity, for better or worse, is tied to the highway. Its significance—both as a connection and a barrier—should not be overlooked.

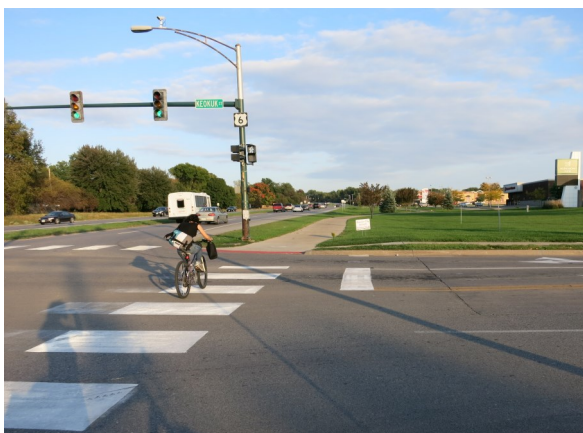
Though it provides a convenient and efficient corridor for automobiles moving across the district, Highway 6 was originally designed and constructed as a federal highway with few accommodations for non-motorists. Commercial and industrial properties along the corridor are oriented toward the highway and have little integration with the local streets that serve the adjacent neighborhoods.

Iowa City constructed a paved trail along the south side of Highway 6, beginning at the Iowa River (where it branches off from the Iowa River Corridor Trail) and traveling along the commercial corridor, just east of Broadway Street (at Casey's). Extending the trail will provide better connection between neighborhoods at the east end of the district, including manufactured housing



**“A body without good bones will fall apart.
... Streets are the bones of communities.
A community that lacks good streets will
suffer in its economy, its social well-being,
and its health.”—Robert Steuteville,
Better Cities, Better Towns (2015)**

“If there is one class of improvements which is more necessary, which becomes more permanent and unalterable, or which exerts a stronger influence upon the individuality and general physical aspect of the city, than any other, it is the layout of the streets. The street layout determines, in a very large degree, how the people shall live, how they shall travel to and fro, how they shall work and play; it has a direct influence upon the character of the home and its surroundings, upon the safety, comfort and convenience of the people, and upon the efficiency of government and the public service.”
—B. Antrim Haldeman (1914)



The Highway 6 Trail is an important route for pedestrians and bicyclists, providing a route along the highway from Gilbert Street east to Taylor Drive and Hollywood Boulevard. Extension of the trail to the east will require engineering to cover the drainage area on the south side of the roadway.



The extension of McCollister Boulevard between Gilbert and Sycamore Streets will provide much needed east-west connectivity for residential areas located south of Highway 6.

parks and multi-family and commercial areas to the west. It will also extend the reach of the trail network for recreational bicyclists. The trail extension is currently on the unfunded Capital Improvements Project (CIP) list.

According to the 2010 Census, South Iowa City is home to nearly 1,800 school-age children. Some of the highest densities of children live in the multi-family and manufactured housing developments along the highway corridor and near Pepperwood Plaza. Because the junior and senior high schools and one of the elementary schools that serves the South District are all located north of the highway along with the public library, public recreation centers, and most medical and health services, families with children often cross the highway on a daily basis.

Crossing Highway 6, particularly east of Sycamore Street, can be challenging. East of Fairmeadows Drive/Industrial Park Road, there are no sidewalks or trails to serve the industrial uses along the north side of the highway, which employ many residents of South Iowa City. Without the requisite sidewalk facilities to connect into, there are no pedestrian crossings along this portion of the highway and limited lighting for those who choose to cross in these areas. For residents, especially those who don't have cars or with limited access to cars, this creates a considerable impediment. Many participants in the planning workshop and online survey asked for safer crossings over Highway 6 to link residents with the rest of Iowa City, especially employment opportunities, shopping, and schools north of the highway. Many called for a pedestrian bridge—an expensive option that requires a significant amount of space given the flat topography of the area. Others requested longer walk signals to cross the wide roadway.

McCollister Boulevard is a planned and much anticipated east-west arterial street that will eventually connect across the South Planning District from the Iowa River east to Heinz Road and then on to Scott Boulevard. An extension of Mormon Trek Boulevard, McCollister Boulevard begins at South Riverside Drive (Old Highway 218), crossing the river into South Iowa City and intersecting South Gilbert Street before entering into the Sand Hill Estates development where it currently terminates at the city limits.

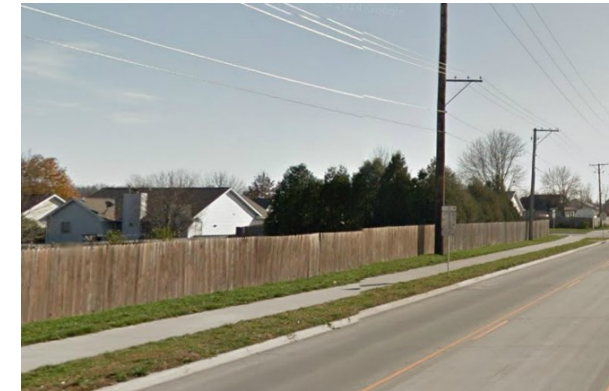
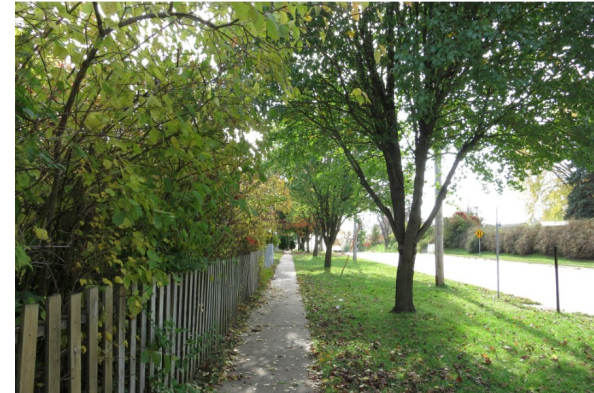
With Highway 6 serving as the only east-west connection across the district, neighborhoods to the east of Wetherby Park and Sycamore Street seem distant from neighborhoods immediately to the west. Neighborhoods east of the Sycamore Greenway are similarly isolated from the larger district, including the new school. An extension of McCollister Boulevard east to Scott Boulevard is essential for providing east-west connectivity and provides an alternative commuter route connecting with Highway 218 and Interstate 380. Work on this extension will likely occur as land is annexed into the city and developed.

For many, the visual image of South Iowa City is tied to Highway 6 and its commercial and industrial properties. Residents see the extension of McCollister Boulevard as an important opportunity to

draw attention to the diverse and family-friendly neighborhoods that lie south of the highway. Participants in the workshop and on-line survey expressed a desire for a pleasant arterial street that unifies and connects neighborhoods across the district. Because McCollister Boulevard will pass through the heart of South Iowa City's residential neighborhoods, it should be a welcoming, pedestrian- and bike-friendly street that is easy to cross and that sets the tone for future development. Buildings on either side of McCollister Boulevard should be oriented toward the street to prevent the corridor from being lined with residential privacy fences.

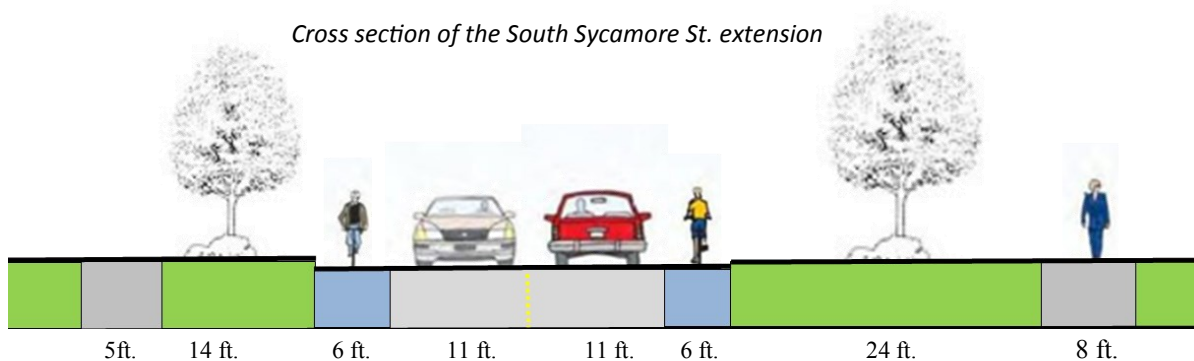
South Sycamore Street is the spine that provides a north-south travel route for neighborhoods east of Wetherby Park. This important roadway enters the northern edge of the district at Highway 6 and continues south before making a 90-degree turn to the west (the Sycamore "L") where it currently intersects with South Gilbert Street. Along with Gilbert Street it provides connectivity to Riverfront Crossings and Downtown commercial as well as employment areas and schools north of Highway 6.

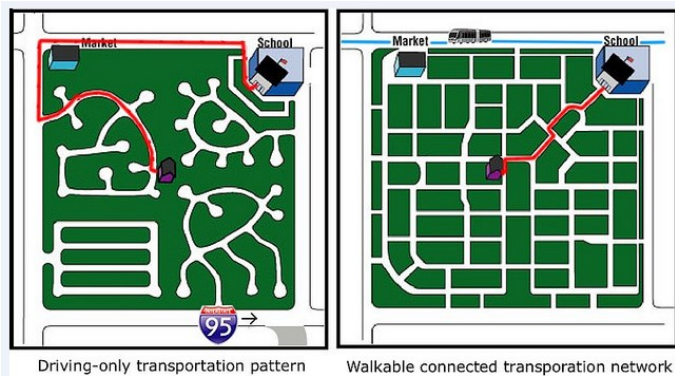
The northern portion of Sycamore Street was originally constructed as a four-lane road and later re-striped to provide a center turn lane as well as shared-lane bicycle markings on both north- and south-bound travel lanes. The reconstruction of the south portion of Sycamore Street will provide an improved connection to Archibald Alexander Elementary School. South of Langenberg, the paved roadway will narrow retaining on-street bike lanes but eliminating the continuous center turn lane. A wide (8-ft.) sidewalk will be provided on the west side of the road and a 5-ft. sidewalk on the east. The remaining right-of-way width will be dedicated to wider parkways (14 feet on the east and 24 feet on the west), which will allow space for street trees to be planted one year after road construction. Roundabouts are planned at the future intersection with McCollister Boulevard and where Sycamore turns west at the "L."



Two priorities for South Sycamore Street emerged from the planning process: slowing vehicle speeds and creating a more attractive and welcoming entrance to the neighborhoods. Above: a section of Sycamore near Highway 6, where street trees have been established. Below: Further south on Sycamore, subdivisions with rear or side yards that face the street often result in a street corridor lined with privacy fences.

Cross section of the South Sycamore St. extension





STREET LAYOUT & WALKABILITY

Street layout can increase or reduce the opportunity for children to walk or bicycle to school. In some areas, the layout of subdivision streets makes routes to school much longer than they need to be—so much so that they become impractical.

Neighborhoods developed with long blocks and numerous cul-de-sacs become barriers to walking and bicycling to school as they reduce connectivity and increase travel distance between the home and school.

Iowa City's current subdivision regulations (adopted in 2008) limit block lengths along local and collector streets to 300-600 feet and require each subdivision to contribute to the larger connected street pattern.

Sidewalks are required along all streets. Cul-de-sacs are discouraged except in those areas where due to topography or other conditions, a street connection would be impractical.

South Gilbert Street provides access to residential neighborhoods west of Wetherby Park, a river crossing at the McCollister Boulevard Bridge, the Napoleon Park softball complex, and the newly developed Terry Trueblood Recreation Area (TTRA) before continuing on into the county as Sand Road. Gilbert Street is an important entry and connection between the South District, Downtown Iowa City, and the University's east campus. The City anticipates greater use of the road as development occurs around the new south elementary school, including subdivisions that connect into McCollister and Gilbert Streets. Reconstruction of South Gilbert Street is planned from Benton Street to Stevens Drive but does not include any improvements to the Highway 6 intersection. However, it is unlikely these plans will be implemented in the near future.

Long-term anticipated arterial improvements:

420th Street/Scott Boulevard and McCollister Boulevard intersection: 420th Street east of Highway 6 has been converted from a rural road to a collector street with public utilities, turn lanes, curb-and-gutter, and sidewalks. The new road serves as the main access to the new industrial park east of the Scott-Six Industrial Park. In the future, intersection improvements for the industrial park will take place south of Highway 6 at Scott Boulevard and the McCollister Boulevard extension.

South Arterial: A future two-lane, east-west arterial is contemplated within the growth area approximately 2 miles south of U.S. Highway 6. The new arterial would become an integral part of the city's major street network, providing a new east-west connection between U.S. 218, Old Highway 218, Sand Road, and Sycamore Street.

Local Streets

The primary function of local streets is to provide access to individual properties and to facilitate circulation within a neighborhood. Local streets in the northern part of the South District are generally arranged in a curvilinear pattern with longer block lengths and numerous cul-de-sacs. This type of street pattern relies on collector streets that "collect" the traffic from the cul-de-sacs and other local streets in a neighborhood and funnel it to the arterials. This type of street system can result in an inefficient transportation network that overburdens certain streets with traffic, discourages walking and biking, and results in inefficiencies for provision of services such as public transit, garbage collection, snow plowing, mail delivery, and emergency services.

Iowa City's subdivision regulations (adopted 2008) help to ensure that future neighborhoods will be designed with better connectivity by establishing a limit on block lengths, discouraging cul-de-sacs, and requiring streets to be extended (stubbed) to the edge of the subdivision. The subdivision regulations also require each subdivision to "contribute to the larger interconnected street pattern to ensure street connectivity between neighborhoods, multiple travel routes resulting in diffusion and

distribution of traffic, efficient routes for public and emergency services, and to provide direct and continuous vehicular and pedestrian routes to neighborhood destinations.” This not only ensures that a street pattern established in one subdivision can be readily extended through the next, but that the design of one subdivision does not preclude future subdivisions on adjacent property from developing in an efficient manner such that orientation and configuration of blocks is consistent and complementary between subdivisions.

On local streets where the speed and/or volume of traffic becomes excessive, the City’s Traffic Calming Program may be implemented. The program uses one or more approaches to reduce speeds or discourage cut-through traffic, including increased police enforcement, improved signage and other driver education techniques, and/or physical changes to the roadway such as speed humps and traffic circles. Streets in the South District that have been identified over the years as possible candidates for traffic calming include Hollywood Boulevard, Lakeside Drive, Langenberg Avenue, Whispering Meadows Drive, and Whispering Prairie Avenue. Some of these neighborhoods have requested a traffic calming study and did not qualify. It is up to the residents along these streets to request that a traffic calming study be conducted by the City. If, based on a traffic study, the subject street is identified as an appropriate candidate for traffic calming, a majority of residents along the street must be in favor of any proposed traffic calming strategies before they will be considered.

Complete Streets

The City has adopted a new Complete Streets Policy. This means that all new streets as well as improved streets will be designed and constructed to accommodate all modes of transportation – cars, bicycles, pedestrians, and public transit, and to provide ADA-compliant curb ramps. South District workshop participants were overwhelmingly supportive of the effort to improve streets in the South District to facilitate and encourage use of alternative modes of transportation.

In 2009, the City of Iowa City partnered with the Metropolitan Planning Organization of Johnson County to draft the Metro Bicycle Master Plan, which outlines new strategies to create an accessible and coordinated bike network throughout Iowa City and the larger metropolitan area. The Metro Bicycle Master Plan identifies opportunities for on-street bike routes, including a signed bike route along Sycamore Street and trail improvements along Gilbert Street. To increase awareness and access to the network, the plan also recommends that way-finding signs be installed on area trails. As mentioned previously, it is an important objective of the South District Plan to provide better way-finding signage along off-street trails and along area streets that are designated as bike routes.

There are a number of streets in the South District that were constructed at a time when sidewalks were not required. Unfortunately, this has resulted in gaps in the district’s sidewalk network. In ad-

Complete Streets are Safe Streets



“The City of Iowa City intends and expects to realize long-term cost savings in improved public health, reduced fuel consumption, better environmental stewardship, and reduced demand for motor vehicle infrastructure through the implementation of its Complete Streets Policy. Complete streets also contribute to walkable neighborhoods, make the community attractive to new business and employment, create a sense of community pride, and improve quality of life.”
— from the Iowa City Complete Street Policy (adopted March 23, 2015)

“Since school zones are locations frequented by children, making the area safe for children at any time of day is a sound investment for the community.”—Safe Routes to School National Partnership

PRINCIPLES OF WALKABILITY

Proximity to home:

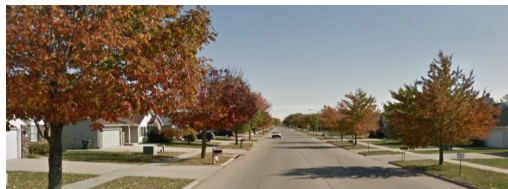
How far is it?

Is it practical to walk there?



Physical access & infrastructure:

Sidewalks and trails to mark your path along with crosswalks, traffic signals, and lighting to make it safe.



Pleasant factor:

Separation from cars and traffic, shade trees, things to see along the way . . .



Places to go:

A sensible mix of destinations, such as parks, schools, coffee shops, neighborhood activities.

dition, residential areas that were developed outside the city limits were not required by the County to construct sidewalks. Due to increasing public demand for a complete sidewalk network, the City Council established a sidewalk infill program, whereby gaps are identified and funds set aside each year to construct missing pieces of the sidewalk network. Priority is given to main pedestrian routes, such as routes to school and along arterial and collector streets. Subdivisions located in the county that are annexed into the city would become eligible for this sidewalk infill program.

Improving pedestrian safety is also a priority. The City will continue to work with the school district to identify safe routes to schools. To improve pedestrian safety, marked crosswalks are typically painted at signalized intersections, at official school route crossings, and at other high-volume intersections. Public requests for marked crosswalks in other locations are evaluated carefully. While well-designed crosswalks are important to pedestrian safety, marking crosswalks at locations where drivers do not expect them or where pedestrian traffic is sporadic can actually reduce pedestrian safety by giving pedestrians a false sense of security when crossing the street. The City evaluates each proposed crosswalk to determine if it is warranted and safe.

Walkability

In general, participants in the on-line survey and community workshop find the South District walkable for recreational purposes, and are enthusiastic about the extensive trail system in South Iowa City. However, walking or biking to meet daily needs or for travel can be more challenging due to the lack of street connectivity (especially east to west), requiring heavy reliance on Sycamore Street and Highway 6 by all modes of transportation.

Neighborhoods in the west portion of the district and those east of the Sycamore Greenway, including the manufactured housing parks, can feel isolated or cut off from many destinations within the district, including parks. This can present special challenges for children traveling to school or recreational opportunities within the district as well as those in areas north of Highway 6. The extension of McCollister Boulevard and construction of new trail sections, including an extension of the Highway 6 trail, are seen as essential to creating better physical and social connection throughout the district.



Trails

Trails are critical components of the South District's transportation network. In addition to providing recreational opportunities, the trails offer low-cost, energy-efficient transportation to schools, employment, and commercial destinations. Notably, the South District offers access to two popular trails in the metro area: the Iowa River Trail and South Sycamore Greenway.

The Iowa River Trail and Terry Trueblood Recreation Area (TTRA) directly link our community to outdoor activities and connect Southside residents to the Downtown Business District and University of Iowa campus. The 2.2-mile South Sycamore Greenway is anchored at the north by Grant Wood Elementary and Kickers Soccer Park to the south. The Greenway functions as a stormwater detention area that reduces run-off into the Iowa River. As areas south of the school are annexed into the city, a trail connection or sidewalk will connect the Greenway to TTRA.

Public Transit

Public bus transit is a crucial part of the South Iowa City transportation system with more than 500,000 rides annually on routes that serve the area. All south-side routes circulate through the northern portion of the district and provide access to the commercial and industrial areas along Highway 6. They include the Lakeside, Eastside Loop (during school), Mall, Cross Park, and Broadway routes. The Lakeside Route has the highest bus ridership of any route in Iowa City.

Residential development around the new elementary school in addition to weekend activity at Kickers Soccer Complex and Terry Trueblood Recreation Area may prompt changes to current bus routes. There has long been support for loop routes that do not terminate downtown, but instead provide residents with direct service to major shopping and employment areas. Commercial development along both sides of the river, along Highways 6 and 1 (e.g. Walmart, Aldi's, Hy-Vee, Pepperwood Plaza, and Sycamore Mall), could ideally be served as part of loop route. The absence of a grid system creates a challenge for extending service further into the residential neighborhoods and, because there is no east-west connection across the district south of Highway 6 and minimal connectivity to areas east of the Greenway, potential bus routes are limited. The extension of McCollister Boulevard will make for an efficient loop route and allow transit to reach more areas in the South District.

Participants in the planning process expressed a desire for improved signage and transit information at bus stops, expanded hours of transit service, and service on Sundays. There is also a need for additional bus shelters in some locations in the South District. Iowa City Transit will be addressing many of these concerns as part of a comprehensive study of its current service. Bus stops are being redesigned and "Bongo" software makes route information and accurate arrival times accessible to the public by computer and smart phone. Wireless service is now available on all buses.

BENEFITS OF WALKABILITY

Economic

- **Save money:**
Transportation is the second largest expense for American households.
- **Make money:**
1 walk score point is worth \$700-\$3,000 in home value.



Community Connection

- Studies show that for every 10 minutes a person spends in a daily car commute, time spent in community activities falls by 10%.
- People living in walkable neighborhoods trust neighbors more, participate in community projects, and volunteer more than in non-walkable areas.

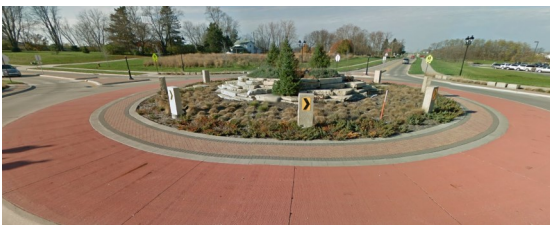
Health

- Men and women age 50–71 who took a brisk walk nearly every day had a 27% reduced death rate compared to non-exercisers.
- The average resident of a walkable neighborhood weighs 6 to 10 pounds less than someone who lives in a car-dependent neighborhood.





Trees and other landscaping along arterial streets can help buffer neighboring homes from noise and other activity and provide a sense of comfort and safety for pedestrians.



Roundabouts offer an opportunity to enhance the appearance and identity of public streets. The above examples are from Holiday Road and 12th Avenue in Coralville.

STREETS, TRAILS, SIDEWALKS—GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives for streets, trails, and sidewalks were formulated with input from participants in the planning workshop and on-line survey. Improvements to rights-of-way, including sidewalks and trails, are the responsibility of the City and developers.

GOAL 1: Improve connections between residential neighborhoods and commercial and industrial properties on both sides of Highway 6 and explore ways to reduce the barrier effect that this major traffic corridor has between South Iowa City and areas to the north. These improvements will require funding by Iowa City and/or grant funds, as well as cooperation from the Iowa Department of Transportation.

- Evaluate pedestrian crossings along the length of Highway 6 for safety improvement.
- Construct pedestrian facilities that connect to industrial and commercial properties north of Highway 6.
- Review pedestrian signal times and explore improved signage, median design/landscaping, and lighting to improve the actual and perceived safety of Highway 6 crossings.
- Extend the Highway 6 trail east to Heinz Road to ensure safety for pedestrian and bicycle access across the district
- Extend a sidewalk/trail connection along Highway 6 and across the bridge to Riverside Drive.

GOAL 2: Prioritize the extension of McCollister Boulevard as an integral element in improving connectivity and access for South Iowa City and to spur the development of a high-quality neighborhood surrounding the new school.

- The new road should enhance movement between neighborhoods by providing appropriate crossings, including medians or traffic controls where needed.
- Design and construct McCollister Boulevard as a welcoming and attractive entrance to the South Iowa City neighborhoods by including trees, landscaping, lighting, public art, or other features that foster a distinct identity for the district.

GOAL 3: Enhance safety and aesthetics along arterial streets.

- Provide safe and accessible street crossings at key locations, such as entrances to commercial centers, parks, and school sites, and where designated trails cross arterial streets.
- Design the extension of South Sycamore Street and McCollister Boulevard to moderate vehicle speeds and maximize safety for children traveling to and from school. Consider the feasibility of on-street parking to slow traffic if a neighborhood commercial area develops.
- Where appropriate, include crosswalks, signals, or median islands as well as lighted trail connections.
- Enhance aesthetics of arterial streets with trees, landscaping, lighting, public art, or other features that support housing and subdivision designs oriented toward the street.

GOAL 4: Maximize walkability and connectivity in all neighborhoods, especially those east of the Greenway.

- Align collector streets along arterial streets to provide for safe crossing of neighborhood boundary streets, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Fill in gaps in the sidewalk network and ensure ADA-compliant curb ramps throughout the district as intersections are improved, including connections to multi-family developments.
- As residential development extends south toward the school, ensure multiple safe and logical walking routes to the school, including well-marked crosswalks for schools.
- Provide count-down timers at high-volume intersections.
- As re-development of commercial areas occurs, work to establish improved street, trail, and sidewalk connections to better integrate shopping centers with surrounding neighborhoods.
- Improve lighting along residential streets if needed for safety. Consider lighting along off-street trails, such as at trail head areas or connections to parks in order to enhance safety.

GOAL 5: Create an accessible and well-coordinated bike network that allows bicyclists to connect to schools, parks, and commercial areas.

- Construct a wide sidewalk from South Sycamore Street to the Terry Trueblood Recreation Area.
- Construct a trail along the trunk sewer easement to connect residential development in Sand Hill Estates to Archibald Alexander Elementary.
- Establish a bike trail or on-street route to connect the Sycamore Greenway Trail and Court Hill Trail.



Physical Infrastructure for Pedestrian Safety

Well maintained sidewalks and trails.

Clearly marked crosswalks.

Good intersection controls where needed.

Reduced vehicle speeds.

Separation between sidewalk and street.

- Create unique and easily identifiable signage or other wayfinding methods to help cyclists find bike routes and off-street trails.
- Encourage visible and well-designed bike facilities as part of any redevelopment plans in South Iowa City.
- Wherever street widths permit, consider establishing or improving on-street bike facilities, such as “sharrows,” bike lanes, or bike boulevards.

GOAL 6: Improve and expand transit service.

- Consider the expansion and diversification of bus routes and stops , including loop service, to connect residential neighborhoods with schools, parks, and recreational opportunities (e.g. Kickers Soccer Complex and Terry Trueblood Recreation Area), and major commercial areas along Highways 1 and 6.
- Raise awareness and improve access to transit service by providing well-marked bus stops with posted schedule and route maps.
- Consider attractive bus shelters, especially at commercial centers and public parks, and adopt-a-shelter programs with neighborhood organizations and commercial centers to help ensure shelters are well-maintained.

Commercial Areas

The South Planning District is served by commercial areas located along or near the Highway 6 corridor, most notably Pepperwood Plaza and the Waterfront Hy-Vee area. Although it is just outside the South District boundaries, the Iowa City Marketplace (formerly Sycamore Mall) is commonly considered an important commercial center serving the South District.

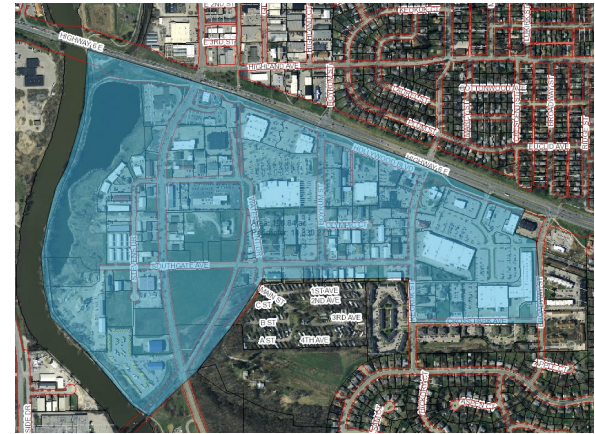
Pepperwood Plaza and Sycamore Mall once offered a wide variety of retail goods and services. In the late 1990s many of Iowa City's national retailers moved to the Coral Ridge Mall and in 2013 Von Maur department store moved to the River Landing in Coralville. This has left South Iowa City and much of the east side with fewer shopping options, especially children's items, clothing, sporting goods, and housewares.

Participants in the on-line survey and community workshop eagerly anticipate redevelopment and improvement of commercial areas within and adjacent to the district. Aesthetic improvements along the Highway 6 and South Gilbert Street commercial corridor, opportunities for local and neighborhood-serving businesses, and improved pedestrian and bike facilities are seen as priorities.

The viability of any commercial business—shops, restaurants, and services—depends on the market demand in the area in which the business is located. Population, residential density, and proximity to customers as they commute to and from work are essential for many retail businesses. New residential development around the elementary school and improved connectivity made possible by the extension of McCollister Boulevard have the potential to strengthen the commercial prospects in South Iowa City. While this will take time, efforts to make the area more attractive and to raise the profile of South Iowa City for residential development will also enhance prospects for commercial development.

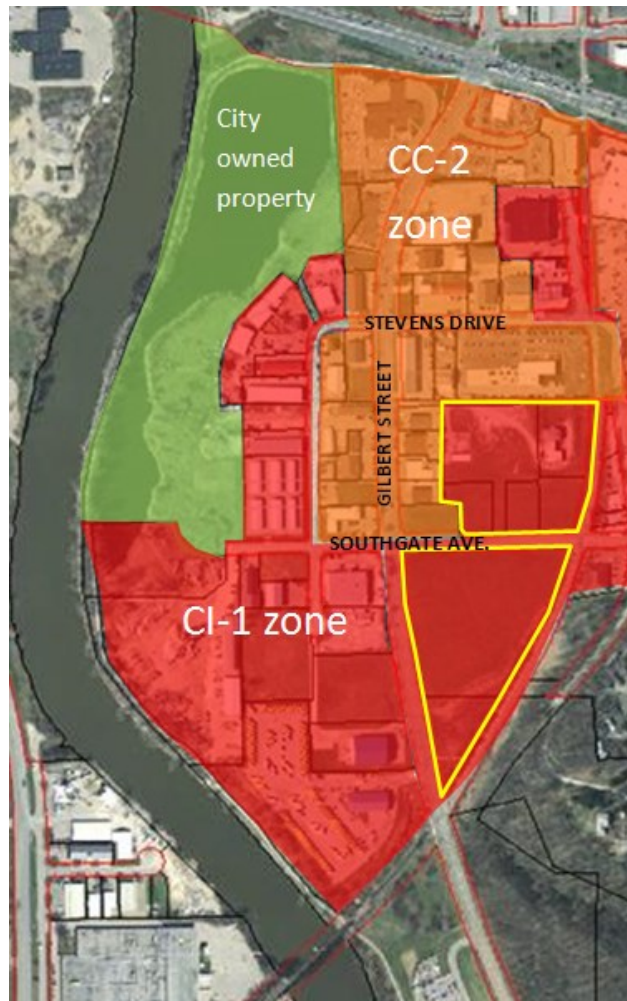
Highway 6 Commercial Corridor

As stated above, commercial development in the South District is concentrated along and to the south of Highway 6. While this busy traffic corridor offers the visibility and traffic activity that many businesses desire, competition from new commercial centers and big box or discount stores in other parts of the trade area, along with changes in the retail market due to the rise of on-line shopping have had an impact on large shopping centers, including Pepperwood Plaza. Designed with large buildings set back from the road behind ample parking lots, this sort of shopping center is appropriate for large national or regional chain stores. The format is less adaptable for small or unique businesses that are less able to capture the attention of passing motorists.



The Highway 6 Urban Renewal Area was established in 2003 with a goal of strengthening commercial activity in existing core areas and neighborhood commercial centers and discouraging the proliferation of new major commercial areas. The City makes available tax increment financing as a means to help finance the construction of some of the necessary private and/or public infrastructure improvements within the Highway 6 Commercial Urban Renewal Area. In addition, the City makes available the use of tax increment financing (TIF) to provide rebates for qualifying businesses or development projects within the Urban Renewal Project Area. This agreement will expire in 2025.

Improvements may include stormwater management facilities, public streets and sidewalks, entryway enhancements, sanitary sewers, storm sewers, and open space improvements. Site improvements may include design and construction of buildings and building additions; grading for building construction and amenities; adequate paving and parking; adequate landscaping; and on-site utilities.



The areas highlighted in yellow indicate vacant commercial properties that front onto South Gilbert or Southgate Avenue. Redevelopment in the Riverfront Crossings District to the north of Highway 6 along with new residential development in areas to the south of the Crandic Railroad may generate new interest in these properties for commercial uses.

While the nature of Highway 6 commercial corridor will likely remain car-centered, residents in the surrounding neighborhoods expressed a desire to tame the auto-dominated character of these shopping areas and improve their aesthetic appeal. Making these areas accessible and inviting to pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users by connecting into the local street network should be a priority. Aesthetic improvements, including landscaping and shade trees to break up large parking areas, may entice shoppers to linger and could help foster a sense of place that encourages neighborhoods to identify with commercial areas. Such efforts could also help to improve the prospects for small or local businesses. Façade and parking area improvements made to Waterfront Hy-Vee at the time of its expansion offer an example for future redevelopment in the area. Other models can be found along Highway 1, west of the river, where landscaping and other parking design requirements have softened views of very large parking areas. Longer term, any redevelopment of properties in the Highway 6 corridor should emphasize bringing buildings closer to the street, pedestrian accessibility, more efficient use of land, and introducing mixed use development.

South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor:

The South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridor is generally located between Highway 6 and the CRANDIC Railroad. The 1997 South District Plan called for general commercial development in this area, including along Stevens Drive and Southgate Avenue, with a focus on creating a more attractive, well-landscaped entrance to the City. At the time, most of the undeveloped land was zoned for Intensive Commercial (CI-1), a classification that provided areas for businesses with operations characterized by outdoor storage and display of merchandise, by repair and sales of large equipment or motor vehicles, or by activities or operations conducted in buildings that are not entirely enclosed.

In 2006, properties along Stevens and Waterfront Drives, east of Gilbert Street, were rezoned to Community Commercial (CC-2). Properties south of Southgate remain in the CI-1 zone. More recently, the CI-1 zone was amended to allow a wider range of commercial uses, including retail and restaurant uses. Little new development has occurred in the area around the Southgate Avenue and Gilbert Street intersection. This may be due in part to the risk of flooding. During major rainfall events, the intersection of South Gilbert and Stevens Drive is frequently flooded and all but a few commercial properties south of Highway 2 and west of the railroad are in the flood hazard area.

While future residential development within the South District, especially in areas along South Gilbert Street may improve development prospects in this area, the character of development that can be anticipated along this corridor is uncertain. Close proximity to Riverfront Crossings and the Downtown, and UI Campus, along with ready access to the Iowa River Corridor Trail and future riverfront park, may make this area attractive to a variety of uses, including mixed use or residential.

It is important to carefully consider the impact of future development on the adjacent residential and commercial neighborhood. The area to the east of the railroad tracks is currently a mix of tradi-

tional CI-1 uses along with a number of social service agencies and the Hilltop Mobile Home Park. Any proposal for residential or mixed use development in the area should be scrutinized to ensure that it contributes to the stability of the neighborhood. With any development or street improvements in this area, the attractive landscaped entryway envisioned in the previous plan should remain a high priority.

Neighborhood Commercial Areas

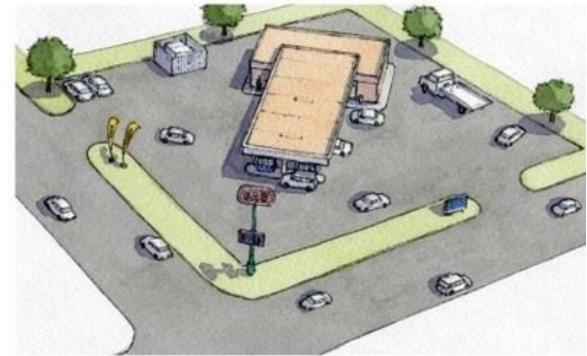
The future land use map includes a small area designated as mixed use at the intersection of McCollister and Sycamore Street and an existing Community Commercial (CC-2) property at the intersection of McCollister Boulevard and South Gilbert Street. The goal with both areas is to create opportunities for small-scale commercial uses that principally serve the surrounding residential neighborhoods. In addition to small retail and personal service uses, neighborhood commercial areas may include institutional uses (e.g. daycare, churches or educational facilities) as well as neighborhood serving office uses (e.g. medical offices). Commercial uses are limited in size to promote a local orientation to minimize potential adverse impacts on nearby residential properties.

A small neighborhood commercial area may be appropriate on the east side of Gilbert Street at the intersection of McCollister, but careful consideration should be given not to detract from existing commercial zones along Gilbert, including the existing zone on the west side of the street, or the commercial node at McCollister and Sycamore. Such an area should be part of a master plan that shows a thoughtful transition to the surrounding single-family residential area.

Zoning code standards for neighborhood commercial areas ensure that development is compatible in scale and intensity to the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Building placement and design requirements help to create an environment that is inviting to pedestrians and that minimizes the impact of automobiles.

To function as a successful neighborhood center, the design of the mixed-use area should incorporate pedestrian and bike accessibility as well as a transit stop. Including a small plaza, park, or other communal space within the development will help to make this corner a neighborhood gathering place and an anchor for the adjacent neighborhoods.

As noted above, commercial uses depend on surrounding residential density and active commuting routes in order to be successful. It will take time for this area to develop enough of a population to support even a small business, such as a coffee shop. Allowing moderate density housing (10-20 units per acre) in the area immediately around these commercial areas and providing residential units above the commercial ground floor may help to improve the prospects for businesses and may encourage pedestrian trips and extension of transit services. Ensuring that these higher density uses are well designed and constructed will help to ensure that density is also an asset to the neighborhood as a whole.



Traditional gas station site design.



A re-oriented site design with the gas station canopy located behind a storefront at the corner. This could allow the site to offer more than gas/convenience retail. This may be an appropriate site design for the commercial corner at McCollister Boulevard and South Gilbert.



Landscaping, shade trees, and pedestrian islands can help break up large parking areas.

COMMERCIAL AREAS—GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following goals and objectives for commercial areas were developed with input gathered during the South District planning process. Achieving these goals may require collaborative efforts by business owners, associations, property owners, and developers.

GOAL 1. Improve the aesthetic appearance of commercial areas along Highway 6 and other commercial streets within the district (e.g. Boyrum, Keokuk).

- Improve the aesthetic appeal/appearance of the Highway 6 and South Gilbert Street Commercial Corridors—both within the right-of-way and on adjacent commercial property—taking cues from aesthetic improvements planned along Riverside Drive as well as landscaping improvements west of the river on Highway One.
- With any proposed redevelopment of Pepperwood Plaza, encourage a reduction of large parking areas to create more inviting social and pedestrian space. Include shade trees, distinctive landscaping, inviting pedestrian routes, and amenities such as seating, bike facilities, and art.
- Encourage landscape improvements for other existing commercial properties/neighborhoods and enforce compliance with landscaping standards as well as maintenance of required landscaping.
- Encourage commercial areas to adopt a common design theme—taking cues from Olde Towne Village at the corner of Scott Boulevard and Rochester Avenue—to create a sense of continuity and identity (e.g. façade design, signage, lighting, landscaping).
- Ensure that small commercial areas, such as those contemplated or zoned along McCollister Boulevard, are designed to complement the adjacent residential neighborhood and contribute to an attractive gateway to the South District by encouraging attractive landscaping, screened parking areas and/or parking behind the building, minimal exterior lighting, bike facilities, and connection to pedestrian routes.

GOAL 2: Improve connectivity between commercial areas and adjacent residential.

- As development and redevelopment occur, integrate shopping areas with adjacent residential neighborhoods by providing improved street, sidewalk, or trail connections and enhance entryways with art, landscaping, and wayfinding.
- Encourage attractive and readily identifiable bike parking and transit stops within commercial development areas.

GOAL 3: Engage the community in re-thinking South Iowa City's commercial areas by encouraging (sponsoring) unique events such as food or cultural festivals, roller derby or roller skating, mini-concerts, farmers market or food trucks nights at Pepperwood Plaza and other commercial areas.

GOAL 4: Support development and redevelopment of areas identified as commercial in the future land use plan, ensuring that commercial areas and uses contribute to the long-term vitality and appeal of adjacent neighborhoods.

- As the nearby Riverfront Crossings builds out, re-evaluate the development potential and zoning of properties in the South Gilbert/Southgate Avenue area. Explore the potential for mixed use/residential or institutional uses. Any proposed rezoning of this area should be scrutinized to ensure that new development contributes to the overall health of the surrounding neighborhood, including nearby residential areas.
- Consider opportunities for small neighborhood commercial or mixed use nodes at key intersections where McCollister Boulevard intersects with Gilbert and Sycamore Streets and encourage quality design and construction that enhances adjacent residential or public open space areas.
- Support local and independent businesses in South Iowa City through targeted promotional efforts and by encouraging alliances among businesses and property owners.
- Encourage or create incentives to attract neighborhood-serving businesses—e.g. daycare, coffee shop, medical office, music or dance studios, salons and other personal services, etc., to commercial areas.



A few fun event ideas suggested for making commercial areas—especially large parking areas—more socially active: outdoor sport demonstrations, such as roller derby or basketball, food truck night with live music, and art events such as a Chalk the Lot festival.



Photo copyright Greeley Tribune.

South District Plan Map Designations

Low to Medium Density Residential:

2-8 dwelling units/acre

Intended primarily for detached single-family housing. Duplexes are allowed on corner lots in all single-family zones. In some areas attached housing may be located along arterial streets or adjacent to permanent open space. The residential density for a property should reflect the nature of the site and take into account sensitive environmental features, topographical constraints, street connectivity, and compatibility with historical development patterns.

Low to Medium Mixed Residential:

8-13 dwelling units/acre

Intended for medium- to high- density single-family residential development, including small lot detached single-family units, zero lot line development, duplexes, and townhouses. Suitable for sites where a single loaded street is desirable to provide visibility and access to public open space, or where clustering is desirable to protect sensitive environmental features. Low-density multi-family residential may also be considered if buildings are designed in a manner that is compatible in scale and design to the lower scale residential dwellings in the neighborhood (e.g. triplexes and 4- or 6-plexes). Higher density housing should be located at the edges of neighborhoods, principally in areas with good street connectivity, access to open space or parks, trails, and transit.

Multi-Family

12-24 dwelling units/acre

Properties developed prior to 2015 may have been established at higher densities, particularly in neighborhoods close to Highway 6. The “New Neighborhoods” section of the plan (page 18) includes language describing the density, location, and design quality that will be part of any rezoning to allow multi-family housing. Higher-density zoning designations may not be suitable for areas with topographical constraints or limited street connectivity or access. Preferred locations for new multi-family developments are along main travel corridors or intersections, especially near permanent open space or adjacent to commercial development.

Commercial

Areas intended to provide the opportunity for a large variety of commercial uses, particularly retail commercial uses, which serve a major segment of the community.

Mixed-Use

An area intended for development that combines commercial and residential uses. Individual buildings may be mixed-use or single-use. Development is intended to be pedestrian-oriented, with buildings oriented to the street with sidewalks, street trees and other pedestrian amenities. Buildings with residential uses should be designed to ensure a comfortable and functional environment for urban living in close proximity to commercial uses. The mix of uses requires special consideration of building and site design.

Public Institutional

Property that is publicly owned and used for a public purpose, including public schools, and City, County, State, and Federal offices or facilities. If the property is proposed to be sold to a private entity for a non-public use, then the land should be rezoned to be compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.

Public Parks/Open Space

Indicates existing or potential public open space intended for the protection of sensitive natural features, stormwater management, and/or to provide for passive, active, recreational, or other public open space needs, and/or to protect the aesthetic values of the community.*

Private Open Space

Indicates existing or potential open space on private land that is important for the protection of sensitive natural features and/or provides for stormwater management, and/or for private, shared passive or recreational opportunities for adjacent properties, and/or to protect the aesthetic values of the community.*

*A public or private open space designation on land that is not currently designated as open space may indicate that an area is largely unsuitable for development due to environmental or topographical constraints or may indicate that an opportunity to acquire needed open space is possible if current land uses are discontinued. While these areas are best reserved or acquired for open space, development may occur on privately held land if a proposal meets the underlying zoning requirements and the requirements of the Iowa City Sensitive Areas Ordinance.

South District Plan Map

