

Smart Planning in Iowa



**A Guide to Principles, Strategies
and Policy Tools**

Contents

Introduction	1
Ten Smart Planning Principles	2
Strategies and Policy Tools	4
Principle 1: Collaboration	6
<i>Strategy 1.1 Encourage public involvement in the planning process.</i>	6
<i>Strategy 1.2 Increase access to resources.</i>	7
<i>Strategy 1.3 Provide outreach and education on smart planning.</i>	7
Principle 2: Efficiency, Transparency, and Consistency	7
<i>Strategy 2.1: Provide easy access to and promote use of planning documents, processes and resources.</i>	8
<i>Strategy 2.2: Foster consistency in and use of sustainable development practices.</i>	8
<i>Strategy 2.3: Report success and areas of improvement.</i>	9
Principle 3: Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy.....	9
<i>Strategy 3.1 Encourage sustainable building practices.</i>	10
<i>Strategy 3.2 Increase access to clean, renewable energy.</i>	10
<i>Strategy 3.3 Support energy efficiency efforts in individual homes and businesses.</i>	11
Principle 4: Occupational Diversity	12
<i>Strategy 4.1 Encourage diversification of business types.</i>	12
<i>Strategy 4.2 Support local businesses.</i>	12
<i>Strategy 4.3 Provide access to employment options (both physically and in opportunity) for all community members.</i>	13
Principle 5: Revitalization.....	14
<i>Strategy 5.1 Support investment in existing downtowns.</i>	14
<i>Strategy 5.2 Encourage building and land reuse.</i>	15
<i>Strategy 5.3 Promote historic and cultural preservation.</i>	15
Principle 6: Housing Diversity	16
<i>Strategy 6.1 Encourage mixed use developments.</i>	16
<i>Strategy 6.2 Increase the affordability of housing.</i>	16
<i>Strategy 6.3 Promote complete, livable neighborhoods.</i>	17
Principle 7: Community Character	18
<i>Strategy 7.1 Strengthen cultural and historical areas and activities.</i>	18
<i>Strategy 7.2 Foster community connection to local businesses and agriculture.</i>	19
<i>Strategy 7.3 Promote walkability.</i>	19
Principle 8: Natural Resource and Agricultural Protection	20
<i>Strategy 8.1 Plan for natural resource and agricultural protection.</i>	20
<i>Strategy 8.2 Discourage sprawl and conversion of natural and agricultural land.</i>	21
<i>Strategy 8.3 Foster community connection to natural resources.</i>	21

Principle 9: Sustainable Design22

Strategy 9.1 Plan for sustainable development.22

Strategy 9.2 Observe Smart Planning Principles in public development projects.22

Strategy 9.3 Encourage sustainable development practices.23

Principle 10: Transportation Diversity24

Strategy 10.1 Encourage multi-modal transportation......24

Strategy 10.2 Discourage excessive personal vehicle usage......25

Strategy 10.3 Promote connectivity.25

Bringing It All Together: Community Implementation.....26

Resources: Smarter Planning.....27

Introduction

Communities in Iowa are continuously changing size, shape and composition. With these changes, both rural towns and urban centers often struggle to maintain a balance between economic, environmental and social sustainability. Planning for such changes allows communities to make smarter decisions about their future.

Smart planning encompasses more than just land use decisions. Land use policies vary based on the needs of the community, but the principles behind the development and implementation of those policies are common. Cooperation and community involvement are key components to creating a unified vision that creates and maintains a high quality of life. Collaboration, consistency, and a desire to create a livable and resilient community help shape individual land use plans and goals.

This guide was created to aid communities in the process of smart planning and is organized around the ten Smart Planning Principles signed into Iowa law in 2010. A general description of the concept, strategies for encouraging use, policy tools for implementation, and a current Iowa example are presented for each Principle. In addition, a brief list of resources is provided to help local governments, community organizations and citizen planners find information and ideas on community involvement and incorporation of smart planning concepts in every day decisions.



City of Dubuque Downtown Trolley. Source: City of Dubuque

Ten Smart Planning Principles

The Iowa Smart Planning Principles were signed into law on April 26, 2010, as one of the three primary components of the Iowa Smart Planning Act contained in State Code Chapter 18B; Land Use- Smart Planning. These Principles must be considered and may be applied when local governments and state agencies deliberate all appropriate planning, zoning, development and resource management decisions. Application of these Principles is intended to produce greater economic opportunity, enhance environmental integrity, improve public health outcomes, and safeguard Iowa's exceptional quality of life. Successful integration of the Principles also addresses the need for fair and equitable decision-making regarding the growth of communities, and can produce cost savings regarding the provision of public services.

1. Collaboration

Governmental, community and individual stakeholders, including those outside the jurisdiction of the entity, are encouraged to be involved and provide comment during deliberation of planning, zoning, development, and resource management decisions and during implementation of such decisions. The state agency, local government, or other public entity is encouraged to develop and implement a strategy to facilitate such participation.

2. Efficiency, Transparency and Consistency

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should be undertaken to provide efficient, transparent, and consistent outcomes. Individuals, communities, regions and governmental entities should share responsibility to promote the equitable distribution of development benefits and costs.

3. Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should be undertaken to promote clean and renewable energy use and increased energy efficiency.

4. Occupational Diversity

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should promote increased diversity of employment and business opportunities, promote access to education and training, expand entrepreneurial opportunities and promote the establishment of businesses in locations near existing housing, infrastructure and transportation.

5. Revitalization

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should facilitate the revitalization of established town centers and neighborhoods by promoting development that conserves land, protects historic resources, promotes pedestrian accessibility and integrates different uses of property. Remediation and reuse of existing sites, structures and infrastructure is preferred over new construction in undeveloped areas.

6. Housing Diversity

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should encourage diversity in the types of available housing, support the rehabilitation of existing housing and promote the location of housing near public transportation and employment centers.

7. Community Character

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should promote activities and development that are consistent with the character and architectural style of the community and should respond to local values regarding the physical character of the community.

8. Natural Resources and Agricultural Protection

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should emphasize protection, preservation and restoration of natural resources, agricultural land and cultural and historic landscapes, and should increase the availability of open spaces and recreational facilities.

9. Sustainable Design

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should promote developments, buildings and infrastructure that utilize sustainable design and construction standards and conserve natural resources by reducing waste and pollution through efficient use of land, energy, water, air and materials.

10. Transportation Diversity

Planning, zoning, development and resource management should promote expanded transportation options for residents of the community. Consideration should be given to transportation options that maximize mobility, reduce congestion, conserve fuel, and improve air quality.

Strategies and Policy Tools

Smart planning aims to realize a community's vision for its future in a way that produces economic, environmental, and social sustainability. The ten overarching Principles are intended to act as a framework, giving communities guidance on the general concepts of smart planning. In the following sections, strategies and policy tools are presented to provide concrete examples on how to implement each Principle. The strategies encourage considering application of the Principles in many different components of the planning and development process.

The strategies and tools presented here are not exhaustive. Communities are encouraged to research other methods, develop their own processes, and share their best practices. Many examples are provided throughout that detail how Iowa communities have already implemented these basic strategies. From large urban city to small rural town, it is important that each Iowa community consider how best to apply these Principles to its unique circumstances.



Principle	Strategies		
Principle 1: Collaboration	Strategy 1.1: Encourage public involvement in the planning process.	Strategy 1.2: Increase access to resources.	Strategy 1.3: Provide outreach and education on smart planning.
Principle 2: Efficiency, Transparency and Consistency	Strategy 2.1: Provide easy access to and promote use of planning documents, processes and resources.	Strategy 2.2: Foster consistency in and use of sustainable development practices.	Strategy 2.3: Report successes and areas of improvement.
Principle 3: Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy	Strategy 3.1: Encourage sustainable building practices.	Strategy 3.2: Increase access to clean, renewable energy.	Strategy 3.3: Support energy efficiency efforts in individual homes and businesses.
Principle 4: Occupational Diversity	Strategy 4.1: Encourage diversification of business types.	Strategy 4.2: Support local businesses.	Strategy 4.3: Provide access to employment options (both physically and in opportunity) for all community members.
Principle 5: Revitalization	Strategy 5.1: Support investment in existing downtowns.	Strategy 5.2: Encourage building and land re-use.	Strategy 5.3: Promote historic and cultural preservation.
Principle 6: Housing Diversity	Strategy 6.1: Encourage mixed use developments.	Strategy 6.2: Increase the affordability of housing.	Strategy 6.3: Promote complete, livable neighborhoods.
Principle 7: Community Character	Strategy 7.1: Strengthen cultural and historical areas and activities.	Strategy 7.2: Foster community connection to local agriculture and businesses.	Strategy 7.3: Promote walkability.
Principle 8: Natural Resource and Agricultural Protection	Strategy 8.1: Plan for natural resources and agriculture protection.	Strategy 8.2: Discourage sprawl and conversion of natural and agricultural land.	Strategy 8.3: Foster community connection to natural resources.
Principle 9: Sustainable Design	Strategy 9.1: Plan for sustainable development.	Strategy 9.2: Observe Smart Planning Principles in public development projects.	Strategy 9.3: Encourage sustainable development practices.
Principle 10: Transportation Diversity	Strategy 10.1: Encourage multi-modal transportation.	Strategy 10.2: Discourage excessive personal vehicle usage.	Strategy 10.3: Promote connectivity.

Principle 1: Collaboration

Collaboration is a process where two or more people or organizations work together on a common goal. Community and stakeholder collaboration occurs when citizens, civic and business groups, and institutions come together to identify their shared values and vision for the future of their community, city or region.

Collaboration among groups or jurisdictions requires leadership to leverage finite resources. Stakeholders share knowledge and build consensus. Successful collaboration is built upon the pride of association, civic responsibility and stewardship.

Smart planning challenges communities, townships, cities, and regions to include all interested citizens and stakeholders in public processes and planning efforts. Outreach, communication and coordination are essential elements of effective collaboration.

Strategy 1.1 Encourage public involvement in the planning process.

Public involvement is essential for building communities that inspire a sense of ownership, value and place. To create a unified vision, public input should be sought at all levels of planning and development. While minimums of public access are governed by the Iowa Open Meetings Law (Iowa Code Ch.21), there are many tools for increasing public involvement in these processes.

Strengthening your community's public notice process through development of a community communication plan and through innovative methods like web-based updates, news releases, and social media will reach many more citizens than conventional methods. **Utilizing participatory planning input methods** like design charrettes, visioning sessions, study circles, and conversation cafés increases active participation and constructive exchange of ideas.

Because the effects of land use decisions do not happen in a bubble, collaboration in planning and development efforts should be extended beyond the boundaries of the community. **Collaborating with neighboring jurisdictions and private entities** not only strengthens relationships, but also allows for the sharing of resources and expertise. Collaboration can be accomplished through regional planning, public-private partnerships, corridor studies, and other similar joint efforts.

Sioux City Design Works

Beginning in 2008, Sioux City Design Works was a project undertaken by the City of Sioux City and the Siouxland Chamber of Commerce, in an effort to articulate a collective identity and provide guiding principles for new development and redevelopment within Sioux City. These guidelines are intended to promote positive and enriching development that reflects the physical character and future vision of Sioux City.

The two entities collaborated with an outside design firm to perform a detailed analysis of Sioux City through information gathering and extensive site visits. Community leaders were identified to provide guidance to the process. Online surveys, community design charrettes, and other stakeholder meetings engaged the general public in the development process as well. This collaborative approach led to Council approval of the Design Guidelines on February 1, 2010. To date, Sioux City has completed two commercial developments with Design Works and has several more underway.



Sioux City Design Works charrette.
Source: City of Sioux City

Strategy 1.2 Increase access to resources.

Because an informed community member is more likely to participate in a public forum, access to planning and development resources, news and documents should be easily accessible. One of the easiest ways to accomplish this is through **online document access**. With forms, minutes, plans, and regulations at the touch of a button, citizens and developers can be instantly informed of expectations and outcomes at any hour of the day.

Adding convenience to access only increases the likelihood of participation. **Email newsletters and notices** update community members on important events or changes in the planning and development process, without having to navigate a website.

Strategy 1.3 Provide outreach and education on smart planning.

Opportunity, access, convenience, and knowledge provide the greatest chance for public input and support. **Utilizing a variety of outlets including social media, cable television, radio, brochures and newspaper**, a widespread campaign can be developed to inform the citizenry of Smart Planning Principles, efforts and accomplishments in their community. **Planning workshops for the public** can also be used to introduce the community to planning basics and processes. Combining these efforts will foster an atmosphere of citizen planners, creating a more unified vision, commitment to that vision, and sense of place. In addition, educational opportunities, like certification programs, for officials and staff, promote knowledgeable leadership and informed decision-making.

Principle 1: Collaboration



Strategy	Tools
Strategy 1.1: Encourage public and stakeholder involvement in the planning process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened public meeting notice process • Utilize participatory planning input methods (e.g. visioning sessions) • Collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions and private entities
Strategy 1.2: Increase access to resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online document access • Email newsletters and notices
Strategy 1.3: Provide outreach and education on smart planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize social media, cable TV , radio, brochures and newspaper • Planning workshops for the public • Certification programs for officials and staff

Principle 2: Efficiency, Transparency, and Consistency

Smart Planning Principles include developing efficient, transparent and consistent methods for governance. Efficiency in governance addresses how a jurisdiction's policies, rules, codes and/or statutes are written, interpreted and enforced to implement the community's vision for the future. Outdated ordinances or conflicting codes make it difficult for developers and others investing in a community to navigate the review or development process to obtain community support, approval and permits.

Transparent procedures in governance allow for open and honest processes that foster trust and support in the ability of the community's government to implement the community's vision for the future. Jurisdictions should also strive for consistency and fairness in managing permits and applications, rule-making and enforcement to ensure that every citizen, applicant and developer has equal access to due process.

Strategy 2.1: Provide easy access to and promote use of planning documents, processes and resources.

Simple forms, straightforward process guidance, and easy to find contact information increase the efficiency, transparency and consistency in government.

Communities may also consider creating a more efficient planning, development, and permit processes by **accepting multiple forms of payment** and allowing **consent agendas** for review of routine items or items that have met certain criteria. Adopted plans should be readily available to guide future decision-making by elected officials and staff, and to inform proposed projects in an effort to avoid costly delays.

Strategy 2.2: Foster consistency in and use of sustainable development practices.

A community's preferred sustainable development practices should be adopted as **easy to use codes and regulations**. These codes allow developers to see upfront the community's vision for the growth of the city. In addition to codification, consistency and use of a community's standards can be increased through **fast-tracked permitting and priority consideration**. Making processes easier and faster for those who follow the community's smart planning and development guidance encourages developers to utilize smart planning and sustainable design principles more often. Education programs,

Cedar Rapids Smart Growth Scorecard

The City of Cedar Rapids Smart Growth Task Force, established in 2007, created a Smart Growth Scorecard as a means of raising awareness and encouraging adoption of sustainable development concepts. The Scorecard serves as a tool to guide the City as it evaluates policies and proposed development to ensure that they produce a more sustainable and livable community.

The Smart Growth Scorecard evaluates proposed projects in five or six categories, depending on the type of project:

- Infrastructure/Service Proximity
- Protection of Land
- Housing Options
- Mix of Uses
- Transportation Options
- Character and Design

The Scorecard assigns a value to proposed projects and is used by city staff and elected officials in their approval deliberations. The Scorecard also offers bonus points for other criteria including LEED certification and sidewalk connectivity.

such as **sustainability workshops**, further increases the likelihood that developers will follow Smart Planning Principles. These tools can be effective, low cost incentives that save both the developer and community money in the long run.

Strategy 2.3: Report success and areas of improvement.

The best strategy for government transparency is reporting on successes and areas in need of improvement. The easiest way to achieve effectiveness of the information shared is through a **community access plan**. Community access plans outline goals for public access, the details of activities and reports, what information can be expected to be shared, and a timeline for community access. In addition, an evaluation process for what goals have been met and what still needs to be accomplished will further transparency.

Another tool used for increasing transparency and efficiency is a **City Hall Open House**. These events allow city departments and elected officials to share information on current activities and past successes. Perhaps more importantly, open houses also allow community members to share ideas on areas of improvement.

Commitment audits can also be used to evaluate the efficiency of government. While usually confined to the political arena, city governments as a whole can apply the same techniques to judge their effectiveness. What commitments to the community has your department made this year? Are you fulfilling those commitments? As well as providing a tool for efficiency, commitment audits increase transparency and build trust between community members and their government.

2

Principle 2: Efficiency, Transparency and Consistency

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 2.1: Provide easy access to and promote use of planning documents, processes and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple forms • Process guidance • Accept all forms of payment for applications • Consent agendas/ administrative approvals
Strategy 2.2: Foster consistency in and use of sustainable development practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy to use codes and regulations • Fast-tracked permitting/ priority consideration • Sustainability workshops for developers
Strategy 2.3: Report successes and areas of improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community access plan (including evaluation process) • City Hall Open House • Commitment audits

Principle 3: Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy

As a leader in renewable energy production, Iowans must now begin to address usage and efficiency at the community level. Clean, renewable and efficient energy protects our environment, our health and our local economies.

Increasing smart energy practices at the local level can be easy and range anywhere from outreach activities to the building of renewable energy facilities. Communities should consider how to reduce fossil fuel usage in the built environment as part of their planning process. Even a small increase in efficiency can save money and reduce environmental impacts.

Strategy 3.1 Encourage sustainable building practices.

Perhaps the most effective way to **encourage sustainable building practices is through building codes**. If a community feels that a certain *practice* is particularly important to their vision, a code requiring such a practice should be considered. However, if a community is more invested in the general idea of energy efficiency, *standards* could be set in code, allowing the builder to determine the most reasonable practice to meet those standards. Communities may also choose to enact incentives instead of requirements.

Sustainable building incentives could include tax credits, fast-tracked permitting and other processes, grants, and relaxation of certain zoning requirements (e.g. parking). In an effort of encouragement by example, many communities are also electing to place sustainable standards on publically-funded projects. An example of such a standard would be to **require an energy conservation certification from a nationally recognized program (e.g. LEED) for all new and renovated public buildings**.

Strategy 3.2 Increase access to clean, renewable energy.

Communities that are able may want to consider **investing in renewable energy facilities and infrastructure**. Depending on the needs of the community, investment opportunities could range from wind turbines to solar panels to harvesting landfill gas to E85 and electric car charging stations. Because the

Fairfield's Go Green Strategic Plan

The Fairfield Go Green Strategic Plan encourages clean, renewable, and efficient energy in a number of ways. The Plan integrates this Principle into all aspects of the City's vision including "Community and Culture", "Economic Development", and "Land Use, Buildings, and Transportation".

Some examples of goals that address this Principle are:

- To develop a culture of wise use of energy and materials
- To achieve energy independence as a county
- To significantly reduce energy consumption in new and existing buildings and increase renewable energy use

Specific activities include:

- Develop a community wind project
- Develop an energy audit team
- Reduce city wide energy use by 60 percent by 2020
- Provide incentives for energy efficiency

expense of energy infrastructure is often high, these activities are also excellent opportunities to collaborate with neighboring jurisdictions and private entities.



Wind turbine outside of Fairfield, IA. Source: Fairfield’s Go-Green Plan

Strategy 3.3 Support energy efficiency efforts in individual homes and businesses.

Beyond policy changes and infrastructure investments, communities can encourage the sustainable use of energy through energy efficiency programs. Such programs may offer **tax incentives, loans or vouchers** for energy efficiency investments. These programs can typically be offered at low cost and are often supported by local utility companies and other interested organizations.

The key to successful energy efficiency programs is **outreach and education**, coupled with practical incentives. Program administrators should actively outreach to the community, letting citizens know that the programs exist and providing educational materials on the benefits of energy efficiency.

Often times, those who would benefit most from energy efficiency programs do not participate because of lack of resources or access or knowledge. Providing free **energy efficiency audits** to homes and businesses increases the likelihood of participation.

3

Principle 3: Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 3.1: Encourage sustainable building practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code requirements for sustainable building practices and energy conservation standards • Sustainable building incentives • Require energy conservation certification from a recognized national program (e.g. LEED, NAHB, IGCC) for public buildings
Strategy 3.2: Increase access to clean, renewable energy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in renewable energy facilities • Invest in renewable energy infrastructure
Strategy 3.3: Support energy efficiency efforts in individual homes and businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy efficiency tax credits, loans or vouchers • Energy efficiency outreach and education • Energy efficiency audits

Principle 4: Occupational Diversity

Many factors influence the local economies and affect how a community resizes over time. Sometimes this happens quickly, sometimes very slowly. The advantage of economic development planning is that communities can anticipate these changes and guide development and revitalization to the best of their abilities to achieve an established vision.

Communities should ensure the sustainability of their local economy and quality of life by developing a diverse range of education, training and employment opportunities. It is important to note that smart economic development planning incorporates quality of life into workforce development. Applying this Principle will promote retention and attraction of employers, as well as skilled and knowledgeable employees.

Strategy 4.1 Encourage diversification of business types.

Encouraging economic diversity often requires a **long term investment strategy**. These plans should encourage local business development, promote stable employment and build local competitive advantages. The basis for a long term investment strategy should be to build on existing strengths and should aim to create distinctive benefits for locating a business in the community.

Part of attracting new businesses to a local economy is advertising of existing workforce, as well as what the community can offer a new workforce. **Community branding and quality of life campaigns** highlight the advantages of locating in a certain area. Educational institutions, cultural facilities, historic characteristics, quality neighborhoods, and recreation are all positive attributes that can be emphasized.

Strategy 4.2 Support local businesses.

Businesses whose owners are already invested in the community- own a home, attend school, have family in the area- are the least likely to relocate. This is why support of local businesses is a key element in maintaining a healthy and diverse economy. Establishment of local businesses can be encouraged through **entrepreneur incentives and education programs**. The more educated and financially prepared owners are, the better the chance of success. Continual support of these businesses, especially in economic downturns

Sustainable Dubuque

The City of Dubuque spent many years investing in and building a quality of life for residents that focuses on sustainability. The Sustainable Dubuque Initiative aimed to provide economic, environmental and social equity in the community. This initiative also attracted businesses interested in sustainability, including IBM- who chose Dubuque as the first city in the United States for their Smart City campaign.

This partnership not only added resources and expertise to sustainability efforts, but also brought with it 1300 jobs to a downtown technology services center, significantly diversifying the city's employment base. The location of the facility exemplifies Smart Planning Principles- providing multi modal access, close proximity to residences and amenities, further revitalization of downtown, energy efficiency and historic preservation.



**Renovated Roshek Building,
home of IBM Dubuque offices.**
Source: City of Dubuque

is also essential. The assistance offered through programs like **local business tax credits and loans** can be a significant factor in whether a small, local business thrives or fails.

Strategy 4.3 Provide access to employment options (both physically and in opportunity) for all community members.

Physical accessibility to employment is an all too common concern for a significant portion of the workforce. There are several tools that communities can use to remedy this issue. **Requiring or incentivizing all new businesses to follow land use standards that promote accessibility** ensures that the entire workforce has a variety of employment opportunities and promotes smart planning overall. These standards could include locating near existing housing, incorporating mixed-use and transit oriented design, and **connectivity to multi-modal transportation infrastructure**.

Because physical proximity does not guarantee employment, accessibility efforts should also incorporate **vocational training and continuing education programs**. These programs offer advancement and personal growth to both skilled and unskilled employees and increase the marketability of a community’s workforce.



Principle 4: Occupational Diversity

Strategy	Tools
<p>Strategy 4.1: Encourage diversification of business types.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term investment strategy • Community branding and quality of life campaign
<p>Strategy 4.2: Support local businesses.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneur incentives and education programs • Local business tax credits and loans
<p>Strategy 4.3: Provide access to employment options (both physically and in opportunity) for all community members.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requiring or incentivizing all new businesses to follow land use standards that promote accessibility • Connectivity to multi-modal transportation infrastructure • Vocational and continuing education programs

Principle 5: Revitalization

Revitalization of existing communities is essential to the economic future of Iowa. City centers are traditional hubs of commerce, culture, entertainment and employment. In a world of increasing transportation costs and enhanced environmental awareness, the revitalization and redevelopment of existing communities is important. Existing communities have infrastructure in place to facilitate (re)development rather than extending costly services into fringe areas. Revitalization within existing communities reduces demand for development at the edge of town, thus reducing loss of productive farmland while also maintaining a strong tax base for the community.

When practicing this Smart Planning Principle, communities should strive to mix land uses to promote greater pedestrian, bicycle, and transit access. Thought should be given to conserving land at the periphery of communities, providing clear delineation between rural and urban/suburban areas. Additionally, redevelopment efforts should strive to protect, preserve and reuse historically significant properties, and find productive uses for grayfield and brownfield sites.

Strategy 5.1 Support investment in existing downtowns.

Many Iowa downtowns have deteriorated as industrial, residential and commercial developments have moved to cheaper locations on the fringe of cities. Supporting investment in existing downtowns through a combination of activities and programs utilizes historic and cultural assets to encourage economic and social vibrancy.

Investing public funds in downtown improvements like streetscaping, civic spaces, pocket parks and signage increases the appeal for business owners, consumers and residents. Likewise, offering **infill incentives** to developers encourages private revitalization efforts.

Businesses are also more likely to locate in an historic downtown if it increases visibility. **Main Street programs** offer businesses located in these areas support through national designation, development committees, networking, revitalization fundraising, and community recognition. Communities may also wish to encourage revitalization through **programs that recognize businesses** for positively contributing to their downtown environment.

Mason City's Downtown Plan

Mason City's Downtown Plan was adopted in 2007 as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Downtown Plan provides a "comprehensive and unified vision of Downtown to guide a program of continued improvement and development". The Plan outlines recommendations that focus on traffic circulation and way-finding and development recommendations for the Downtown Core, Willow Creek and Downtown North areas.

The Plan also gives a detailed timeline of implementation strategies and funding resources. The Plan is to be implemented over four years utilizing a range of public and private funding including tax increment financing, grants, loans, Capital Improvement funds, and city budgetary funds.



Downtown Mason City. Source: Mason City Downtown Plan

Strategy 5.2 Encourage building and land reuse.

While revitalization often focuses on historic downtowns, building and land reuse in other areas of a community are also important to smart planning efforts. To encourage building reuse, communities might consider offering **financial incentives** like split-rate taxing, tax increment financing and **low interest loans for adaptive reuse**. **Brownfields redevelopment**, and the grants and technical assistance associated with it, is also a popular tool in promoting land reuse.

Strategy 5.3 Promote historic and cultural preservation.

In order to promote preservation, a community must first inventory its assets. **Identification of historic and cultural districts** in a comprehensive plan acts as a foundation for preservation goals and efforts and promotes public awareness. **Historic preservation building codes** often accompany identification of such districts to ensure that preservation of buildings meets a set standard.

To encourage private preservation effort, communities may consider offering **financial incentives** or providing technical assistance on available aid, such as National Trust for Historic Preservation grants.

Principle 5: Revitalization

5

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 5.1: Support investment in existing downtowns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investing public funds in downtown improvements • Infill incentives • Main Street programs • Business recognition program
Strategy 5.2: Encourage building and land re-use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives for re-use • Low interest loans for adaptive reuse • Brownfield redevelopment
Strategy 5.3: Promote historic and cultural preservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of historic and cultural districts • Historic preservation building codes • Financial incentives

Principle 6: Housing Diversity

An individual or household's housing wants and needs change over time. Life cycle housing, affordable housing, and workforce housing are all terms used to address a desire for diverse housing types within a community. Life cycle housing allows people to stay in an area or neighborhood as their household size changes. Affordable housing is usually meant to address a specific price point or range that is available to households that meet established thresholds for identification as low and median income. Workforce housing is typically meant to address the cost and affordability of housing for service occupations such as nurses, law enforcement and teachers. Housing diversity within a community addresses the issue that not every household will need or want the same style of housing.

Strategy 6.1 Encourage mixed use developments.

Mixed use developments are designed to allow for a range of housing. **Mixed use zoning** can help promote and direct flexible housing diversity. In addition, codes allowing **secondary dwellings** (e.g. "granny flats") encourage housing diversity in existing residential areas.

Strategy 6.2 Increase the affordability of housing.

Housing diversity not only applies to the physical structure of the options offered, but also to the socio-economic range of possible tenants and owners. To expand housing options to as many people as possible, communities should strive for increased housing affordability.

Development and building codes can be used to promote housing affordability. **Compact housing** (including lofts, apartments, and condominiums) maximizes land and increases affordability. Requiring developments to be located near **existing infrastructure** also reduces the cost of development and ownership. Simply varying the size of lots within housing subdivisions produces homes of varying sizes and, thus, price points. Other tools include allowing for **flexible parking requirements** that maximize profitable land space and encouraging **housing near job and transit centers** which reduce the overall cost of household expenses.

City of Johnston 2030 Comprehensive Plan

The City of Johnston's 2030 Comprehensive Plan specifically addresses the Iowa Smart Planning Housing Diversity Principle. The Johnston Plan outlines six housing goals that strive to create a balanced, well maintained housing supply that respects the environment and established neighborhoods, promotes mixed uses, and integrates affordable housing.

Implementation of these goals is laid out in eleven action steps that include:

- Utilizing regulations to promote housing diversity
- Promoting mixed uses and integration of open space
- Exploring new opportunities for affordable housing
- Encouraging neighborhood associations
- Working collaboratively to meet housing needs
- Protecting from the negative effects of foreclosure
- Monitoring housing trends

Strategy 6.3 Promote complete, livable neighborhoods.

Complete and livable neighborhoods are comprised of a diverse network of housing, job and recreation options. These neighborhoods provide housing for all family sizes, ages, and abilities. **Age-in-place housing** allows older community members to remain in their current residence or neighborhood as their capabilities change, while **life cycle housing** provides flexibility for changing family sizes.

Housing diversity in neighborhoods is also shaped by demand. Amenities that attract a wide range of community members include recreation facilities like **community centers and parks, proximity to jobs and commerce, and safe pedestrian access.**



Neighborhood in Johnston, IA. Source: City of Johnston Comprehensive Plan

6

Principle 6: Housing Diversity

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 6.1: Encourage mixed-use developments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed Use Zoning • Secondary dwellings
Strategy 6.2: Increase the affordability of housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compact housing • Existing infrastructure • Transit supportive density levels • Flexible parking requirements • Housing near job and transit centers
Strategy 6.3: Promote complete, livable neighborhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age-in-place and life cycle housing • Community centers and parks • Proximity to jobs and commerce • Safe pedestrian access

Principle 7: Community Character

A unified community character is indispensable in fostering a sense of place and garnering support from community members for planning principles. Employing this Principle enables the people of a community to craft a vision of how they want their town to look and set standards for development and construction which reflect local values and architectural distinctiveness. The idea of community character encourages planning that intentionally provides welcoming public spaces, preserves important environmental characteristics, defines focal points and encourages appropriate styles and scales.

Establishing a strong community character is only possible through stakeholder collaboration and cooperation. For each person to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the community, discussions must take place as to the importance of shared values. Once a vision is created, the community can begin to apply the Smart Planning Principles to shape and maintain the desired character.

Strategy 7.1 Strengthen cultural and historical areas and activities.

The strength of a community's historical and cultural features relies heavily on awareness and pride. **Branding and tourism programs** are often used for increasing awareness, advertising distinctive traits to those inside and outside of a community. These programs can greatly increase economic and social vitality.

Community gathering events centered around cultural and historic activities also foster community connectedness. Celebrations, parades, and fairs are just a few ways of promoting pride.

In a more physical sense, **historic preservation or architectural building codes and requirements** can help preserve the unique character of the community's built environment.

Center Point Comprehensive Plan

Center Point's 2010 Comprehensive Plan builds off the vision that "growth and development should continue in Center Point but neither at the expense or integrity of the existing community nor at the expense of the small town character." In order to clearly define how growth should occur, several policy statements cover land use, transportation, development character and drainage. Specifically, these require:

- Compact, contiguous development
- Conservation of open space, natural drainage ways, mature trees, and watersheds
- Neighborhood commercial and mixed use development
- Consistency in scale
- Diverse and interesting architecture that avoids "cookie cutter" design
- Walkability and bicycle access
- Connected neighborhoods and transportation infrastructure

Strategy 7.2 Foster community connection to local businesses and agriculture.

Fostering a supportive environment for local businesses and agriculture not only creates a diverse economy, but also strengthens community character. The character of communities in Iowa is especially influenced by the hard working nature of our local farmers and producers. Encouraging **farmer’s markets and cooperatives** are tested methods for increasing awareness of local products. Patronage of local businesses can also be encouraged through activities like **Local Foods/Business marketing campaigns** and **local business open houses**.

Strategy 7.3 Promote walkability.

Most people do not want to live in or visit a city where it is unsafe and uninteresting to walk around. Communities can strengthen their positive qualities by promoting walkability. Walkability creates a safe environment that allows community members and visitors to slow down and discover aspects of the community that may go unnoticed while driving by in a car. Walkability provides a variety of health, environmental, economic, and social benefits.

There are many tools that help promote walkability. **Human scaled, mixed use developments** are unimposing to walk through and offer a variety of activities. **Pedestrian malls and corridors** provide walking only zones that are safe for pedestrians to move, sit and converse in. **Sidewalk requirements** for all streets combined with **lower speed limits** offer **safe walkways and routes**. And **streetscaping** can make even the duller street seem more inviting and interesting.



Principle 7: Community Character

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 7.1: Strengthen cultural and historical areas and activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Branding/tourism program • Community gathering events • Historical preservation/architectural character building codes and requirements
Strategy 7.2: Foster community connection to local agriculture and businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer’s markets and co-ops • Local Foods/Business marketing campaign • Local business open houses
Strategy 7.3: Promote walkability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human-scaled, mixed use developments • Pedestrian malls and corridors • Sidewalk requirements • Lower speed limits • Safe walkways and routes • Streetscaping

Principle 8: Natural Resource and Agricultural Protection

Communities that care about the natural resources that surround them are more invested in the well being and future of their community as a whole. The protection of the environment we live in is vital to our physical, economic and social well being. Communities that work to protect their resources have a greater sense of place and a higher quality of life.

Protecting the environment goes beyond reducing pollution or protecting endangered wildlife. Natural resource conservation at the local level involves preservation and connectivity of open spaces, maintenance and rehabilitation of habitats, and land use practices that minimize the footprints and environmental impacts of development.

Protection of agricultural land also falls under this Smart Planning Principle. Because of Iowa's rich history of farming, it is especially important for our communities to carefully consider how urban development practices affect this important natural, cultural and economic resource. The support of community members in our cities and towns is essential for the preservation of our farmlands.

Strategy 8.1 Plan for natural resource and agricultural protection.

Natural resources and agricultural protection can come about in many ways including advocacy, voluntary stewardship, and governmental efforts. A community that plans for protection creates a flexible system for achieving goals while still identifying specific areas to protect and issues to address.

Implementing **natural resource and agricultural zoning** creates land use standards while still observing the rights of private land owners through the planning and development process.

Communities may also wish to produce specific **protection area plans** for especially important or vulnerable areas. These plans are often a collaboration between advocacy, governmental, and private stakeholders that share a desire to protect a community's natural resources for future generations.

Council Bluffs Loess Hills Preservation Plan

The Council Bluffs Loess Hills Preservation Plan, created in 2001, was a result of a partnership between the City of Council Bluffs and the Loess Hills Alliance. This plan was adopted as an amendment to the City's Comprehensive Plan.

The Preservation Plan recognizes Loess Hills as a "valuable asset" and states that City decisions impacting the area should "provide a balance" between development and natural beauty.

The Plan identifies:

- Five areas along the Loess Hills for protection.
- Four goals that address the need for environmentally sound development, open spaces and parks, and compatible land uses.
- Five implementation strategies including land use and development regulations, property acquisition and conservation easements, public-private partnerships, and City development policies.



Loess Hills at Hitchcock Nature Center. Source: Photograph by Ty Smedes

Strategy 8.2 Discourage sprawl and conversion of natural and agricultural land.

Cities and towns can also protect resources in their own land use practices. **Decreasing or ceasing annexation** discourages sprawl and conversion of land, while directing (re)development within current city boundaries. Unincorporated developments outside of city boundaries should be discouraged. Local governments can also **acquire land for protection** or enter into **conservation easement agreements** with private land owners. In addition, local governments may choose to implement **transfer of development rights (TDR)** programs to encourage use of private funds for preservation.

Strategy 8.3 Foster community connection to natural resources.

Individual and community stewardship is perhaps one of the most effective and long lasting ways to protect natural resources. Increasing the importance of these resources in the everyday lives of citizens fosters connection and a sense of responsibility. **Green spaces, trails, and urban wilderness** provide opportunities for the community to interact with nature. **Increasing access to and awareness of natural spaces** and local environmental issues can also increase stewardship efforts.

Principle 8: Natural Resource and Agricultural Protection



Strategy	Tools
Strategy 8.1: Plan for natural resources and agriculture protection.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural resource and agricultural zoning • Protection area plans
Strategy 8.2: Discourage sprawl and conversion of natural and agricultural land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease or cease annexation • Acquire land for protection • Conservation easement agreements • Transfer of development rights (TDR)
Strategy 8.3: Foster community connection to natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green spaces, trails, urban wilderness • Increased public access to and awareness of natural spaces

Principle 9: Sustainable Design

Sustainable design encourages the efficient use of our natural resources through smart land use and construction practices. While often just associated with green building, sustainable design also encourages the creation and preservation of town centers and vibrant neighborhoods, promotes protection of productive agricultural land and open spaces, and advocates for the efficient use of energy and resources.

Many communities already use some sustainable design practices in everyday decision making, like encouraging businesses to locate downtown for economic revitalization projects. However, conscious efforts to include all aspects of sustainable design when considering development will foster community resiliency and pride by instilling a sense of place and ownership over the community's resources.

Strategy 9.1 Plan for sustainable development.

The easiest way to achieve sustainable development is to plan for it. Outlining **community-wide sustainable development goals** in a comprehensive plan gives authority to the vision and provides guidance for implementation of the principle.

Consideration of the community goals in a comprehensive land use or zoning map also provides a strong basis for meeting these goals. **Mixed use, transit and pedestrian oriented design, planned unit developments, historic/cultural and other similar zones and overlay districts** all contribute to sustainable development.

Strategy 9.2 Observe Smart Planning Principles in public development projects.

Leading by example is essential in smart planning. **Requiring that Smart Planning Principles be followed in public development projects** will demonstrate the commitment of the local government to the community's vision. Transparency in the process through public awareness and involvement campaigns will further increase the buy-in of citizens and developers. Involvement of community leaders is also important in achieving sustainable development goals. **Smart planning education for elected officials** reduces the difficult political situations sometimes associated with development and creates another avenue for outreach to the public.

Downtown Des Moines EcoCore

The City of Des Moines and the Downtown Community Alliance have partnered to promote sustainable design with the EcoCore program. This program seeks to improve the competitiveness of the downtown area by creating an environmentally sustainable place to live, work and play.

The first EcoCore effort, Project 101: Office Building Sustainability Grants, offered funding to downtown building owners to pay for sustainability audits. Audits were completed on five buildings, and articulated specific steps property owners could take to make their buildings more energy efficient. The audit included:

- Hub Tower at 699 Walnut Street
- Bank of America at 317 Sixth Street
- AmerUs Life Building at 611 Fifth Ave
- Midland Building 206 Sixth Ave
- Office building at 420 Watson Powell Jr. Parkway

Strategy 9.3 Encourage sustainable development practices.

While planning and education encourage community support of Smart Planning Principles, sustainable development cannot be implemented without the backing of developers and builders. Although community demand and developer preferences have some affect on the extent of sustainable practices, there are many tools local governments can use to encourage sustainability. **Guidance documents and tools** are an easy and effective way to inform developers of any code requirements, community goals, and best practices that are encouraged. Tools like **fast-tracked processes for projects observing a community's sustainable development goals and practices** and **financial incentives** can also be used to meet goals.

9

Principle 9: Sustainable Design

Strategy	Tools
Strategy 9.1: Plan for sustainable development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed use, transit and pedestrian oriented design, planned unit developments, historic/cultural and other similar zones and overlay districts City-wide sustainable development goals
Strategy 9.2: Observe Smart Planning Principles in public development projects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smart planning requirements for public development projects Elected official education on smart planning practices
Strategy 9.3: Encourage sustainable development practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance and tools for sustainable development Fast-tracked processes for projects observing sustainable development Financial incentives

Principle 10: Transportation Diversity

With development increasing on the periphery of our communities and implementation of land use practices that promote separation of uses, Iowans are becoming increasingly dependent on cars. Environmental quality, community vibrancy, and safety are all negatively affected by this increased dependency, in addition to increased costs of transportation activities and the public infrastructure necessary to support them. Quality of life of many in our communities is also limited by lack of access to a personal vehicle or the inability to drive. Providing accessible transportation options promotes personal and environmental wellbeing, and encourages smart land use practices and community connectivity.

When practicing this Smart Planning Principle, communities should strive to maintain and expand options that maximize mobility, reduce congestion, conserve fuel and improve air quality. All modes of transportation—including rail, bus, shared-vehicle and shared-ride services, bicycling, and walking—should be considered for practicability. Most importantly, transportation options should be integrated and consistent with land use objectives, and land use practices should encourage and promote transportation diversity.

Strategy 10.1 Encourage multi-modal transportation.

Lack of convenience and safety concerns are perhaps the two biggest deterrents to multi-modal transportation use. To encourage transportation diversity, communities must address these issues. **Accessible, convenient and easy to use transit** include stops close to businesses, schools, homes and recreation, easy to understand schedules and fees, safe and clean transport, and reliable service.

Safe bike and pedestrian routes encourage outdoor activity, and improve the quality of neighborhoods, commercial districts and healthy school environments. Increased safety can be accomplished through signage, dedicated bike lanes, trails, wide sidewalks, slower speed limits, and pedestrian oriented design.

Johnson County COG's Metro Bicycle Master Plan

The Metro Bicycle Master Plan covers six members of the Johnson County COG (Iowa City, Coralville, North Liberty, Tiffin, University Heights, Johnson County) and the University of Iowa. The Plan “outlines strategies to create an accessible, coordinated and comfortable bike network”. Goals in the Plan include:

- Increase the number of people bicycling for transportation and recreation
- Improve bicyclist safety
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Improve health and fitness
- Develop education, enforcement, and encouragement programs
- Enhance economic development
- Build “Safe Routes to Schools”
- Provide bicycle parking
- Ensure high quality services



Bike storage on Iowa City Transit.

Source: Johnson County Council of Governments

Strategy 10.2 Discourage excessive personal vehicle usage.

Because it is the most convenient mode of transportation, it is often necessary to discourage excessive personal vehicle usage in order to increase use of other modes. There are many tools helpful in implementing this strategy. One of the most effective tools is **land use and development policies that encourage compact and accessible design**. However, there are also many more immediate fixes that can reduce personal vehicle usage in certain areas with minimal resources required. Tools to reduce convenience include **reduction in speed limits, reduction in parking supply, and increased parking fees**.

Strategy 10.3 Promote connectivity.

Connectivity in transportation infrastructure allows citizens to efficiently and conveniently reach their destination using any mode or modes of transport they choose. Connectivity applies to streets, sidewalks, trails, transit routes and any other applicable infrastructure. **Short, grid-like streets** provide a variety of routes, increasing pedestrian appeal and safety, reducing traffic and speeds, and providing built-in alternatives in times of maintenance.

Complete and connected sidewalks are also important in encouraging multi-modal transportation. Whether a route to school, a downtown district, a neighborhood park, or an employment hub, well connected and maintained sidewalks provide a safe and enjoyable environment for pedestrians.

Multi-modal connectivity is a holistic approach to transportation that encourages accessibility to a variety of options and combinations of modes to reach a destination. **Bike racks on buses, transit stations at trail heads, and park and ride shuttle systems** all encourage the use of alternative transportation.



Principle 10: Transportation Diversity

Strategy	Tools
<p>Strategy 10.1: Encourage multi-modal transportation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible, convenient, and easy to use transit • Safe bike and pedestrian routes
<p>Strategy 10.2: Discourage excessive personal vehicle usage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land use and development policies that encourage compact and accessible design • Reduction in speed limit • Reduction in public parking supply and increased parking fees
<p>Strategy 10.3: Promote connectivity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, grid-like streets • Complete and connected sidewalks • Bike racks on buses, transit stations at trail heads, and park and ride shuttle systems

Bringing It All Together: Community Implementation

This guide highlights just a few examples of how Iowa communities are already implementing the Smart Planning Principles. There are many more instances of cities, towns, counties, and public-private partnerships working to create a more livable and vibrant Iowa. From Coralville's Brownfields Program to Kalona's Sidewalk Improvement Program to the economic development partnership of Western Iowa Advantage, all communities have the opportunity to apply smart planning practices in a unique way.

Whether updating an existing plan or starting from scratch, it is essential to have a strong community vision to build on and to considering all of the ways in which the ten Principles fit into that vision. The strategies and tools provided by this guide, as well, as the resources on the following page, should serve merely as a starting point for implementation. Communities are encouraged to discover what works best for them and to share best practices and lessons learned with each other. Striving for greater economic, environmental, and social sustainability will safeguard the exceptional quality of life Iowa communities.



Resources: Smarter Planning

National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)

www.ncdd.org

Provides news, tools, guidance and resources on collaboration and participation efforts around the world.

EngagingCities

<http://engagingcities.com>

Provides tools, guides, and trends for urban planners on using the internet for a more participatory and effective planning process.

Making Smart Growth Happen

http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/sg_implementation.htm

Provides tools and resources to help communities learn about and implement smart growth approaches.

Local Government Commission

www.lgc.org

Assists local governments in creating livable communities through partnering opportunities, resource and outreach materials, and providing information on available state and federal grants.

Main Street

www.preservationnation.org/main-street/

This National Trust for Historic Preservation site offers information on and resources for the national Main Street program.

National Rural Development Partnership

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/CEDP-NRDP.html>

The Partnership exists to facilitate discussions on rural development issues. The website offers information on the Partnership, rural development resources, and funding.

Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

<http://www.lincolninst.edu/>

The Lincoln Institute provides resources and discussions on issues involving the use, regulation and taxation of land.



Prepared by the Rebuild Iowa Office

State of Iowa

2011