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2016 Annual Report

Iowa's Living Roadways
community visioning

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Introduction

The Iowa's Living Roadways Program was born of an effort to provide design services to small Iowa communities. The program is a collaboration involving the Iowa Department of Transportation (Iowa DOT), the Living Roadway Trust Fund (LRTF), Iowa State University (ISU), and Trees Forever. Iowa's Living Roadways consists of the Community Visioning Program and the Projects Program.

The Community Visioning Program integrates landscape planning and design with sustainable action to assist community leaders and volunteers in making sound and meaningful decisions about their local landscape. The program empowers local leaders through a planning process that results in a transportation enhancement plan reflecting the values and identity of the community.

A committee of local residents participates in a series of steps toward creating a conceptual plan, including:

- Identifying issues
- Investigating the physical and cultural dimensions of landscape issues
- Setting goals for change
- Developing strategies to meet those goals
- Creating an implementation plan

Throughout the process, the committee receives support from the technical experts at Trees Forever, a professional landscape architecture firm, and the Iowa State University Department of Landscape Architecture.

The sustainability and success of the program is evident by the number of communities with which it has collaborated. Since Iowa's Living Roadways was created in 1996, 215 communities have participated in Community Visioning, more than a dozen of which have gone through the process more than once. The Projects Program has awarded grants for more than 500 projects.

The results of ongoing program evaluation show how the program has impacted Iowa communities (see impacts below). Furthermore, our case studies of successful visioning communities support our belief that engaging local residents generates the knowledge necessary to make changes that the community as a whole will embrace.

ABOUT 98% of visioning communities complete at least one project.

NEARLY 50% of visioning communities complete four or more projects.

NEARLY 75% of communities funded projects through local volunteers.

NEARLY 85% of visioning steering committees are still active in some way.

Representatives FROM 63% of communities reported that the program had a postive impact on their town.

MORE THAN 60% of those communities reported that the program positively affected aesthetics and the economy.

OF THOSE COMMUNITIES, 100% identified improved quality of life as a positive impact.

2016 Community Visioning Program

The 2016 visioning communities are Carlisle, Colfax, Garrison, Hampton, Kalona, Manning, Monona, St. Ansgar, Stuart, and University Heights.

The annual report summarizes the essence of the year-long Community Visioning process and the main ideas developed by the design team for each town. In each community summary, we present images from the concept plan, as well as data collected from focus groups as part of the transportation assets and barriers assessment. For five communities – Carlisle, Colfax, Hampton, Kalona, and University Heights – we also provide selected results from random-sample surveys.

Focus Groups

We invited residents with different transportation needs to participate in focus groups. In most communities, participants were separated into four user groups and the steering committee, which are defined below.

Each user group identified and mapped assets and barriers, as well as desired improvements. The ISU research team analyzed the focus-group maps and transcripts, giving the steering committees insight into how residents perceive the local transportation system.

Design Proposals

Based on information gathered from the focus groups, a transportation inventory, an assessment of the local bioregion, and survey results (in five communities), the steering committees in each community identified and prioritized goals. The design team for each community developed a range of design proposals to address these goals.

Together the design proposals work to highlight important community features, establish or strengthen city identity, and elevate aesthetics. The projects also aim to improve local transportation systems for all user types.

Transportation User Types

Actives: This user group represents those in the community who engage in outdoor recreation, including cycling, walking, running, etc. The availability of multiple venues for outdoor recreation matters to this group.

Seniors and Mobility Impaired: Accessibility is a major concern for this user group. Handicapped parking, curb ramps, and smooth surfaces are critical transportation features. Having goods and services within walking distance is important.

Youth: This group uses primarily non-motorized modes of transportation, so pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets and sidewalks are important. These users value the ability to get to popular destinations on foot or via bicycle.

Parents: Safety of their children is a primary concern of this user group. Access to safe and easy routes to school activities is a significant factor to this group. Parents of young children desire smooth, wide surfaces for strollers.

Steering Committee: This group's observations are influenced by special knowledge of the transportation system acquired during the Community Visioning assessment process. As a result, this group is more representative of decision makers.

Communities

Carlisle

Carlisle (population 3,950) is located in Warren and Polk Counties in central Iowa approximately 15 miles southeast of Des Moines, and is part of the Des Moines-West Des Moines Statistical Area. Iowa Highway 5 runs east-west through Carlisle, connecting with US Highway 65 just west of town. Since the late 1990s the community has experienced steady growth, and counts access to many great parks and trails in the area among its most cherished assets.

Planning and Design Summary

The focus groups and mail survey results revealed that the ability for pedestrians and cyclists to safely cross Highway 5 in town is a major concern among residents, particularly children going to and from school. These assessments also reinforced the how much residents value Carlisle's parks and trails. People want to see the trails expanded into the heart of Carlisle and extended to connect to regional trail systems.

Based on information obtained through the community assessments, the visioning committee identified five priorities:

- Entrance Enhancements
- Highway 5 Signage and Beautification
- Safe Routes to School through additional Sidewalk Connections
- Downtown Trail Connection
- Downtown Enhancements

The concept plan addresses these projects in a number of ways. Entrance enhancements, including signage and vegetation, improve aesthetics while signaling to drivers that they are entering a town. Signage also directs cyclists to downtown Carlisle. Lighting, banners, and native vegetation along Highway 5 through town help to calm traffic. The designers also proposed crosswalks and sidewalk connections along the highway to provide safe routes to school. In terms of trail enhancements, the team created a trail connection from Summerset Trail to downtown and designed a new downtown park that includes a bike hub with cyclist-focused amenities such as fix-it stations.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Patty Reisinger*

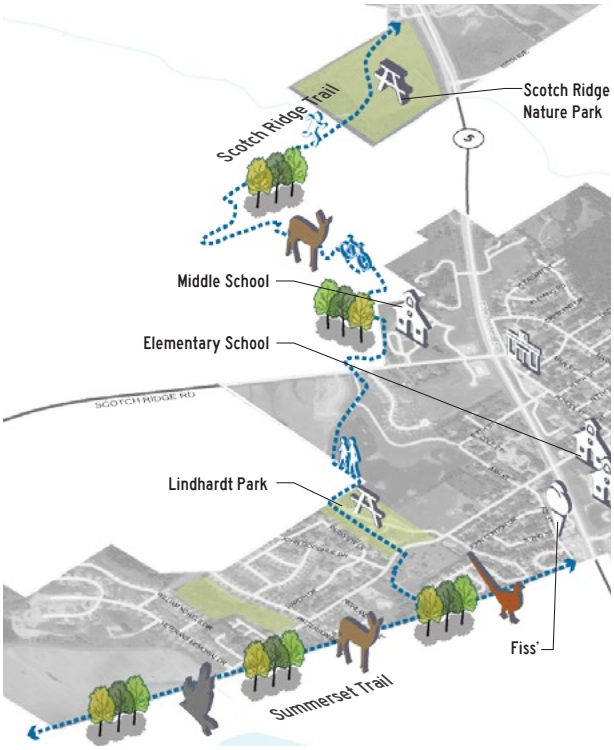
Landscape Architect: *Bruce Niedermyer, RDG Planning & Design*

Intern: *Sara Davids, RDG Planning & Design*

Community Tour at Highway 5 Exit

Steering Committee:

Robert Fleming
Susan Fleming
Rex Fowler
Ronda Frost
Stephanie Goodhue
Scott James
Joe Jenkins
Andy Lent
Ruth Randleman
Barb Rasko
Bill Scholl
Kay Scholl
Geri Seiberling
Sadie Todd
Dennis Woodruff



Assets Identified in Focus Groups

Parks and Trails Are Important in Carlisle!

Carlisle's parks are popular destinations for all user types. Active users reported heavy use of the trails in and around Carlisle, including Summerset Trail and the Scotch Ridge Nature Trail.

What we heard

"Carlisle heavily invested in a bike trail from a regional standpoint ...that's fantastic."

"Carlisle citizens are interested in safe walkways and bikeways..."

"We need some bike racks if we're going to do biking."

Infrastructure Barriers

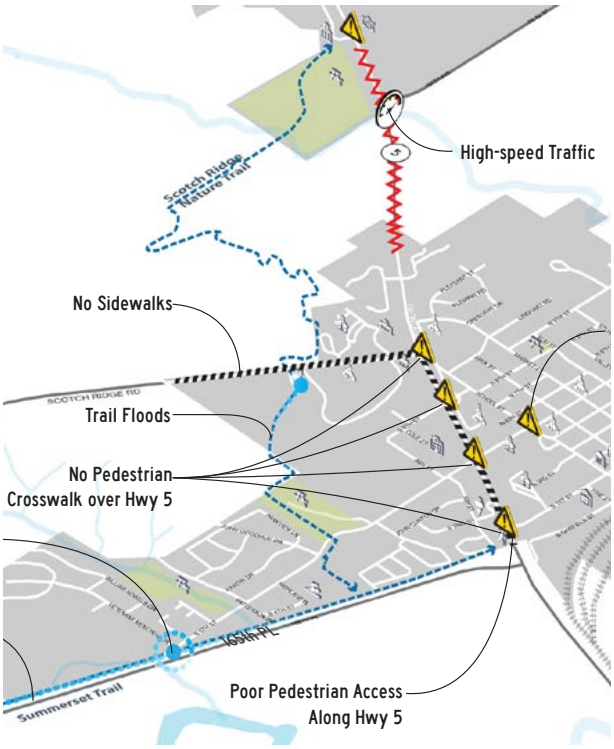
Iowa Highway 5 is a busy transportation corridor, and focus-group participants were concerned about traffic speed and the lack of pedestrian crossings. They also identified the inconsistent sidewalk system as an issue.

What we heard

"The sidewalks in Carlisle are so inconsistent..."

"Yeah, there's just a...lack of sidewalks in Carlisle."

"...[O]ne major barrier is a lack of safe Highway 5 crossings."

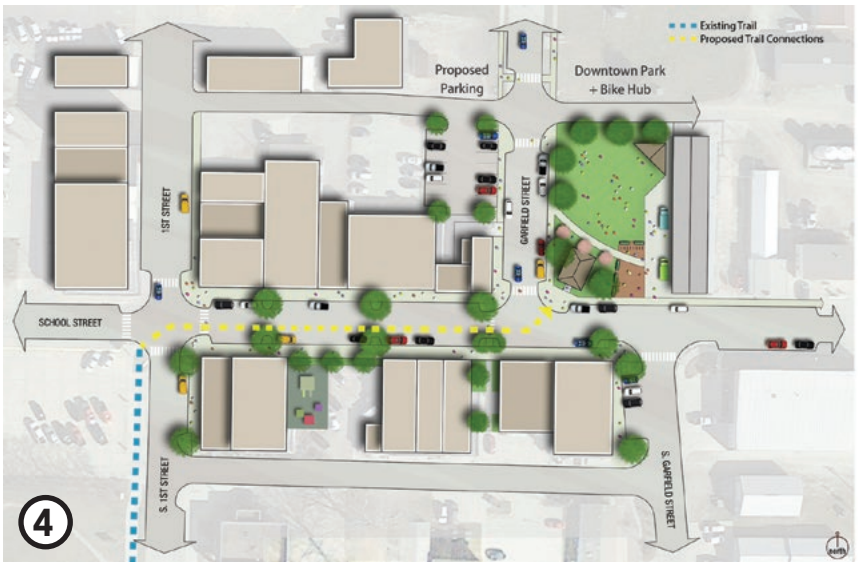


Barriers Identified in Focus Groups


CARLISLE HISTORIC DOWNTOWN
1

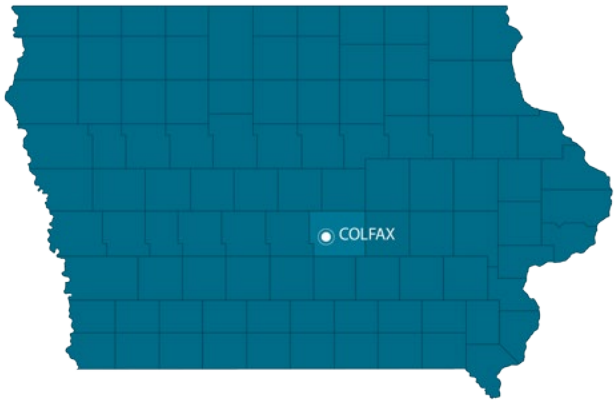

2


3



1. The intersection of South 1st Street and Highway 5 is a gateway to downtown Carlisle; the proposed crossings would improve pedestrians' perception of safety.
2. The park design for downtown features a new stage and bike hub.
3. Median plantings and welcome banners along Highway 5 would help to slow traffic through town.
4. The plan for downtown enhancements includes a new park, corner bump-outs, street trees, and a bicycle hub.
5. The natural stone entrance sign and prairie plantings proposed for the North 1st Street entrance reflect Carlisle's identity as "The Natural Choice."
6. The entrance signs, banners, and gateway designed for Carlisle would create a cohesive identity throughout town..

Colfax



Colfax (population 2,093) is located in Jasper County just south of Interstate 80, approximately 24 miles east of Des Moines. Highway 117 runs north-south through town, connecting it to Interstate 80. Because of its proximity to Des Moines, Colfax positions itself as "residential enclave" for those who work in Des Moines but prefer small-town living. Colfax participated in the Community Visioning program in 1999 and has implemented many of these projects. The recently opened 500-acre Quarry Springs Park on the north side of Colfax has generated a lot of excitement in the community.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Leslie Berckes*

Landscape Architect: *Bruce Niedermyer, RDG Planning & Design*

Intern: *Sara Davids, RDG Planning & Design*

Planning and Design Summary

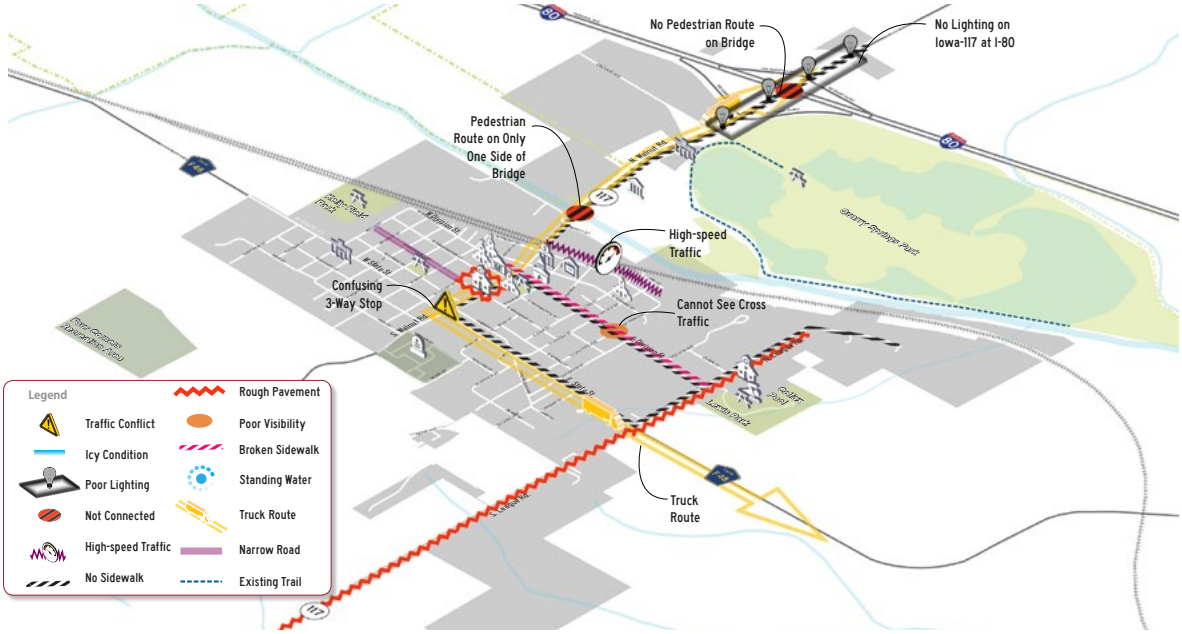
As the gateway into Colfax and the primary connection to Interstate 80 and Quarry Springs Park, Highway 117 is heavily used by drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. At the same time, this corridor has a number of issues identified by survey respondents and the focus-group participants, including lack of lighting and sidewalks. Residents also indicated through the assessments their concern regarding the poor condition of streets and sidewalks in town. The steering committee sought to address these and other issues in the four top priorities it identified:

- Highway 117 Corridor Improvements
- Downtown Enhancements
- Safe Routes to School and Recreational Trail
- County Road F48 Pedestrian and Vehicular Safety Improvements

The proposed Highway 117 improvements consist of 1) connecting the trail in Quarry Springs Park to Colfax, 2) expanding the native prairie at the entrance to Quarry Springs Park to the entire corridor, and 3) adding trees and lighting with banners along the corridor to enhance aesthetics and help with traffic calming. The concept for downtown also includes planting additional trees, as well as reducing the number of driveways along Highway 117 and adding curb ramps and crosswalks at intersections. Safe Routes to School is addressed in the concept plan with sidewalks connections to the schools.

Public Presentation of Concept Plan

Steering Committee:
Travis Cook
Linda Darrock
Don Edwards
Doug Garrett
Connor Jones
Brad Magg
Dave Mast
Pete Parvi
Kim Seebeck



Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

With Highway 117 bringing heavy traffic through town, the conditions of many roads are less than satisfactory. All user groups listed both roads and sidewalks as barriers in town. The intersection of State and Walnut Streets emerged as serious issue during the focus groups because it is a three-way stop on a hill.

Desired Improvements

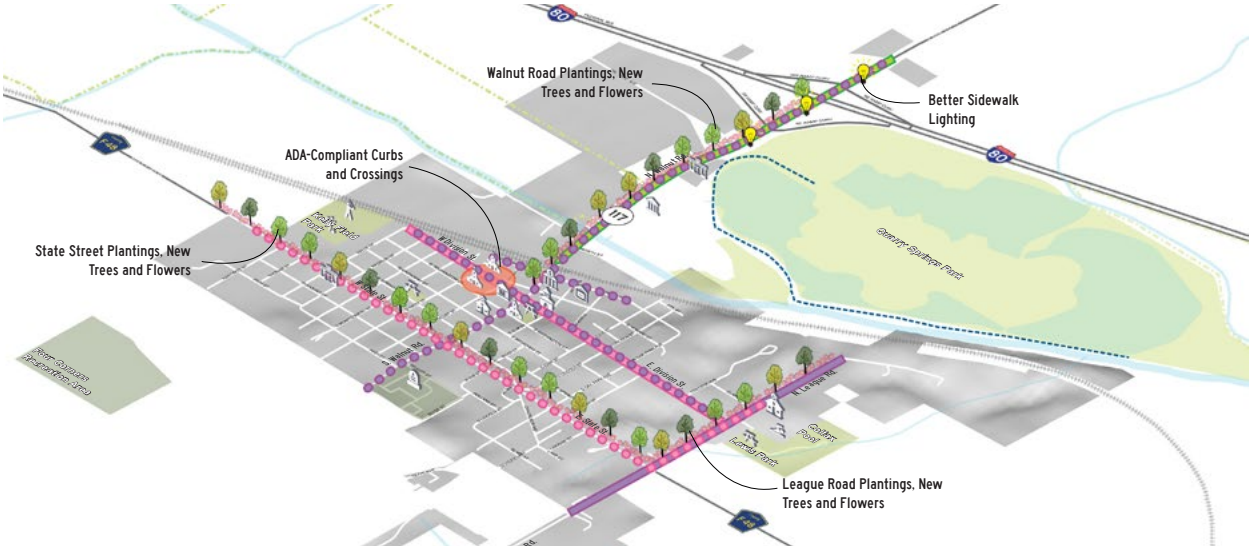
The majority of the desired enhancements are along Highway 117 and includes road repair, better lighting, and street plantings. People would also like better pedestrian access to places such as Quarry Springs Park.

What we heard

"There are a lot of sidewalks in town that are hazardous to people walking."

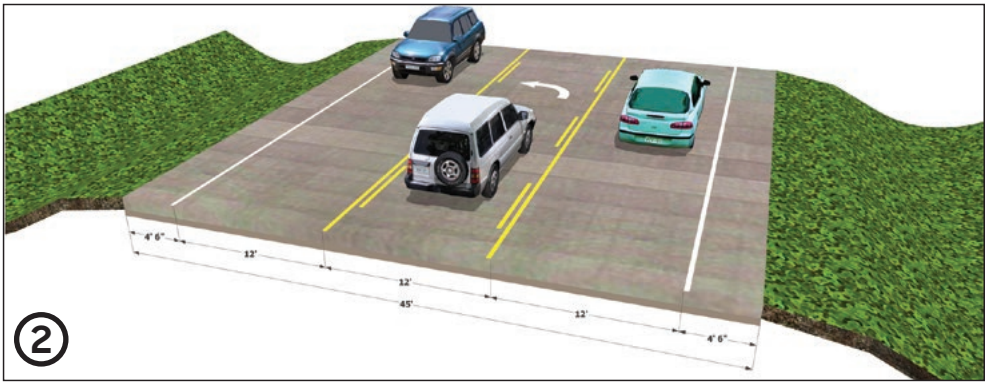
"Once you get past the Catty Shack [going south on Walnut Street], there's not one light, so it's kind of hard to see cars coming."

"I won't walk up and down Division because there's no sidewalk most of the way along there."



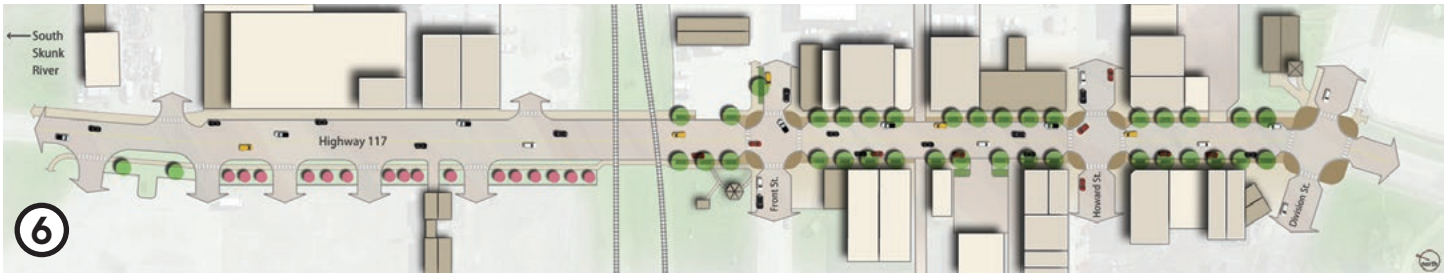
Desired Improvements Identified in Focus Groups


1

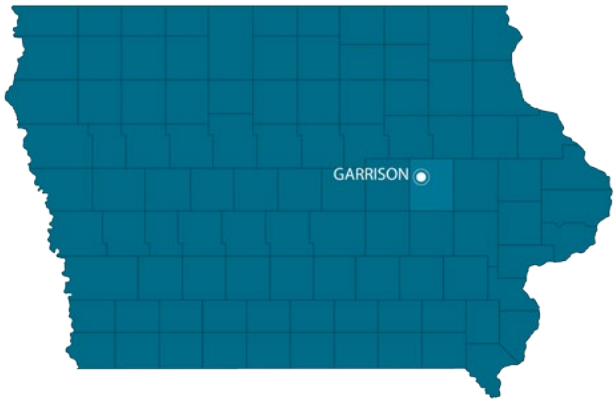

4' 6"
12'
12'
45'
12'
4' 6"
2


3

1. Proposed downtown enhancements include bump-outs, new pavers, and street plantings.
2. An added center turn-lane on Highway 117 would prevent traffic congestion and make travel safer.
3. Highway 117 corridor plantings include native grasses and wildflowers and would add interest and beauty.
4. A trail extension at the South Skunk River would provide a safer and more accessible route to Quarry Springs Park.
5. Another rendering of the proposed downtown enhancements shows bump-outs, crosswalks, and street trees.
6. A plan drawing of the Highway 117 corridor show updates to the historic downtown district of Colfax.



Garrison



Garrison (population 360) is located in Benton County between Interstate 380 and US Highway 30, approximately 40 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids. Residents use local recreational areas year-round, including the Old Creamery Trail that connects Garrison to the nearby towns of Dysart and Vinton. Garrison suffered a loss in July 2011 when straight-line winds damaged the city's fire station and library, as well as many private residences and trees throughout town. In a move to overcome the disaster, residents quickly joined together and successfully raised funds to build a new library and fire station.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Patty Reisinger*

Landscape Architect: *Meg Flenker, Flenker Land Architecture Consultants*

Interns: *Erika Birnbaum and Amanda Holtman, Flenker Land Architecture Consultants*

Planning and Design Summary

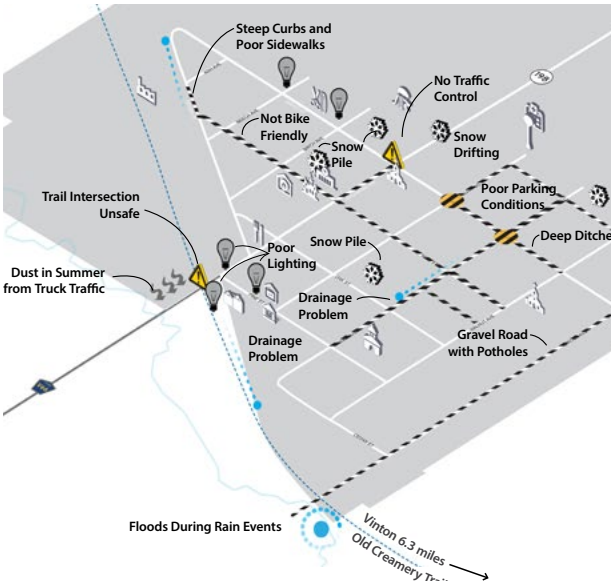
During the focus groups, participants expressed concern about the heavy traffic speeding through town along Sycamore Avenue. The focus groups also revealed the importance of amenities in town such as the library, the Old Creamery Trail, and City Park. Resident input played an important role in the goal-setting process, through which the Garrison visioning committee identified the following projects:

- Sycamore Avenue Corridor Enhancements
- City Park Improvements
- Looped Trail around Garrison
- Downtown Beautification
- Pocket Park/Hero Memorial
- Community Way-finding Signage and Community Identity
- Sidewalk/Accessibility Enhancements

The Sycamore Avenue plan promotes safe access for all types of transportation users. The plan features decorative vehicular and pedestrian lighting, crosswalks, vegetation, and curb ramps. The design for downtown includes the same elements, as well as a plaza in front of the Mercantile, public art, bump-outs at intersections, and a plan for a "Central Park" on property next to the old fire station. The concept plan also includes a design for a trail loop, a heroes memorial, a trailhead, and signage.

Design Workshop

Steering Committee:
Angela Dague
Amanda Erickson
Caroline Erickson
Ann Jorgensen
Christy Leckband
Allan Lindsey
Steve Meyer
Teresa Meyer
Randy Scheel
Michelle Trimble
Merle Welte
Steve Young



Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Assets

Residents highlighted the Old Creamery Trail as a vital recreational asset for biking, walking, and access to fishing, as well as snowmobiling in winter. Well-maintained facilities including the lights in City Park, the Mercantile, and the Old Creamery Trail are a source of pride.

Desired Improvements

Focus-group participants would like a trailhead where the Old Creamery Trail crosses Sycamore Avenue with a park and a parking lot for trail users. Some storm-damaged trees still need to be removed and new ones need to be planted. Planting trees would bring back wildlife that has been absent since the storm.

What we heard

"It would be interesting to have some sort of depot, or gazebo, [or rest stop] on the trail for people to feel comfortable stopping and taking a break."

"There's a lot of shade. There are lots of trees around."

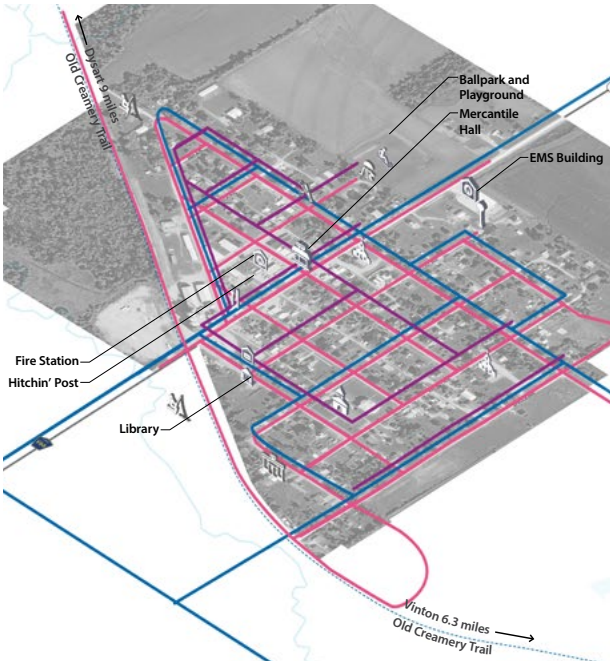
Transportation Barriers

Residents are concerned with the poor street lighting, sidewalk connections, and drainage throughout town. The streets are less shaded and protected from the elements because of the loss of trees resulting from the 2011 windstorm. There is limited space to pile snow in Garrison, which makes getting around town in the winter months difficult.

What we heard

"Sidewalks around town are buckled so [they are] a tripping hazard. Main Street is the worst..."

"A lot of people don't walk because the sidewalks are all ripped and damaged..."



Assets and Routes Identified in Focus Groups


GARRISON
45
1


2


3

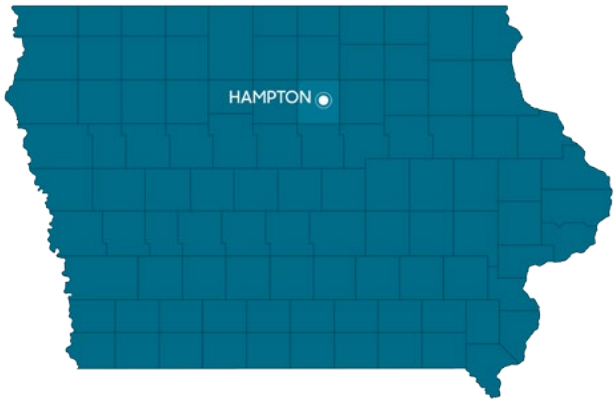
4

1. The north entrance concept features signage and native vegetation along North Sycamore Avenue.
2. A pedestrian walkway in the alleyway would connect Central Park and Main Street.
3. Bioswales along East Maple Street would help manage stormwater while beautifying the area.
4. A community garden and arboretum along Sycamore Avenue would offer a form of passive recreation for all ages.
5. The way-finding signage concepts reinforce Garrison's identity.
6. The one-way vehicular traffic-flow concept would include bump-outs that shorten pedestrian crossing distances.

5

6

Hampton



Hampton (population 4,393) is the county seat of Franklin County in north-central Iowa. The community is located at the intersection of US Highway 65 and State Highway 3, just nine miles east of Interstate 35. The Rolling Prairie Trail runs east-west through the north part of town along a former Chicago Northwestern Railroad line and is considered a major community asset.

Hampton participated in the Visioning Program in 1997–98. Since then, the community's demographics have changed significantly. Currently, more than 20% of the population is Hispanic, which adds cultural and economic diversity uncommon in small-town Iowa. To ensure that the needs and desires of Hispanic residents were included in the process, the ISU research team conducted focus groups with Hispanic adults and youth. In addition to focus groups, the ISU research team, in conjunction with the design team, staffed a booth at the Gran Festival, a cultural event sponsored by La Luz Hispaña, a community center focused on the needs of Hampton's large Hispanic community.

Planning and Design Summary

Based on the Hampton visioning committee's identified goals, the design team developed a concept plan that addressed the following:

- Regional and Community Trails – Connect the Rolling Prairie Trail to destinations in town as well as to regional destinations such as Beed's Lake.
- Trail and Trailhead Amenities – Add parking, a dog run, a bike maintenance area, benches, etc. Add lighting, benches, and trees along the trail.
- Pedestrian Circulation – Implement a comprehensive, accessible sidewalk plan.
- Downtown Revitalization – Provide safe pedestrian crossing areas using bump-outs, colored and textured pavement, street trees, and signage.
- Way-finding and Identity Signage – Create signage that reflects Hampton's identity and directs visitors to local destinations.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Jeff Jensen*

Landscape Architects: *David Stokes and Eric Doll, Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company*

Intern: *Samuel Thompson, Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company*

Spanish Language Focus-group Facilitation: *John Wolseth, Scott Timm, Samuel Merced-Matos, and Sandra Oberbroeckling, ISU Extension and Outreach Community and Economic Development*

Discussion of Community Enhancement Goals

Steering Committee:

Brody Bertram
Brook Boehmler
Donnis Borcherding
Spencer Clark
Crystal Cross
Jim Davies
Ron Dunt
Maguire Flint
Paul Flint
Riley Flint
Valeria Gonzalez
Newton Grotzinger
Ally Hanson
John Krull
Dyanne Pralle
Kristina Raisch
Kennedy Reynolds
Emilio Valenzuela
Sally Van Wert
Randy Westhoff
Susan Wulf

Assets Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Assets

All user groups enjoy the amenities offered at Progress, East, and Harriman Parks. Both Anglo and Hispanic youth frequent the pool at Progress Park during the summer. The soccer fields located at East Park host adult and youth soccer leagues. Harriman Park has a picnic area, fishing, and "cool rocks," and is visited by all types of users.

What we heard

"When you...drive down 2nd Street, there [are] beautiful trees."

"Well, there [are] a lot of recreational opportunities. The bike trail has gone a long way to linking things..."

What we heard

"I don't feel particularly safe on that mile and a half [of the trail] that's along the highway."

"Pieces [of sidewalk] are missing [along Highway 3]."

Transportation Barriers

Every focus group identified sidewalks as a barrier to getting to everyday places and recreation facilities such as parks and the school playgrounds. Parents are concerned because there aren't sidewalks to many places their kids go. Active users would like a sidewalk connection to East Park.

Quotes from the Spanish Language Youth Focus Group

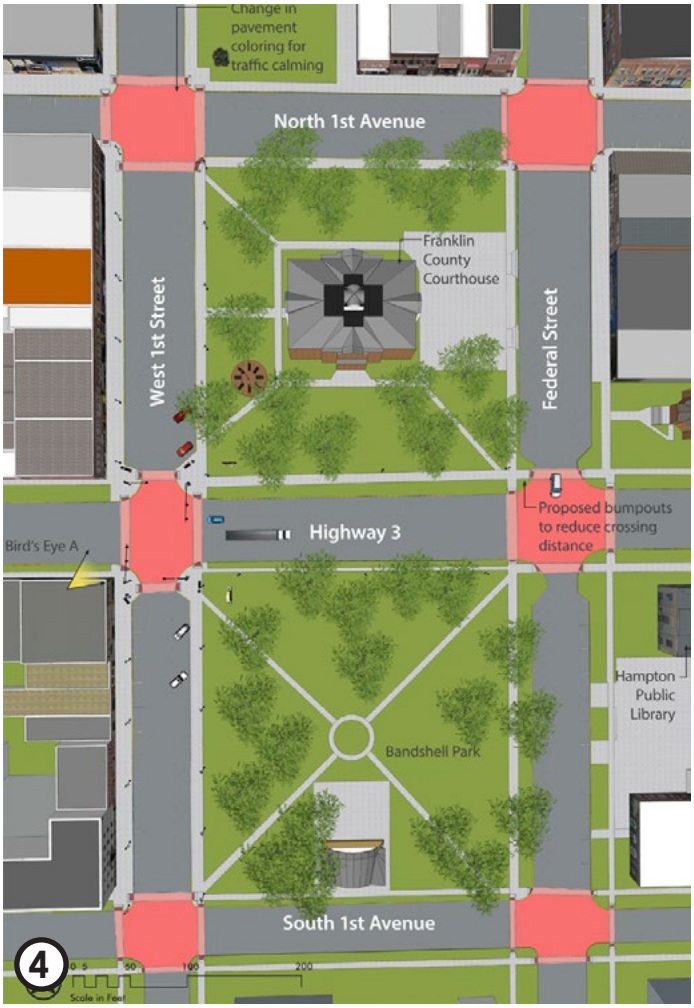
Spanish-Language Focus Groups

The concerns of Hispanic adults group are similar to those of Anglo parents. However, some Hispanic adults do not drive and need to find rides to work and other locations. This group walks to destinations to which other users would typically drive. Like the Anglo youth, Hispanic youth use primarily walk and bike, so pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets and sidewalks are important. This group spends a lot of time at school playgrounds, so having functional, up-to-date equipment matters to them.


Hampton
1

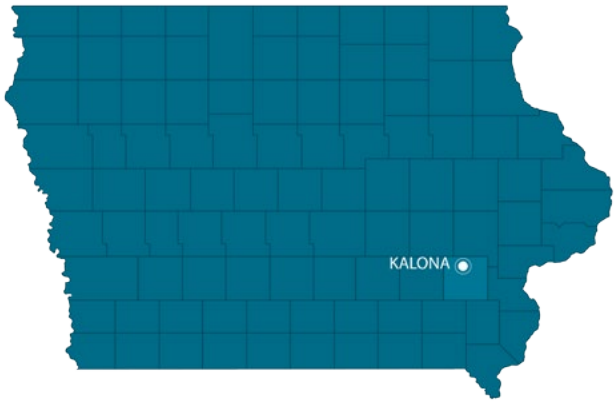

Existing
2


Rain Garden
Parking Lot
Dog Park
Trailhead
Native Plant Screen
3



1. Downtown amenities proposed include bump-outs and an entry arch for Hampton's Main Street.
2. One entrance concept for East Park has a new parking lot and sidewalk along Highway 3.
3. The Rolling Prairie Trail trailhead design builds on the existing gazebo by adding a dog park, a rain garden, and parking.
4. The downtown revitalization plan features bump-outs and colored pavement at six intersections surrounding Courthouse Square and Bandshell Park.
5. This bird's-eye view highlights the proposed intersection of Highway 3 and First Street.

Kalona



Kalona (population 2,450) is located at the intersection of Highways 1 and 22, 20 miles southwest of Iowa City. The city of Kalona benefits from several local attractions, such as the Historical Village, the Quilt and Textile Museum, countryside businesses, and a newly renovated downtown with specialty shops and boutiques. The community has flooding issues caused by its proximity to the English River and by local waterways through town.

The Kalona area has been home to several orders of Amish and Mennonites since the mid-1800s. These groups live primarily outside Kalona, but are an integral part of the community and regular users of the transportation system. In fact, 10% of respondents to the mailed transportation survey indicated horse and buggy as their primary mode of transportation. To gather additional input from this unique user group, the ISU research team worked with the Kalona Historical Society and the Chamber of Commerce to organize a focus group with five Amish elders. Because of Amish religious beliefs, the sessions were not recorded and the photo mapping activity was omitted.

Planning and Design Summary

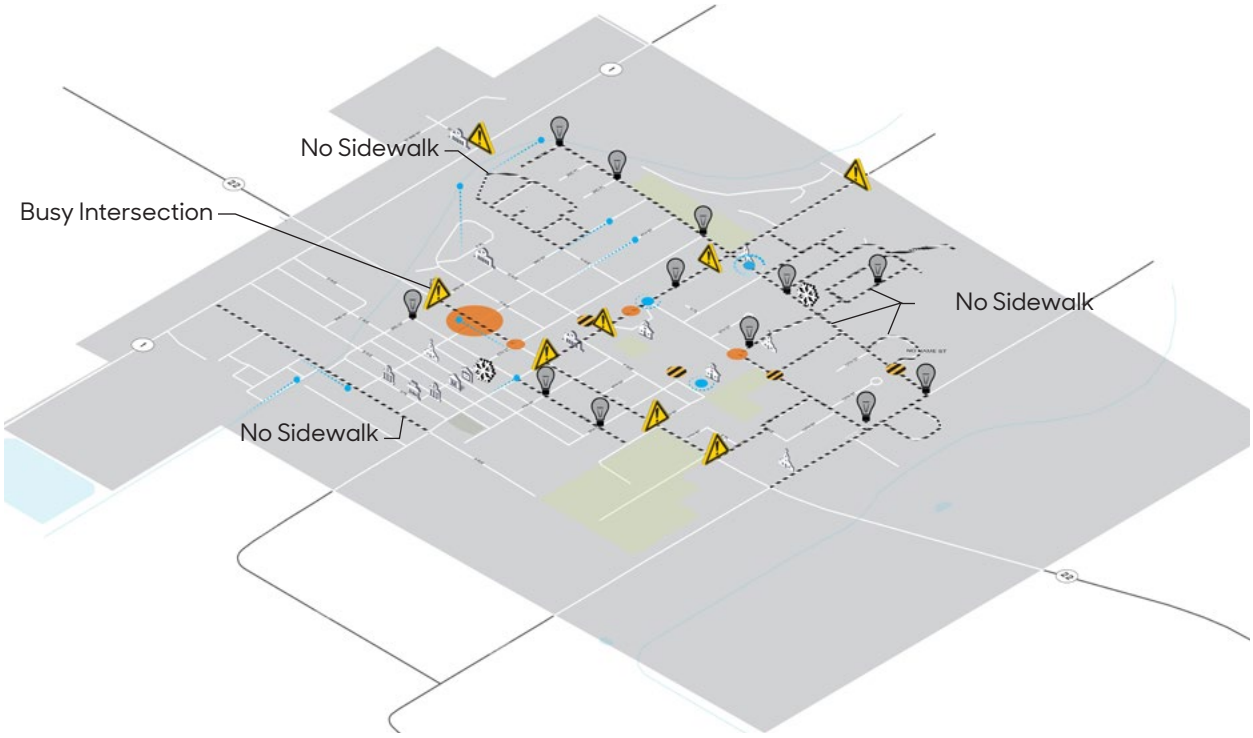
The design team developed a concept plan that focuses on trails, stormwater management, B Avenue, and park development. The concept plan proposes a perimeter trail and pedestrian connections, including connecting the elementary and middle schools to City Park and connecting downtown to residential areas. The plan also addresses the safety of the pedestrian crossing at Highway 22 and 10th Street.

To address stormwater management, the plan calls for enhancing the existing detention basin east of the middle school, constructing new basins at the intersection of Highways 1 and 22, and planting rain gardens in front of the elementary school on 6th Street. B Avenue enhancements include bump-outs, street trees, and colored pavement to make the corridor more pedestrian friendly. Finally, the design team proposed a new KCTC Park, a veterans memorial, and Salvesen Park.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Dustin Hinrichs*
Landscape Architect: *Dylan Jones, Bolton & Menk*
Intern: *Hannah Schmitz, Bolton & Menk*

Preliminary Design Review

Steering Committee:
Jenelle Bender
Sean Cortum
Ben Curtis
Gloria Hochstedler
Jan Peterseim
Ed Raber
Mark Robe
Phil Ropp
Ryan Schlabaugh
Joe Schmidt
Anthony Spitzer
Craig Spitzer
Mary Zielinski



Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

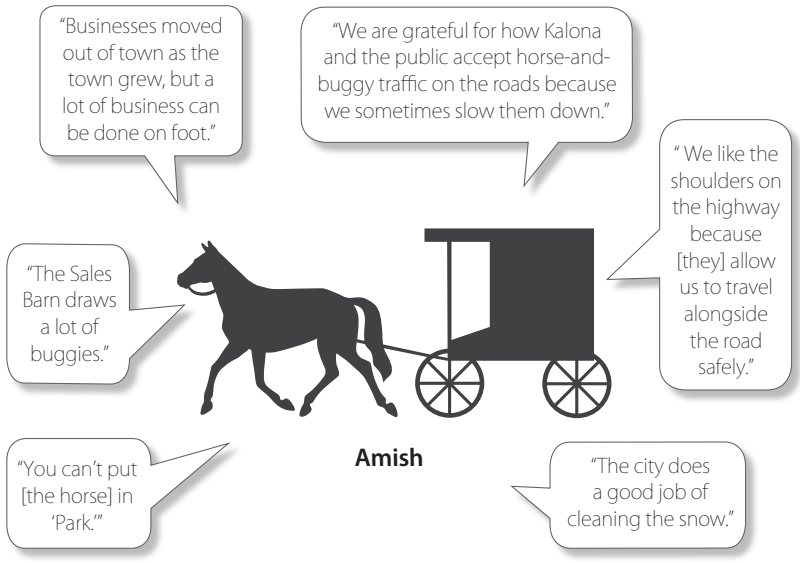
Kalona residents identified pedestrian access and lighting throughout town as the most significant barriers. All groups except the Amish mentioned the need for trails to connect the parks and parts of town that are disjointed from the rest of Kalona. Better connections to the school, downtown, and Harvest Hill were the main priorities of residents.

What we heard

"The top [priority] would be a very wide bike trail all around the city, a couple of miles"

"[There are] no bike trails or nature trails or anything [in Kalona]."

"It would be easier for me to let my kids ride their bikes if I knew they could get all the way on sidewalks."



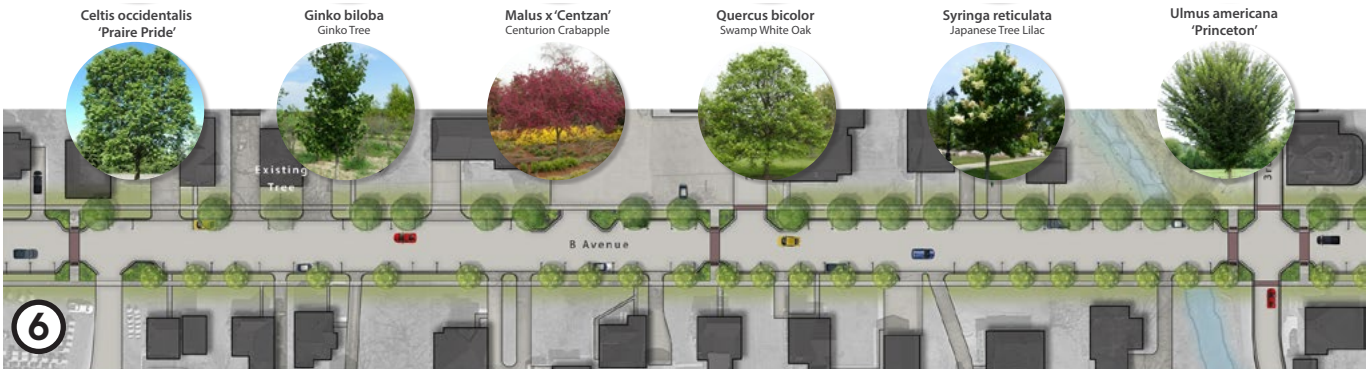
Comments made by Amish Focus-group Participants

Amish Focus Groups

The Amish do not live in Kalona but come to town regularly to conduct business. As a result, their destinations are focused on utility and necessity rather than pleasure. These places are hardware shops, blacksmiths, the horse tack store, L&M or JW's grocery stores, and the farm supply and feed stores. They often come to Kalona for auctions at the Kalona Sales barn. Unlike other user types, trails are not important to the Amish, who traditionally live simply with few amenities.

Existing Site Conditions

1. The design team proposed transforming a vacant lot along Salvesen Creek into a park that would feature native vegetation along the creek bank to reduce erosion.
2. A rain garden west of the elementary school would mitigate stormwater runoff while serving as an educational tool.
3. The park designed for the property owned by Kalona Cooperative Technology Company would have a stage and seating.
4. Enhancing the stormwater detention basin near Kalona Middle School would be one way to help mitigate flooding in the area.
5. The Veterans and Volunteers Memorial Park would be located southeast of City Hall.
6. This B Avenue streetscape plan shows proposed bump-outs and street tree planting.



Manning

Manning (population 1,500) is located in Carroll County in western Iowa. The town is bisected by Highway 141, which is heavily traveled and a major route to Omaha, Des Moines, and Sioux City. The highway provides a lifeline throughout the town with many tourist attractions, local resources and businesses located along the road. Manning is close to many desirable destinations, including Great Western Park and Four Corners Recreation Area, located just west of town. The West Nishnabotna River runs along the western edge of Manning and is a valuable and underutilized resource as it currently stands. Manning was a visioning community in 2012 and completed all the proposed projects. The committee applied again in 2016 to continue the community's momentum.

Planning and Design Summary

During the focus groups, more trails and more green space emerged as high priorities. Pedestrian and cyclist access to destinations along Highway 141 was also a common theme among all user types. The steering committee's goals and the subsequent concept plan reflect these desires.

- Downtown Improvements – Create green spaces at the former site of the health center and the adjacent empty lot and add amenities along Main Street such as street trees, benches, bike racks and trash receptacles.
- Highway 141 – Install way-finding signage along the corridor and if possible, convert the highway from four to three lanes.
- Great Western Park – Create a trail from the campsite to the shelter and restrooms, widen and make the existing pier accessible, and install a monument entrance sign based on the existing entrance signs.
- Trestle Park – Develop the site of the old mill adjacent to the historic trestle bridge into a park with access to the Nishnabotna River.

The ambitious residents in Manning have already completed part of the Main Street parks and have cleared the site of the proposed Trestle Park.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Brad Riphagen*

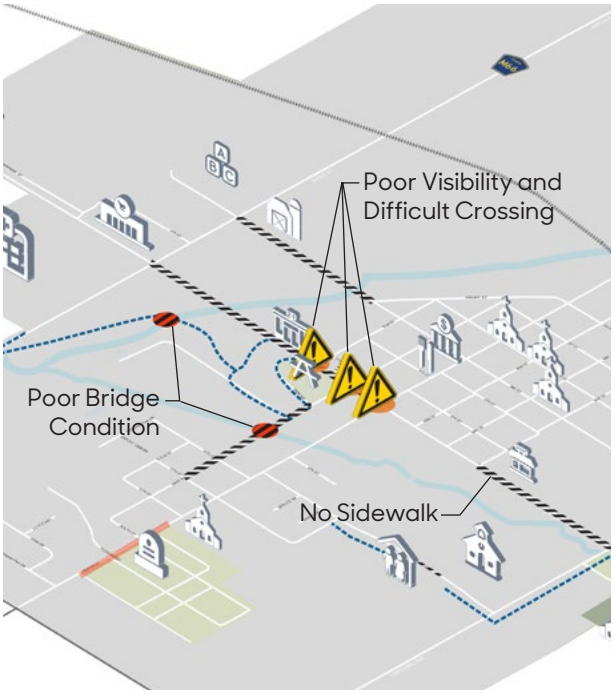
Landscape Architect: *Jen Cross, RDG Planning & Design*

Intern: *Ashleigh Gildon, RDG Planning & Design*

Design Presentation at the Hausbam

Steering Committee:

Cory Arp
Jean Behrens
Brad Benton
Jamie Blum
Jason Christiansen
Marsha Clausen
Harley Dales
Tammy Eberly
Ridge Muhlbauer
Karen Reinke
Dawn Rohe
Jessica Singsank
Geri Spies



Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

The active, parent, and senior and mobility-impaired groups said that the lack of sidewalks on Highway 141 makes it challenging to get to West Side Market and the health care center for pedestrians and cyclists. The parents and actives groups said that pedestrians can't easily reach the Quakerdale Center because there are no sidewalks on 3rd Street. The youth think it is hard to bike on uneven pavement. The parents and actives groups appreciate the recently added path along Manning Cemetery but would like to see it paved.

What we heard

"A lot of [the streets] either have bumps or curbs and it's just pretty bad [for biking]."

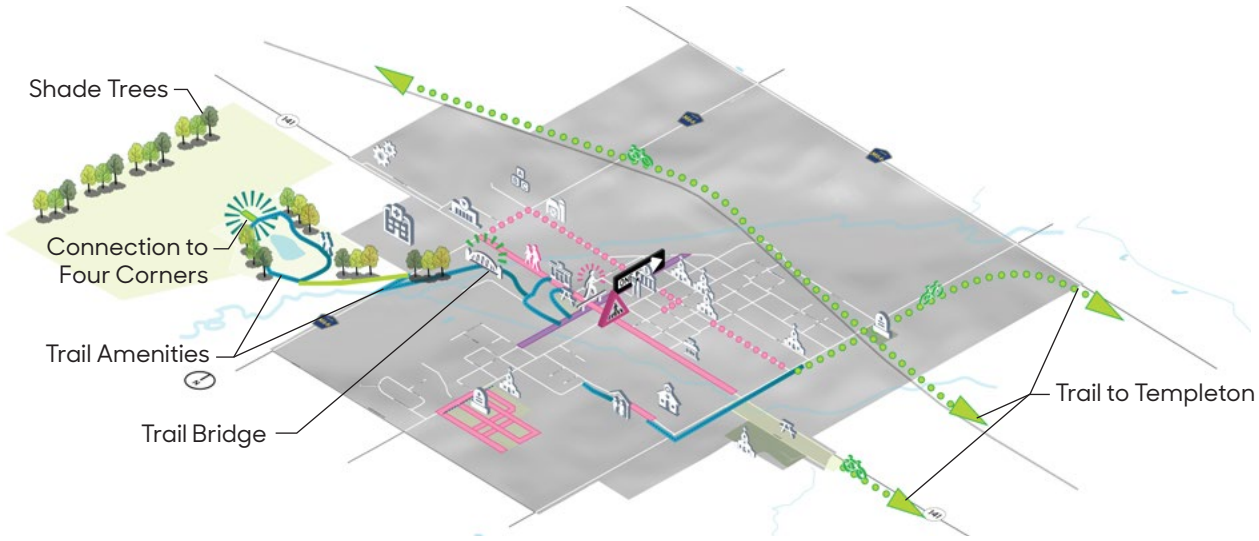
"...some people might want to walk...but one of our biggest problems is no sidewalk [on Highway 141]."

"We've got plenty of wildlife—deer right here in town and fox right here in town."

"I like to rollerblade around here and play at [Four Corners]."

Desired Improvements

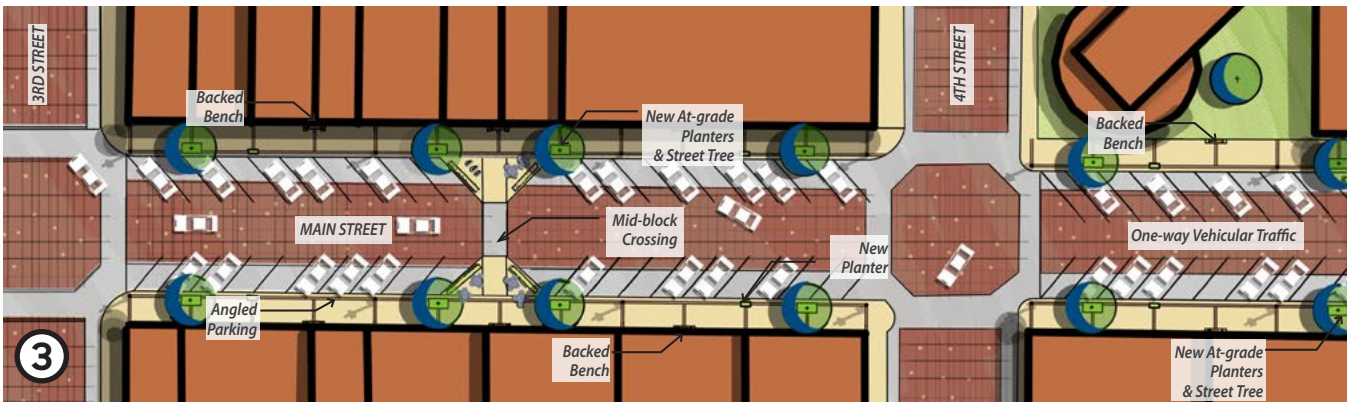
Many of the desired improvements were centered around Great Western County Park. User groups would like bike trails, trail amenities, and shade trees added to the park. Another improvement would be a trail connection to Four Corners Recreation Area. Participants also recommended various options for the trail to be extended to Templeton.



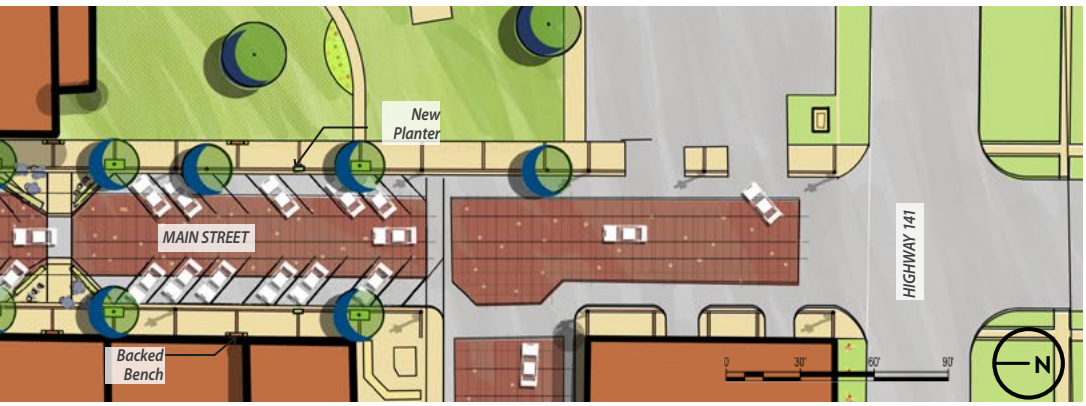
Desired Improvements Identified in Focus Groups


1

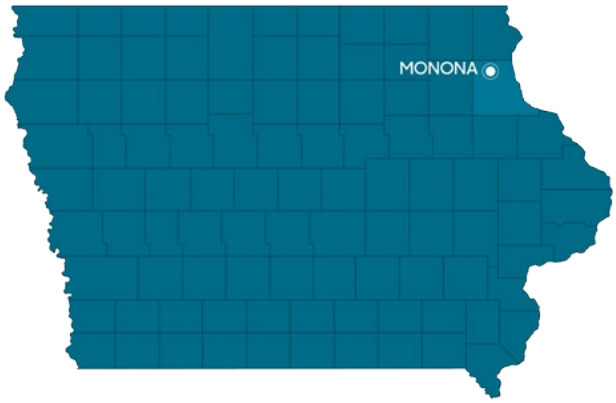

Manning
Great Western Park
Rec Center
Main Street
Manning Public Library
SPEED LIMIT 30
2
Highway 141 Corridor Improvements


3RD STREET
4TH STREET
Backed Bench
New At-grade Planters & Street Tree
Backed Bench
MAIN STREET
Mid-block Crossing
New Planter
One-way Vehicular Traffic
Angled Parking
Backed Bench
New At-grade Planters & Street Tree
3

1. The proposal for Trestle Park features a nature play area.
2. The plan for the Highway 141 corridor through town includes converting the highway from four lanes to three and posting way-finding signage.
3. The design team created a plan for Main Street that offers more amenities for pedestrians and cyclists.
4. Planting beds and street trees would beautify Main Street as well as manage stormwater.
5. The proposed Trestle Park offers recreation opportunities for people of all ages.



Monona



Monona (population 1,549) is located on Highway 52/18 in northeast Iowa. Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, is 16 miles east along Highway 18. The community is growing, with a new development along the southwestern limits of Monona designated for industrial and residential development and a second residential development and two proposed roads northeast of town.

One notable project that enhanced the natural environment was the installation of a permeable-paver parking lot next to Turkey River watershed. Monona is the highest point in the county at more than 1,200 feet above sea level and is situated atop the Turkey River, Bloody Run, and Yellow River watersheds, so environmental conservation has always been important. Monona participated in the Visioning Program in 2007 and has completed most of the projects proposed, perhaps the most visible project being the landscaping at Gateway Park.

Planning and Design Summary

The focus-group analysis confirmed several of the steering committee's goals, such as increasing downtown lighting and accessibility, improving connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists, and enhancing community parks. The committee also wants to continue making strides in terms of the environment. The concept plan addresses the committee's goals with the following proposals:

- Community Trail System – Develop a four-mile perimeter trail using a combination of separate trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways.
- City Parks – Connect to the other parks and the Garden View Trail, create trails, and add native vegetation and trees.
- Signage – Update destination park signage.
- Sidewalks – Implement a comprehensive sidewalk plan to improve connectivity.
- Downtown – Install additional lighting and curbed bump-outs with native vegetation and street trees to make the area more pedestrian friendly as well as manage stormwater runoff.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Emily Swihart and Patty Reisinger*

Landscape Architects: *David Stokes and Eric Doll, Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company*

Intern: *Samuel Thompson, Jeffrey L. Bruce and Company*

Design Workshop

Steering Committee:
Dan Canton
Barbara Collins
Micah Decker
Connie Halvorson
Rogeta Halvorson
Jim Langhus
Pam Malanaphy
Pat Malanaphy
Fran Passmore
Gary Passmore
Craig Schmidt
Kerrill Schmidt
Shirley Seitz
Anjela Waterman

Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

Access to a continuous network of sidewalks and trails is impeded by inconsistent maintenance and gaps in the system. The downtown in particular is perceived to be too dark at night. Participants identified several places where visibility is poor and turning is difficult, as well as busy intersections that are not easy to cross. Strong winds are a fact of life in Monona, causing snow drifts that can block passage and visibility on streets and sidewalks.

Transportation Assets and Destinations

The Butterfly Garden is an iconic symbol of Monona's public parks, other popular parks are Gateway Park, Garden View Park, and City Park. Mononans value peaceful, natural areas close to home. Downtown Monona is the core identity of Monona, but suffers from a sense of isolation and few plantings.

What we heard

"What makes this area popular is the Butterfly Garden, and it is just nice."

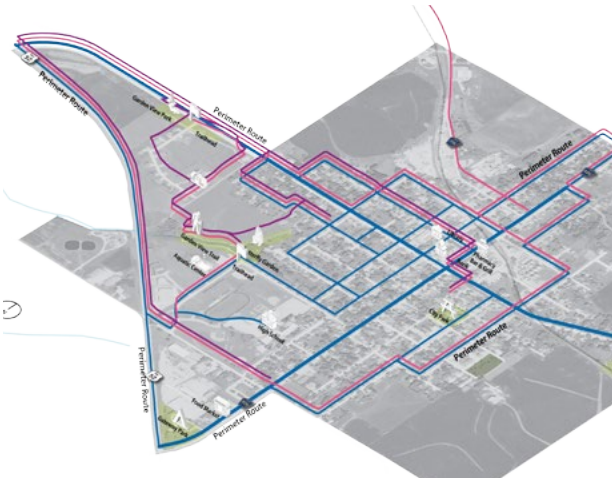
"I think Gateway is a wonderful park... they have farmers markets, which are great. "

What we heard

"I walk in the street because it's too dangerous to walk [from the railroad tracks to the sidewalk]."

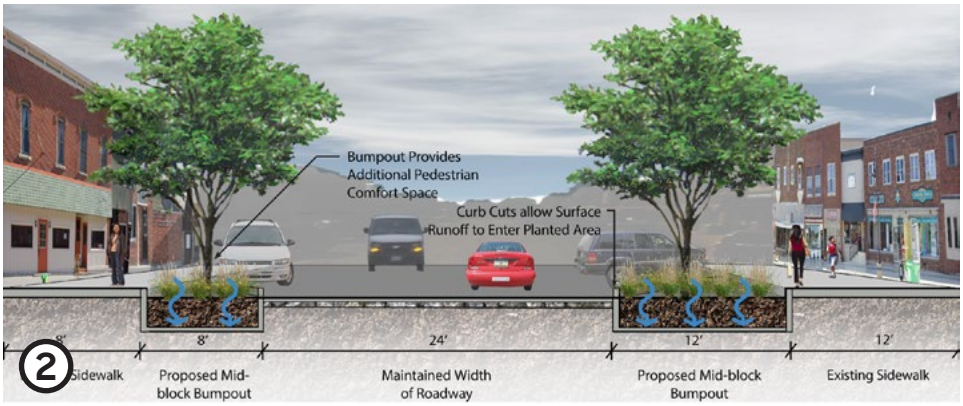
"[Downtown lighting] is extremely bad."

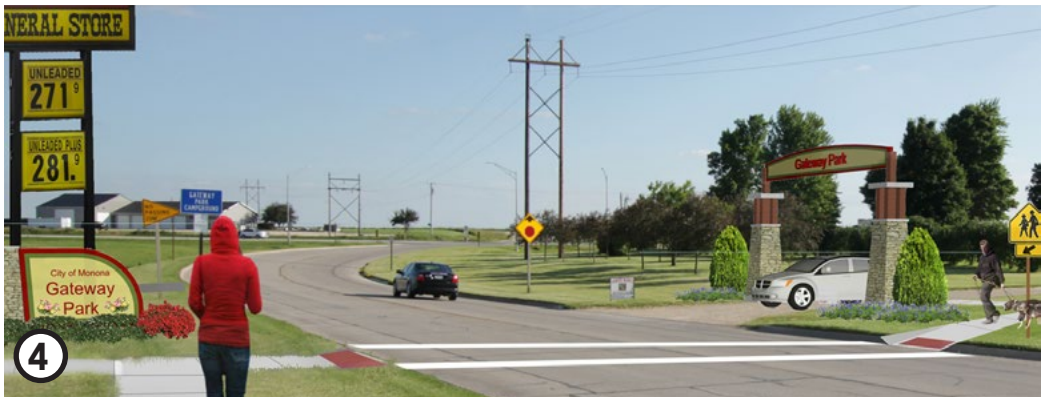
"[Iowa Street] is not that busy, but it gets kind of scary riding by the ditch – just staying out of the way of cars."

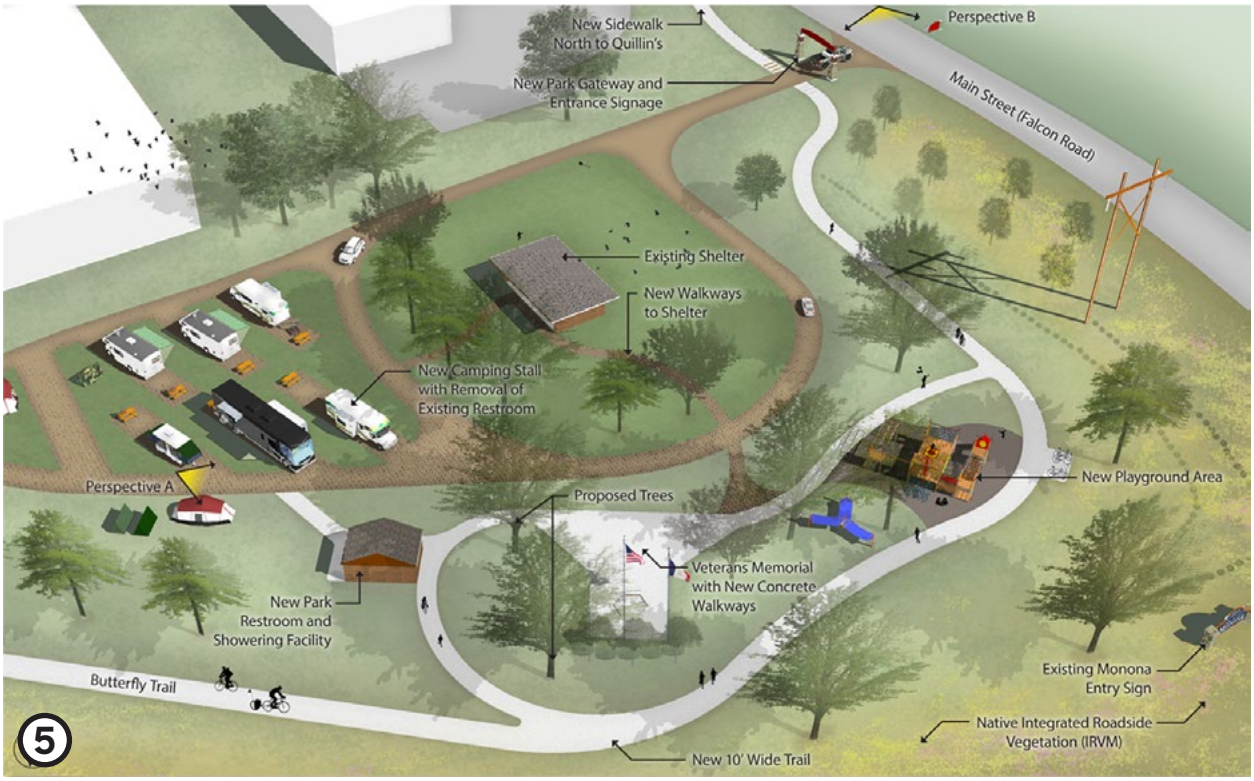


Assets and Routes Identified in Focus Groups

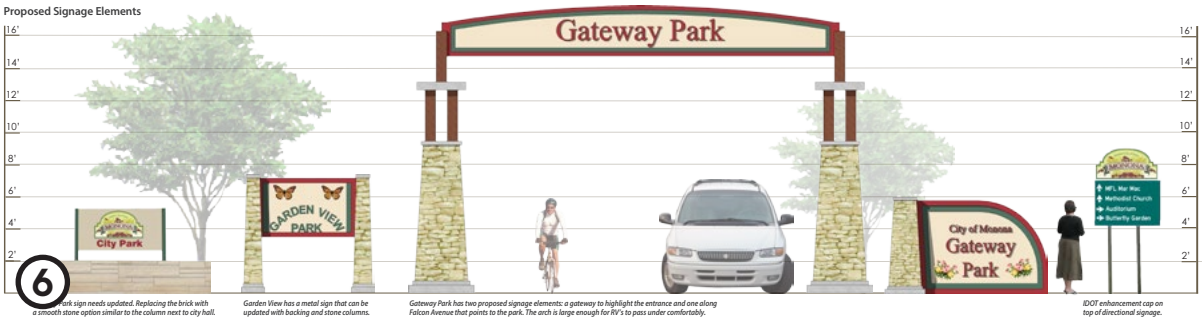
1. The addition of curbed bump-outs with vegetation and trees would help with stormwater management downtown.
2. This section view illustrates how the proposed bump-outs would filter stormwater.
3. The downtown improvements also feature additional lighting.
4. New entry and gateway signage for Gateway Park would increase the park's visibility.
5. A new trail connecting Gateway Park to the Butterfly Garden, additional trees, and a playground are some of the enhancements proposed for the park.
6. The updated signage family incorporates Monona's identity as "The Garden City" and highlights the Butterfly Garden.







Proposed Signage Elements



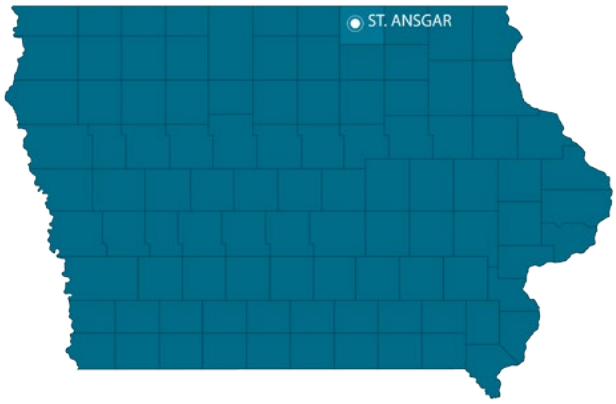
Park sign needs updated. Replacing the brick with a smooth stone option similar to the column next to city hall.

Garden View has a metal sign that can be updated with backing and stone columns.

Gateway Park has two proposed signage elements: a gateway to highlight the entrance and one along Falcon Avenue that points to the park. The arch is large enough for RV's to pass under comfortably.

IDOT enhancement cap on top of directional signage.

St. Ansgar



St. Ansgar (population 1,146,) is located in Mitchell County on Iowa Highway 105, US Highway 218, and County Roads T38 and A25 near the Cedar River. The town's charming character comes from the restored architecture of many historic homes and downtown buildings. Clausen City Park and Angel Park are two important parks in the community, and a number of possible ideas for enhancements were brought out in the visioning process. A major transportation issue in St. Ansgar is the lack of safe pedestrian routes to the school and its aquatic center, the children's garden, and the trailhead for a popular walking trail. Neighborhood stormwater is a serious concern in St. Ansgar.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Meredith Borchardt*

Landscape Architect: *Craig Ritland and Samantha Price, RITLAND+KUIPER Landscape Architects*

Intern: *Jake Spitz, RITLAND+KUIPER Landscape Architects*

Planning and Design Summary

Based on the needs and desires of the local residents, as well as a detailed inventory of community resources, the steering committee set priorities and design team developed a concept plan with the following components:

- Signage – Replace the plywood sign with an engraved limestone face, retaining the existing limestone columns, and incorporate way-finding and destination signage throughout town.
- Pedestrian Connections – Designate a safe route to school and upgrade sidewalks and add crosswalks as needed along the route.
- S.T.A.R.T. Trail Master Plan – Add lighting and trees along the trail and combine the visioning, school district, and S.T.A.R.T. committee plans into one master plan.
- Clausen City Park – Install accessible paths to park facilities, replace the earth berm and mulch under the playground equipment with a limestone wall and pea gravel, and add new play equipment and a sandbox.
- Angel Park – Install an accessible walking path to park facilities, plant trees along Winter Street, and add interpretive signage for the prairie buffer.
- Stormwater Management – Install stormwater control measures such as rain gardens or buffer strips and encourage individuals to install such measures.

Design Workshop

Steering Committee:
Bonnie Eustice
Barb Groth
Daria Jorgensen
Myrna Jorgensen
Tara Kramer
Brad Mayer
Bryan Mayer
Karen Robertson
Holbrook Schutjer
Meg Schutjer
Devin Schwiesow

Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

Lack of crosswalks within the community, especially along Highway 105 and 4th Street, coupled with discontinuous sidewalks and railroad crossings in poor condition, create hazardous conditions for children. Old Mill Road is a popular walking and biking route for resident. However, the road is narrow and lacks shoulders. A suggestion was made at both the transportation meeting and the assets and barriers public input session to install "share the road" signage along this route.

What we heard

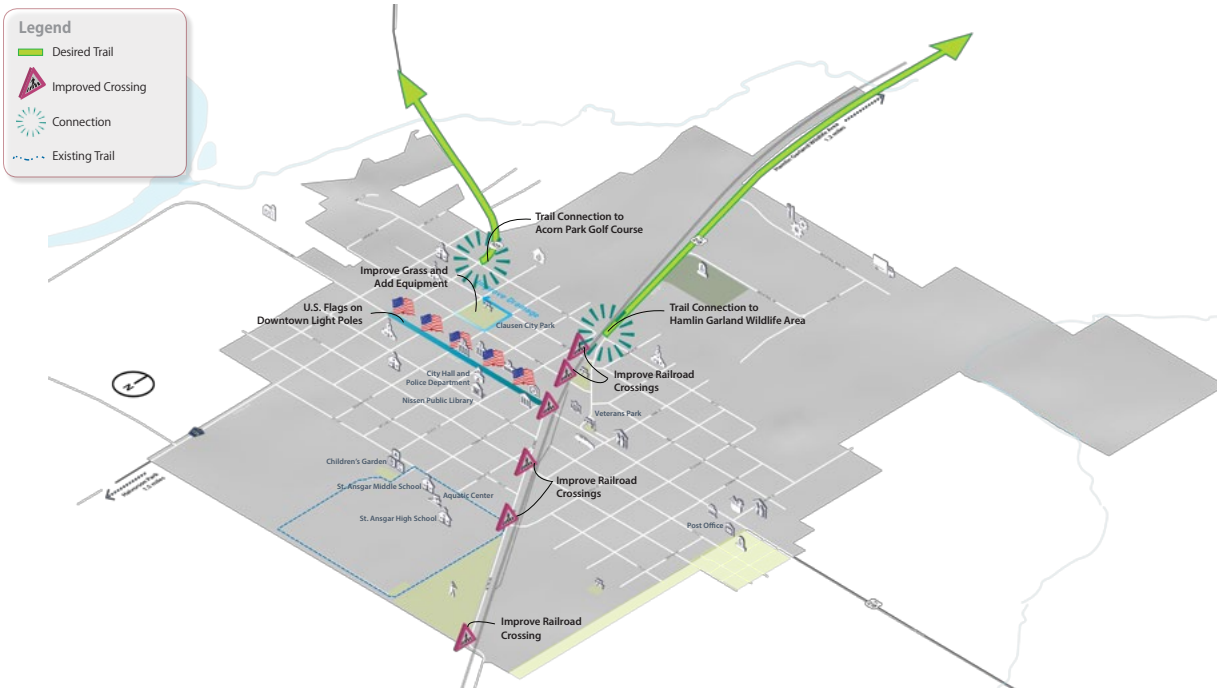
"We are proud of our four signs on each highway."

"A lot of [my walking route] is picturesque too, because people take such good care of their yards."

"We have a terrible problem [with diseased trees]...we've got about a hundred-plus trees to be cut down right now."

Desired Improvements

The seniors and mobility-impaired users discussed the importance of having a railroad in town, but wish to have better approaches to the tracks as well as have the tracks repaired. The steering committee brought up having safer railroad crossings and suggested crossing guards. Focus-group participants would like new play equipment and more vegetation and Clausen Park and more trail connections.



Desired Improvements Identified in Focus Groups

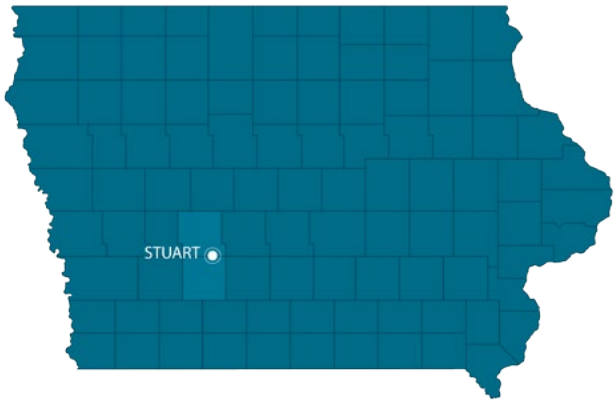

1


Welcome to
St. Ansgar
2


3

1. More trees at the trailhead and along the trail are proposed for the St. Ansgar Recreation Trail (S.T.A.R.T.).
2. The updated entrance sign would retain existing limestone columns and the face would be replaced with engraved limestone.
3. A limestone wall and pea gravel would resolve the existing problem of mulch washing away.
4. The existing St. Ansgar logo is incorporated into proposed way-finding and destination signage.
5. The safe route to school would need crosswalks and pedestrian signage at intersections.
6. The update of Angel Park features an accessible walkway to park facilities, additional trees, and a bioinfiltration trench.

Stuart



Stuart (population 1,612) is approximately 40 miles west of Des Moines and is located just north of Interstate 80, which brings many travelers into town who contribute to the local economy. The historic White Pole Road (old Highway 6) runs east-west through town. Stuart's "claim to fame" is that Bonnie and Clyde robbed the First National Bank (now a hair salon) in 1934.

Stuart has amenities such as the Lawbaugh City Park, Stuart Sports Complex, a half-mile walking/biking trail, and the Stuart Recreation Center. However, pedestrian access and proper signage to these amenities is currently lacking. An incomplete sidewalk system hinders access to and from areas such as the high school and recreational fields. High truck and rail traffic also causes safety concerns because there is only one marked railroad crossing for pedestrians and an increased amount of semi traffic driving through town to reach the ethanol plant.

Planning and Design Summary

The focus groups showed that Stuart residents appreciate the outdoor amenities in town but would like them to be more accessible for pedestrians and cyclists. A major concern raised during these sessions is the lack of a sidewalk or trail to the high school. The visioning committee used information from the focus groups to guide the goal-setting process. The resulting concept plan includes the following elements:

- Pedestrian Connections - Develop a path from Lawbaugh Park to the high school and add railroad crossing gates.
- Community Identity – Create custom entrance signs, way-finding signage, and an information kiosk for visitors.
- City Streetscape and Traffic Calming – Plant street trees, add bump-outs at intersections to decrease pedestrian crossing distances, and install pedestrian crossing signals where appropriate.
- Parks – Redesign the outdoor reading room to include a curvilinear sidewalk, planting beds, a gathering space, and a table area; connect Lawbaugh Park to the recreation fields.

Trees Forever Facilitator: *Leslie Berckes*

Landscape Architect: *Dylan Jones, Bolton & Menk*

Intern: *Hannah Schmitz, Bolton & Menk*

Community Tour

Steering Committee:

Jenyse Belden
Matt Funk
Terri Hommer
Erin Hunsaker
Mike Morgan
Lynsi Pasutti
Kristen Renslow

Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

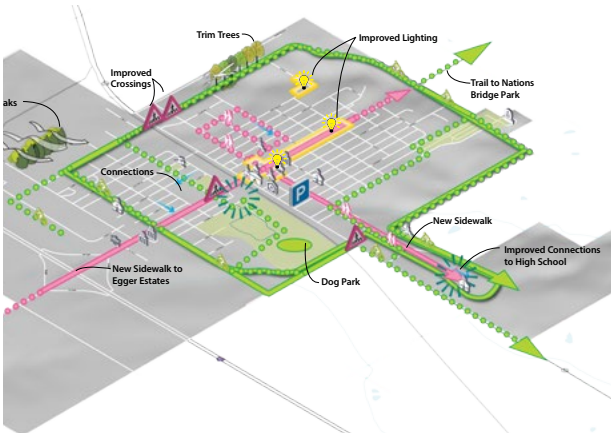
Transportation Barriers

The focus-group workshops and the analysis of the design team revealed some consistent themes regarding transportation barriers in Stuart: nighttime visibility and security, seasonal barriers such as flooding from heavy rainfall, gaps in the sidewalk network, and intersections where people don't feel safe, such as the busy intersection and heavy truck traffic at Division and 350th Streets.

What we heard

"[Division Street] comes up in some places, it ditches in others, and if it rains, there is nothing but a slick spot."

"...[I] tell my kid not to cross the railroad tracks or anything because it's just too busy on the main drag."

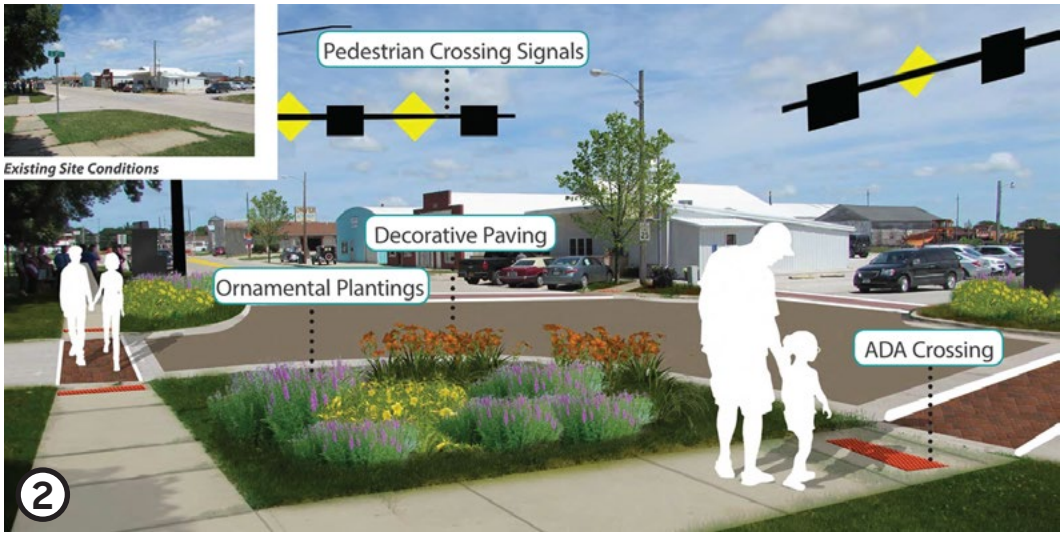


Desired Improvements Identified in Focus Groups

Desired Improvements

Changes suggested by focus-group participants include 1) improve the sidewalk network by fixing existing sidewalks and build continuous sidewalks along Division Street and to the high school, 2) make a trail system in town and to out-of-town destinations such as the Raccoon River Valley Trail in Redfield, 3) create better connections by improving pedestrian crossings to the high school and other places, 4) incorporate traffic control measures diverting racetrack traffic from Adair Street, and put in stop signs or a signal at the intersection of Division and Front Streets.


Existing Site Conditions
STUART
1

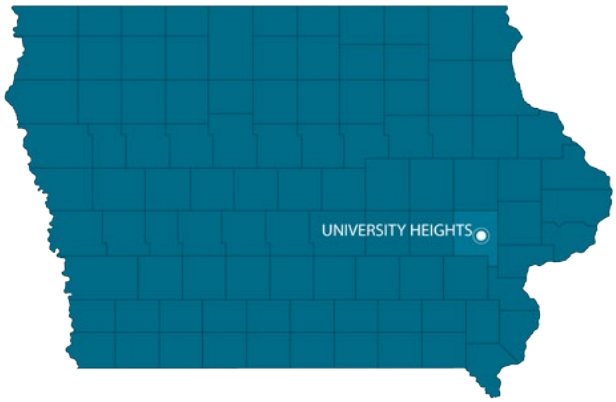

Existing Site Conditions
Pedestrian Crossing Signals
Decorative Paving
Ornamental Plantings
ADA Crossing
2


A Decorative Paving
B Sidewalk Extension
C Bump-outs
D Street Trees
Lawbaugh Park
Division St.
2nd St.
3rd St.
3

1. The proposed entry sign design at the Interstate 80 off-ramp incorporates limestone to match the newest entrance sign near the high school.
2. The ornamental vegetation in the bump-outs creates a more welcoming gateway into town.
3. The plan for South Division Street not only creates a more welcoming environment but helps to slow traffic.
4. The way-finding signage proposed includes light-pole blades, information kiosks, community guides, and historic information columns.
5. The redesigned outdoor reading room would include a free library stand.
6. The curvilinear sidewalk and planting beds help to define the space and keep vegetation from taking over.

University Heights

University Heights (population 1,120) is situated inside Iowa City just west of the University of Iowa. Because of its proximity to Kinnick Stadium and the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, an inordinate amount of traffic passes through the community daily. Its location also gives residents access to many amenities such as parks and trails. A point of pride among residents is the fact that approximately 40% of the population either walks or bikes to work. However, many streets lack sidewalks and there are no bike lanes.



Planning and Design Summary

The community assessment process in University Heights included focus-group workshops and a mailed transportation survey. The results of both of these assessments indicate that pedestrian and cyclist accessibility and safety are major concerns among residents, and that recreational opportunities are highly valued. This information is reflected in the concept plan, which consists of the following proposals:

- Melrose Avenue Streetscape – Install decorative pavement for crosswalks and seating areas, widen sidewalks, create bike lanes, install way-finding signs, and add decorative vehicular and pedestrian lighting.
- Signage and Community Entryways Enhancements – Install large entrance signs, native vegetation, and lighting on Melrose Avenue at the east and west ends of town and the south end of town on Sunset Street.
- Triangle Park – Screen the park from the road with native vegetation and add a bike rack, a water station, a shelter, and a bench planter.
- Sidewalks – Install sidewalks in phases, starting with connections to priority areas such as Ernest Horn Elementary School.
- Site Lighting – Add both vehicular and pedestrian lighting to Melrose Avenue, Sunset Street, and Benton Street and add vehicular lighting to residential streets.
- Stormwater Management – Install bump-outs that integrate bioswales along Koser Avenue to both slow traffic and manage stormwater, install bioswales in the area between the street and the sidewalk.

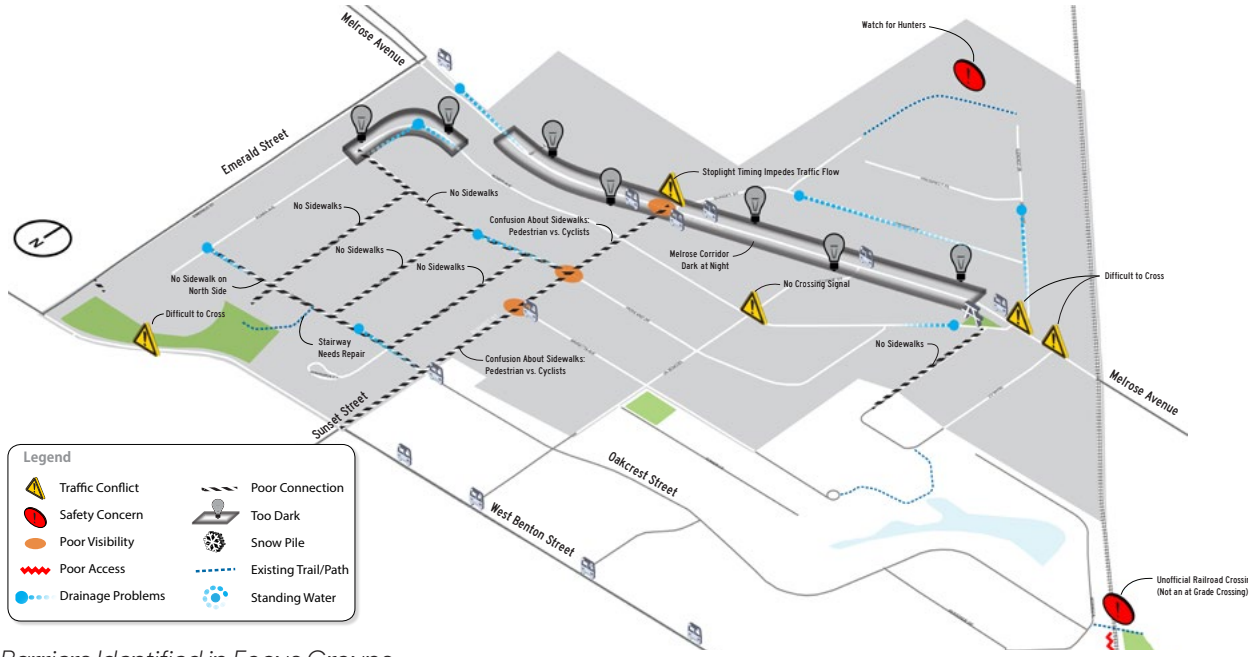
Trees Forever Facilitator: *Hannah Howard*

Landscape Architect: *Meg Flenker, Flenker Land Architecture Consultants*

Intern: *Erika Birnbaum and Amanda Holtman, Flenker Land Architecture Consultants*

Transportation Meeting with Local Representatives

Steering Committee:
Nancy Barth
Janis Deyak
Karen Drake
Michael Gay
Michael Haverkamp
Wally Heitman
Dorothy Maher
Virginia Miller
Sara O'Sullivan
Silvia Quezada
Martha Terry
Thad Wunder



Barriers Identified in Focus Groups

Transportation Barriers

Focus-group participants identified the lack of connections in town, especially to recreational facilities, as a major barrier. Poor lighting, drainage issues, and visibility issues were also mentioned as problems in town. Some participants expressed the need for entrance signage so people know when they are entering University Heights.

What we heard

"I think for such a small community it's very dark at night for so much pedestrian traffic."

"There are trails, but they're not well maintained."

What we heard

"There's a playground outside of Horn that I occasionally go to with my friends."

"I really appreciate the planting of the trees to help us make sure that we're always having big shady trees."

"[T]he one thing I do love, like the wide sidewalks on Sunset are great."

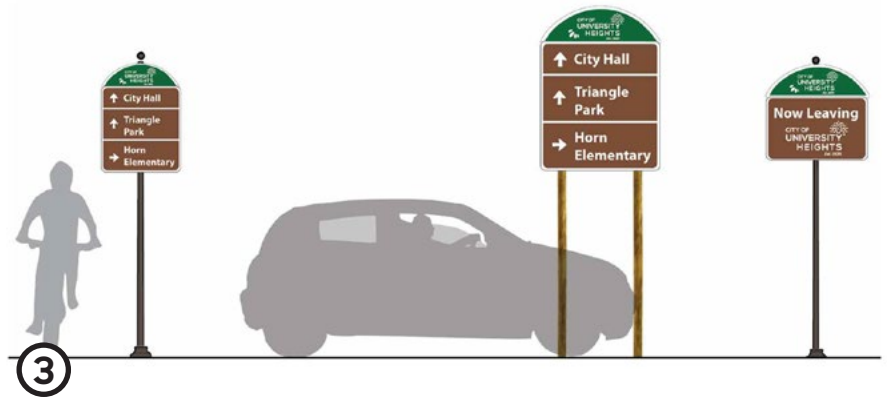
Assets Identified in Focus Groups

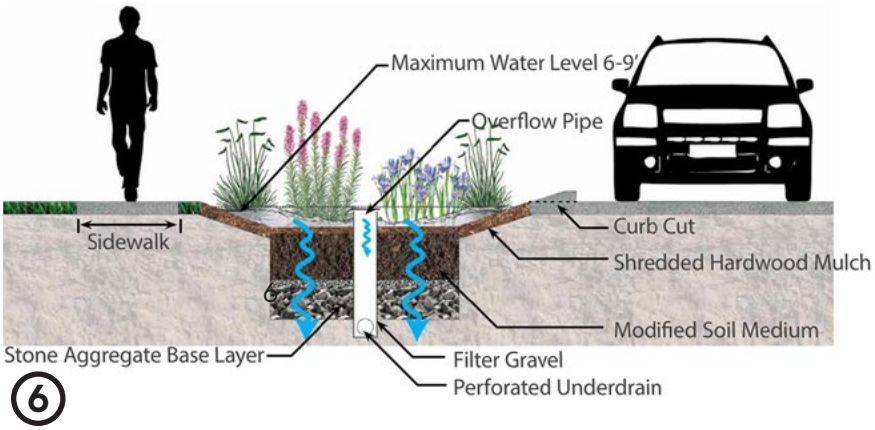
Transportation Assets

Melrose Avenue and Sunset Street are the two main streets in town. Residents noted the wide sidewalks as an asset to University Heights. The large shade trees on these streets and the park and recreation facilities in town were also assets identified by participants.


CITY OF
UNIVERSITY
HEIGHTS
Est. 1935
1


2


City Hall
Triangle Park
Horn Elementary
City Hall
Triangle Park
Horn Elementary
Now Leaving
CITY OF UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS
3



1. The entrance sign for the west side of town announces "you are now in University Heights."
2. The refreshed Triangle Park accommodates daily activities, with a bike rack and water station for cyclists.
3. The proposed way-finding signage incorporates the city logo on the caps.
4. Primary corridors would have both pedestrian and vehicular lighting.
5. Bioswales between the street and the sidewalk along Koser Avenue are stormwater management.
6. This section view of the roadside bioswale shows how stormwater is filtered.

People

Community Visioning

Julia Badenhope, FASLA
Director, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program
Professor of Landscape Architecture

Matthew Gordy
Studio Director, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program

Sandra Oberbroeckling
Project Manager, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program
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Strategies for Making Places

Stories of Successful Visioning Communities

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Introduction

The purpose of this case-study analysis is to describe how communities develop projects after completing the Community Visioning process. Specifically, the research team examined how communities used resources, partnerships, and knowledge developed in the program to move forward to secure funding, convene teams, get additional help, and use other programs to achieve goals. This document describes the completion of research begun in 2015 and highlights the findings in Belle Plaine, Shellsburg, and Woodbine.

Methodology

To capture how communities build projects and better understand factors that impact the implementation process, the research team used an expanded case-study approach building on existing data such as exit interviews and impact surveys.
The initial case-study list consisted of 109 communities that participated in the Community Visioning process from 2006 through 2013. Based on geographic distribution, diversity of contexts for pursuing visioning, and available existing data, the research team identified 12 communities on which to conduct further research.

Student interns developed project maps for the 12 communities showing the locations of completed projects, as well as images of enhancements proposed during the visioning process and a place for notes. Students visited the study communities and photographed the completed projects, making notes on the quality of construction, planting, and maintenance for each site.

Although interviewing committee members was not part of the site-visit protocol, on several occasions the students encountered residents willing to share their insights regarding the visioning process and subsequent project implementation.

After establishing baseline information for the selected communities, we narrowed down the list of study communities on which to conduct a deeper investigation to six: Belle Plaine, Clarksville, Parkersburg, Shellsburg, Tripoli, and Woodbine.

The research team outlined the implementation stories in the six communities by combining data collected during site visits with elements of previous research and reviewing exit interviews with steering committee members conducted by Trees Forever field coordinators.
We fleshed out these stories further by reviewing press clippings and social media posts.

We compared our findings with those in existing literature on decision making in rural communities. The Iowa State University Department of Sociology conducted a longitudinal study of the conditions in 99 Iowa communities in 1994, 2004, and 2014 to develop a profile of Iowa small towns. The results are published in a report titled *Sigma: A Profile of Iowa Small Towns 1994 to 2014*. The foundation of this study is the work of Iowa State University faculty members Vern Ryan and Willis Goudy on how rural Iowa differs from urban areas.

Findings

The follow-up interviews, press clippings, and social media posts provided a rich data set on factors affecting both the planning and implementation processes in rural communities. Although each community has a unique story, these data are valuable in terms of cross-case analyses in that patterns across the communities emerged that will guide future research.

Comparing the study communities' stories revealed a number of characteristics common among most or all of the planning and implementation processes. The factors that contribute to successful community project implementation fall into four categories: communication and social learning, organizational structure, values and community sentiment, and compatible design proposals.

Communication and Social Learning

Communication in the context of Community Visioning is how a local steering committee "gets the word out" about committee meetings, workshops, and events during the planning process and later when trying to get projects built. The success of communication strategies at the local level is often dependent on the social environment in a community. Engaging people is easier when there is a sense of friendliness and credibility among residents. When a proposal comes from a trusted member of their social environment, people are more likely to embrace change and are willing to share with their peers through social networks such as service clubs, church groups, and youth groups (*Sigma*, p. 16).

Organizational Structure

The results of the case-study analysis indicate that communities with one or more organizations devoted to betterment in place at the time they participated in the Community Visioning program tend to complete more visioning projects in a shorter length of time. Possible reasons are that well-organized committees already have mechanisms in place for grant writing, fund-raising, recruiting volunteers, and managing projects. Strong organizational structure also seems to affect the number and scale of projects that a community can complete.

Values and Community Sentiment

The value that people assign to the place where they live relates directly to their willingness to invest in their communities. Residents who are emotionally linked to their surroundings typically take the time and effort to become involved in community building. Those who have strong social ties demonstrate this by serving on local boards, running for elected office, or donating financially or by volunteering. The importance of community sentiment to effective project implementation is born out in the analysis of the six study communities.

Compatible Design Proposals

One of the central tenets of the Community Visioning program is that the steering committee, with input from residents through the assessment process, decides what project designs it wishes to pursue. The role of the consultant is to create a concept design for each project that is feasible, sustainable, and meets the needs of the community. While part of the visioning process gives the committee the opportunity to "think big," the final concept plan should ultimately fit the scale and resources of the community.

The following narratives demonstrate how these four factors influence the outcomes of completing the visioning process in Belle Plaine, Shellsburg, and Woodbine.

Belle Plaine

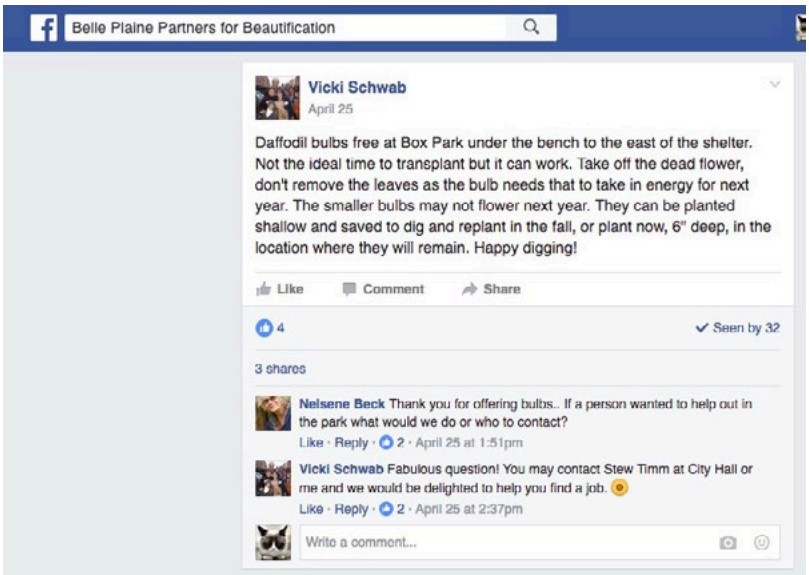
Population: 2,486
Community Visioning Year: 2008
Projects Completed: 10
Trees Forever Facilitator: Mark Pingenot
Landscape Architect: Meg Flenker
Intern: Martyn Albert

A study of Belle Plaine shows that the community began the visioning process with established organizational structures in place, along with a spirit of cooperation among the different groups. This well-organized community was able to obtain $4.4 million in grants from a variety of sources, including Main Street Iowa, the Iowa Economic Development Authority (in the form of a Community Development Block Grant), the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and Trees Forever, among others, and successfully completed 10 projects.

At the time Belle Plaine applied to the Community Visioning program, it already had established the Belle Plaine Community Development Corporation (BPCDC), which had partnered with the City of Belle Plaine to redo the downtown streetscape. When forming the visioning committee, the cochairs made sure that the mayor and others involved in the downtown project were members. This arrangement allowed the Belle Plaine visioning committee to expand its focus outside downtown while staying connected with the downtown streetscape project, ensuring that the visioning proposals would complement the downtown plan.

The committee also consisted of members of a variety of service organizations in Belle Plaine, including the Lion's Club, the Rotary, the Optimist Club, 4-H, Girl Scouts, and Knights of Columbus. Several master gardeners and the director of the Parks and Recreation Department also served on the committee.

Since completing the visioning process, the Belle Plaine visioning committee has evolved into Belle Plaine Partners for Beautification (BPPB). During a follow-up interview with Trees Forever, committee members noted that they continue to collaborate with BPCDC and the City of Belle Plaine, because partnering with a nonprofit or government entity offers more funding opportunities.



The Belle Plaine Partners for Beautification Facebook page gives residents a forum where they can learn about ongoing projects and how they can contribute.

The Belle Plaine visioning committee (and subsequently the BPPB) has employed several communications strategies from the start of the visioning process in 2008 to the present. Throughout the planning process, the steering committee received regular coverage in the local newspapers. This coverage was most likely facilitated by the fact that one of the committee members wrote for the *Belle Plaine Star Press Union*.

The committee has also made good use of the presentation boards and feasibility study. During the first year of implementation, the committee took the boards to community events and to city council meetings. As recently as June 2015, BPPB cochairs Vicki Schwab and Richard Wells said that they still use the visioning products to share information about ongoing projects.

In April 2015, BPPB set up a Facebook page, where the group has posted hundreds of photos of residents building projects, completed projects, and residents making use of new amenities created through visioning. BPPB also posts fund-raising announcements and calls for volunteers. The site is also an information source for people interested in participating in projects.

These strategies are significant, because according to *Sigma*, 34% of residents not involved in community projects said that no one had asked them, and 16% said that they were unaware of how to become involved. Community leaders in Belle Plaine understand the importance of communication.

Through the visioning assessment process, Belle Plaine residents were able to voice their opinions and ideas.

Sources

Belle Plaine Visioning Application

Belle Plaine Partners for Beautification Facebook Page

Field Notes by Madison Dierks and Katherine Gould, July 2016

Follow-up Interview by Dustin Hinrichs with the Belle Plaine Visioning Committee in February 2014

Interview with Sheila Hlas, Executive Director, Belle Plaine Community Development Corporation

Interview with Vicki Schwab and Richard Wells, Cochairs, Belle Plaine Partners for Beautification

Press Clippings from the Belle Plain Star Union*, the* Tipton Conservative and Advocate*, and the* South Benton Union

During the follow-up interview with Trees Forever, committee members attributed the group's continued success to maintaining regular communication with the city and local organizations. BPPB cochair Vicki Schwab noted that Belle Plaine has been successful because it has a good visioning committee, along with many residents who want to "jump in and help."

In summary, Belle Plaine is a community that is rich in social capital, a characteristic important to making decisions and accomplishing goals more efficiently (*Sigma*, p. 11).

Project Implementation

At the recommendation of Trees Forever field coordinator Mark Pingenot, the Belle Plaine visioning committee started implementation with a project that was simple but would have an immediate impact. With funding from the Alliant Energy and Trees Forever Branching Out program, the committee purchased trees and resident volunteers planted them at the community entrances.

In addition to entryway enhancements, Belle Plaine volunteers completed planting projects in two parks. One of the planting projects was a bioswale to address a wet area in Box Park. The community also created a new park with a mowed trail along the Iowa Valley Scenic Byway

"The bigger part of success is educating everybody and making sure they come [to meetings] and they know what's going on."

—Sheila Hlas, BPCDC Executive Director

Volunteers lay cement for the trail in Box Park (top) before planting a bioswale (bottom).

Top left: The first visioning project was planting trees at each community entrance.
Above: Belle Plaine added signage at each entrance later in the implementation process.
Left: Beautiful Plaines Prairie Park features interpretive signage throughout the park.

that passes through town. The Beautiful Plaines Prairie Park features native prairie vegetation with interpretive signing and serves as an interactive learning center as well as a community gathering place.

A site visit conducted in July 2016 shows that overall the projects are well built and maintained, primarily by volunteers.

Shellsburg

Population: 964
Community Visioning Year: 2013
Projects Completed: 4
Trees Forever Facilitator: Dustin Hinrichs
Landscape Architects: Craig Ritland and Samantha Price
Intern: Jake Wilson

Shellsburg is a case-study community that clearly demonstrates the impact of organizational structure, community values and sentiment, communication and social learning, and compatible design proposals on project implementation.

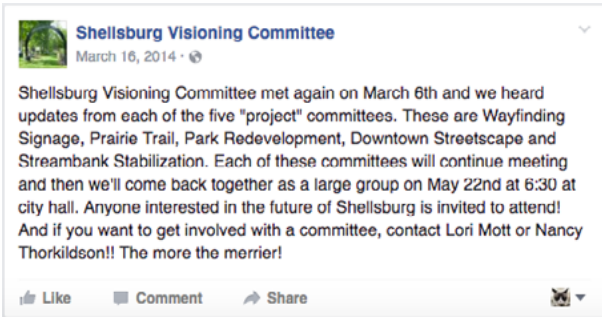
The Shellsburg Area Community Group (SACG), a local nonprofit organization with approximately 50 members, was the driving force behind the visioning process in Shellsburg and continues to support the visioning committee as projects are being built. In SACG, the visioning committee has a valuable resource to assist with fund-raising, grant writing, and planning, as well as a mechanism in place for recruiting volunteers.

During the planning process, the visioning committee was essentially a subcommittee of SACG. When Shellsburg entered the implementation stage, the individual project committees became part of SACG, including committees on way-finding signage, the prairie trail, park redevelopment, the downtown streetscape, and streambank stabilization.

The size and diversity of the SACG membership and its accomplishments demonstrate the community sentiment felt by a large number of residents. Both SACG and the Shellsburg visioning committee consist of members from the city administration, local service clubs, and the school district. Business owners, retirees, short- and longtime residents, and youth are actively involved, giving Shellsburg the social capital needed to make plans and achieve results (*Sigma*, p. 11).

In terms of communication, the Shellsburg visioning committee employed a variety of effective public engagement strategies. In addition to sending the local media press releases about its activities, the visioning committee collaborated with city to keep the public informed. The Shellsburg visioning committee has a regular spot on the council agenda and puts announcements in the city's monthly newsletter, *Shellsburg Pride*.

Social media also played a major role in the visioning committee's efforts to inform the public. Upon completing the visioning process, the committee decided to create the Shellsburg Visioning Committee Facebook page, where members post meeting announcements, concept plan



The Shellsburg visioning committee has successfully used its Facebook page as a digital message board.

image edits, and countless photos of residents building projects followed by photos of completed projects.

During the follow-up interview with Trees Forever, committee members commented on the value of the participatory assessments, because engaging the wider community galvanized residents' support of the design proposals resulting from Community Visioning and created the local buy in necessary to actually build the projects.

After finishing the visioning process and identifying subcommittees for each project, the committee instituted "Family Fun Nights" as a way to encourage residents to get out and enjoy the park. These events sometimes feature live music and food, with the overarching purpose of helping residents get to know each other. Residents also participate in service projects such as park clean-up day or trail clean-up day.

Project Implementation

The value and community sentiment that residents feel for Shellsburg was clearly evident in the process of building the projects.

The implementation of the Prairie Forest Trail and trailhead project in particular demonstrates cooperation among local groups, including the city, the school board, and SACG. In "History of the Shellsburg Prairie Forest Trail Entrance," published in the *Shellsburg Pride* newsletter, visioning committee chair Nancy Thorkildson

The Shellsburg steering committee used social media to provide information about the visioning process.

Sources

Field Notes by Madison Dierks and Katherine Gould, July 2016

Follow-up Interview by Dustin Hinrichs with the Shellsburg Visioning Committee in August 2016

Press Clippings from the Vinton Eagle, *and the* Vinton Cedar Valley Times

Shellsburg Pride *Newsletter*

Shellsburg Visioning Application

Shellsburg Visioning Committee Facebook Page

describes the contributions of numerous volunteers over the two-year period in which the project was built. In addition to volunteers helping install the trailhead sign, building a split-rail fence, and cleaning up debris, a farmer owning land adjacent to the trail entrance donated time and equipment to drill post holes, haul materials to construct a bridge, and clear and grade the site.

The ability of Shellsburg residents to complete four projects in three years can also be attributed in part to how landscape architect Craig Ritland developed a concept plan that could be implemented in several phases. For instance, the phasing of the city park project gave the community the opportunity to make a visible impact in the short term that would produce the momentum the community needed to keep residents engaged and invested in making the remaining projects happen and in identifying new improvements to implement.

The Prairie Forest Trail trailhead project was completed in June 2016. As with most of the visioning projects in Shellsburg, volunteers and donated equipment and materials were an integral part of project implementation.

Top: Volunteers complete the streambank restoration project in City Park.
Middle: The trail in Memorial Park was built with volunteer labor and donated equipment.
Right: The streetscape project completed on one side of Pearl Street addressed accessibility identified during the Community Visioning program assessment process.

Woodbine

Population: 1,416
Community Visioning Year: 2008
Projects Completed: 4
Trees Forever Facilitator: Brad Riphagen
Landscape Architect: Josh Shields
Interns: Dylan Jones and Emily Brodersen

The case study of Woodbine demonstrates how participating in one community improvement program can be a catalyst through which the community learns about more opportunities. Woodbine applied to Community Visioning as a result of its involvement in Horizons Community Leadership Program to Reduce Poverty offered by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. During its visioning process, Woodbine applied to be a Main Street community and was accepted after completing visioning. Through the Main Street program, it became a Green Initiative Pilot community. And in 2015, Woodbine was named a Blue Zones certified community.

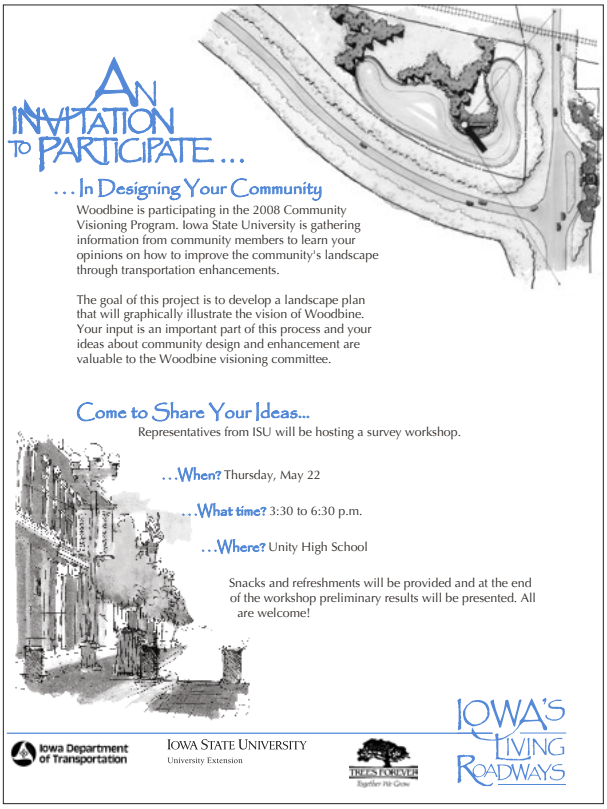
In addition to the Horizons group, the Woodbine Betterment Association, the Chamber of Commerce and its Economic Development Committee, Kiwanis, Optimists, Woodbine Community School, and several churches were actively working on improving Woodbine's economic and aesthetic vitality, providing the visioning committee with a well-established pool of volunteers. Such strong social ties are an important aspect of community attachment (*Sigma*, p. 5).

Throughout the visioning process, the committee communicated program activities through the local newspaper, fliers, and at city council meetings. During an interview with ISU staff, Deb Sprecker, executive director of Woodbine Main Street, stressed the importance of maintaining a connection with city government throughout the process. In a follow-up interview with Trees Forever, committee members noted that having a meal in conjunction with the public presentation of the concept plan "was a great way to get people involved and educated many residents."

Although the Woodbine visioning committee did not have its own Facebook page, Woodbine's Main Street program, which has taken over implementation of the visioning concepts, does have a page. And the feasibility report and the presentation boards were used extensively during the process. Sprecker commented on how "beaten up" Woodbine's presentation boards have become from being used so often.

"Presentation boards in bad condition are a sign of a successful visioning community," she said.

Woodbine's use of the concept plan and presentation boards continues to be quite effective. Most recently, Sprecker convinced the Iowa Department of Transportation engineers to model a new bridge under construction along US Highway 30 after a design developed during the visioning process by showing them the presentation board. The DOT has agreed to incorporate brick inlays into the bridge and will add wiring in order to accommodate streetlights.



Left: The Woodbine steering committee posted fliers announcing events during the visioning process. Above: Residents had several opportunities during the process to offer their insights to the design team.

Sprecker also attributes Woodbine's success to the strong sense of community attachment she has witnessed among residents of all ages. The commitment of the community is evident in the "snowball effect" that the visioning process has had. For example, the completion of the public art project on the historic grain elevator prompted residents to propose more public art downtown.

Sprecker recalled that hundreds of people, many of them youth, attended the lighting ceremony of the sculpture on the grain elevator. "Those kids will have that memory for the rest of their lives," she said.

Sources

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Follow-up Interview by Brad Riphagen with the Woodbine Main Street Committee (former Visioning Committee) in March 2014

Interview with Deb Sprecker, Executive Director, Woodbine Main Street, September 2016

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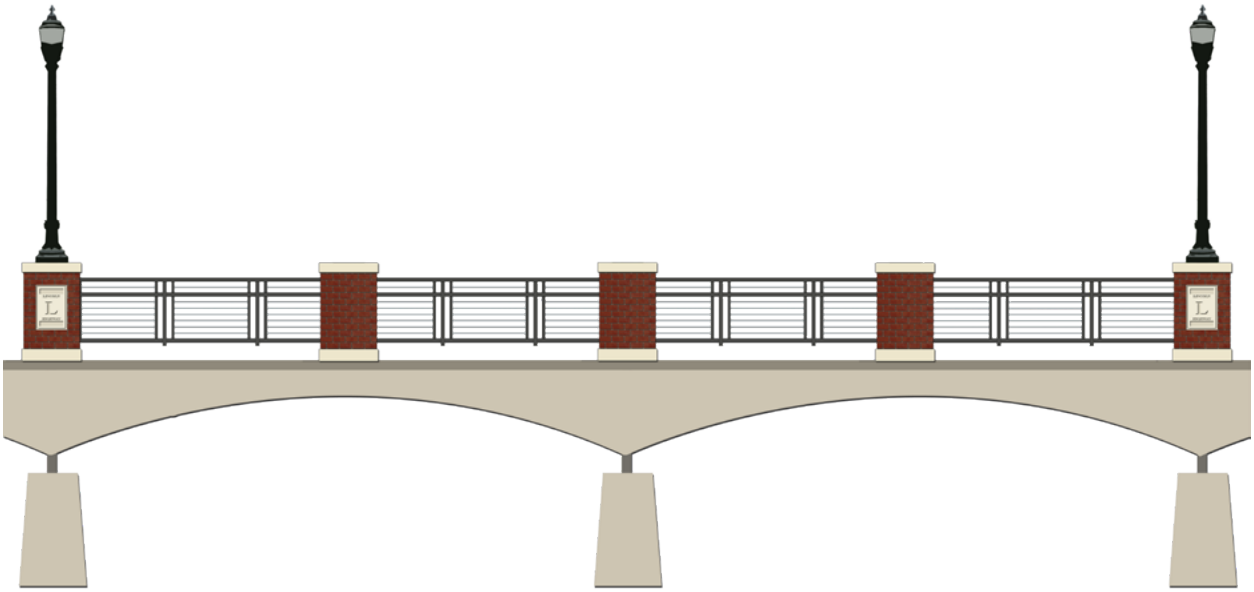
Woodbine Visioning Application



Above: The visioning design team proposed enhancing the Boyer River bridge with masonry columns, lighting, and decorative lighting. Right: This image edit shows how the proposed enhancements to the bridge would appear. The DOT agreed to adopt some of these features in the bridge currently under construction.

Project Implementation

The site visit in July 2016 revealed that Woodbine has completed only four visioning projects in eight years. These projects include the grain elevator sculpture, native prairie planting in the foreground of the elevator, tree planting, and an entrance sign and landscape that has since been removed to accommodate road construction.

However, as the grain elevator public art project demonstrates, the visioning projects, in conjunction with the Main Street façade projects, were catalysts that inspired residents to seek out additional community enhancement opportunities. For instance, the native prairie plantings that resulted from the visioning process inspired Woodbine to create a community orchard of native apple trees.

Top: Woodbine was able to save its historic grain elevator from demolition by raising funds to install a metal sculpture and lighting to the structure. Left: Part of the visioning concept plan for Woodward included planting trees along the highway corridor.

Discussion

The data collected in this case-study research indicate that communities that are successfully completing projects have a number of characteristics in common, despite very different circumstances.

Regardless of geographic location, population, use of social media, or physical conditions (e.g., recovering from a natural disaster, as in Parkersburg), the six study communities were impacted by the four types of factors identified in the findings: communication and social learning, organizational structure, values and community sentiment, and compatible design proposals.

Communication and Social Learning

Communities that successfully completed projects used multiple strategies to engage residents and "get the word out," including sending press releases and announcements to the local media, planning meetings and workshops to coincide with community events, and regularly updating the local government (e.g., attending city council meetings).

Each of the case-study communities also had a social environment in which residents felt a sense of friendliness and trust. Finally, the visioning committees in the study communities worked through social networks such as the Lions Club, schools, and local businesses to share ideas and solicit input. Unique examples of engagement include the Tripoli Community Visioning float and Shellsburg's Family Fun Nights. In recent years, social media—specifically Facebook—have become popular methods of communicating with residents.

Organizational Structure

The visioning committees in nearly all the case-study communities were a product of or part of an existing local group. In Shellsburg, Parkersburg, Woodbine, and Belle Plaine, the visioning committees were products of the Shellsburg Area Community Group, the Long-Term Tornado Recovery Committee, the Horizons committee, and the Belle Plaine Economic Development Corporation, respectively. In Shellsburg and Belle Plaine, these "parent" organizations continue to support and collaborate with their respective visioning committees; in Parkersburg the city has taken over project implementation. As a result, these communities are obtaining funds and implementing projects in a relatively short period of time.

Values and Community Sentiment

Residents in the study communities have a strong sense of community attachment that is demonstrated by their willingness to volunteer to help raise funds and build projects. Local businesses donate equipment, labor, and funding to volunteer efforts. Residents who are emotionally linked to their surroundings typically take the time and effort to become involved in community building. In the case of Parkersburg, social ties and community sentiment were strengthened as residents helped each other recover from a natural disaster.

The steering committees in the study communities gained the trust of the public through techniques described in social learning theory, such as presenting concept plans at a citywide breakfast or displaying them in a parade.

Compatible Design Proposals

Successful completion of visioning projects in the study communities can also be attributed to concept plans that are feasible and sustainable. Committee members in these communities praised their respective consultants for their understanding of how to balance the needs and desires of a client community with potential resources. At the same time, these consultants gave their committees the opportunity to "think big," resulting in communities completing projects that formerly were considered outside the realm of possibility.

Next Steps

The findings of this study provide a framework for future program evaluation. For instance, the impromptu conversations in which student interns engaged with committee members and residents involved in building and maintaining projects offered valuable insight into local values and community sentiment. Additional interviews informed by the data collected for this study would increase our understanding of the social environment in visioning communities and how it contributes to successful project implementation.

Since Facebook launched in 2014, social media have become more and more a part of everyday life. A number of visioning committees have their own Facebook pages or post on their city or chamber pages and websites. For this study, the research team identified visioning communities that have websites, Facebook pages, or post on other websites or pages.

However, social media have expanded to include Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube, to mention a few, and, according the Pew Research Center, nearly two-thirds of Americans own a smartphone, giving them easy access to these platforms. Therefore, it may be useful to study more closely the use of different types of social media in visioning communities and whether or not such communication strategies impact residents' participation during and after visioning.

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