



Community Visioning Program  
**Annual Report 2017**



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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, 225 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 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 positive 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.

## 2017 Community Visioning Program

The 2017 visioning communities are Adel, Clarion, Granger, Greene, Humboldt, Lester, Massena, Morning Sun, Scranton, and Varina.

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 four communities – Adel, Clarion, Granger, and Humboldt – 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 five 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 four 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, swimming, skiing, etc. The availability of multiple venues for outdoor recreation matters to this group.



**Mobility Impaired:** This user group is directly affected by accessibility barriers such as high curbing and uneven sidewalks that make it difficult to operate mobility-aiding equipment effectively. Handicapped parking, curb ramps, and smooth surfaces are critical transportation features.



**Older Adults:** Accessibility—both in terms of physical access and proximity—is a major concern for this user group. Because some people in this user group do not or are unable to drive, 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 destinations on foot or via bicycle and having goods and services within walking distance.



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



**Steering Committee:** The common denominator for this user group is that their 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



# Adel

Adel (population 4,047) is rich with history related to transportation infrastructure. The city lies at the intersection of the Raccoon River, state and interstate highways, and a rail line that is now the Raccoon River Valley Trail. The seat of the fastest growing county in the state, Adel is facing both the opportunities and transportation issues that come with growth. Lack of overall connectivity is a significant issue in the community, in terms of both vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

## Community Assessments

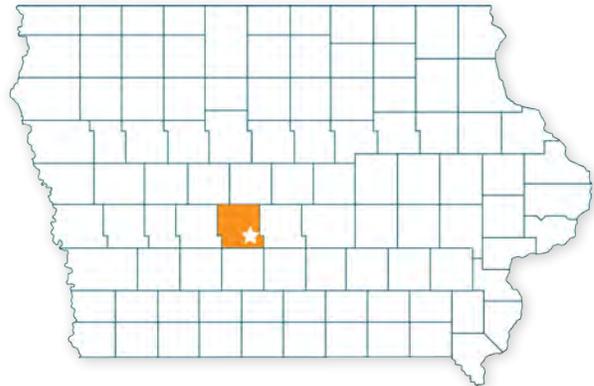
Creating safer routes to school was identified by both random-sample survey respondents and the focus-group participants as an important issue. Highways 169 and 6 are perceived as barriers to pedestrians and cyclists because of the high level of traffic. Parents in particular expressed concern that children have to walk along Highway 169 to get to the high school.

These assessments also demonstrated the need for more recreational opportunities for the growing population, as well as improvements to existing outdoor venues. Although residents see the Raccoon River Valley Trail as an asset, they would like more connections to the trail from various parts of town.

## Planning and Design Summary

Based on information obtained through the community assessments, the visioning committee identified four priority areas:

- Raccoon River Valley Trail – Create safer crossings at major intersections along the trail, add trees and shrubs, create a new trailhead, and add lighting.
- Gateway at South Highway 169 – Add sidewalks and two new crossings at ADM school.
- Gateway at East Highway 6 – create an eastern gateway to provide a visible entrance to Adel and a safe crossing to connect "Old Adel" to new development.
- Trail Connections: Explore alternative trail routes to better connect Island Park and the Raccoon River Valley Trail.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Leslie Berckes*  
**Landscape Architects:** *Eric Holt and Paige Hubbard, Genus Landscape Architects*  
**Intern:** *Fan-Kai Lin, Genus Landscape Architects*



*Performance objectives meeting*

## Steering Committee:

*Deb Bengtson*  
*Kristi Fuller*  
*Melissa Heikes*  
*Rebecca Hillmer*  
*Elizabeth Holland*  
*Dan Juffer*  
*Amy Lucht*  
*Kent McAdon*  
*Kip Overton*  
*Douglas Pfeiffer*  
*Jeremy Schwertfeger*  
*Bryce Smith*



"I would like to have the traffic light on [Highway] 169 fixed and the broken sidewalk fixed."



3

"I run in the morning really early so I go mainly where it's more lighted just for safety."

2



"There's no way for [kids] to safely get to the path [that leads to the high school]."

4



"We have a lot of shade in Adel, but there are some areas where there isn't much, and you have to walk quite a ways to get to shade."

1



1



Improving pedestrian safety along Highway 169, especially for students needing to cross near the ADM campus, is addressed in the proposed South Gateway. The project also enhances the aesthetic character of this important artery through Adel.

**Performance Icons**

-  Connectivity + Access
-  Safety

-  Identity + Aesthetics
-  Ecology
-  History + Culture

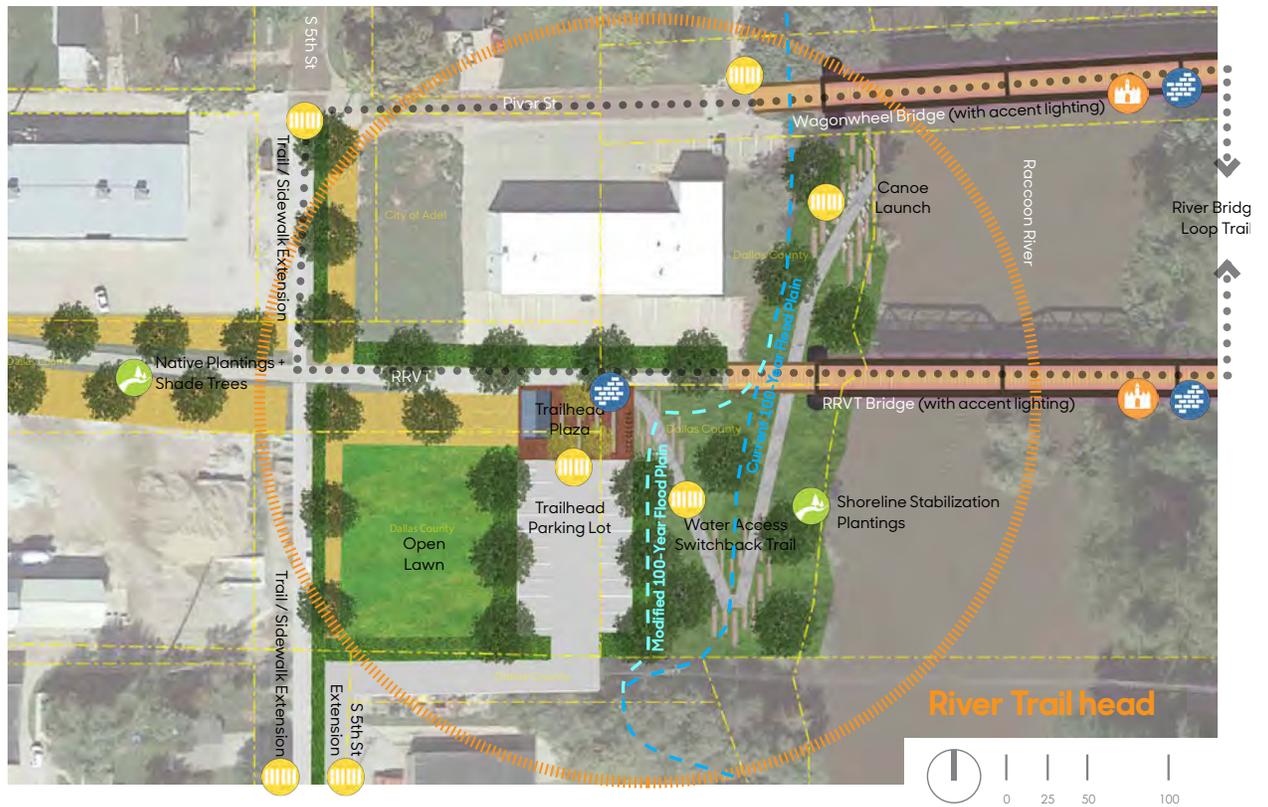
2

An improved trail crossing is proposed where the Raccoon River Valley Trail crosses Highway 169/Nile Kinnick Drive. To alert drivers to the crossing at greater distances, enhanced pavement markings (with a brick stencil pattern over a red background) and crossing signs with push button-operated Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) LED lights can be installed.



3

The corridor improvements on the Raccoon River Valley Trail include adding lighting to the two historic steel box truss bridges. LED accent lighting is proposed to add drama and enhance safety at night as well as to draw the attention of drivers on the parallel Highway 6 bridge to the south.



4

To address the lack of shade in some places, tree planting is proposed in diverse areas. As an example, new tree plantings screen adjacent industrial facilities and provide shade for trail users, while turf areas can be converted to low maintenance prairie and shrub plantings that reduce mowing needs, create habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, and give this portion of trail corridor a distinct character.



River Trailhead Plaza Perspective



River Trailhead "Bird's-eye" View

# Clarion

Clarion (population 2,850) is the county seat of Wright County and is located at the intersection of Highway 3 and County Road R38. The community has a strong agricultural heritage, which is on display at the Heartland Museum, one of the largest agricultural historical museums in the Midwest. Economic growth, which is increasing the population and creating a need for new housing, has put a strain on the local transportation system, which lacks walkability/bikability.

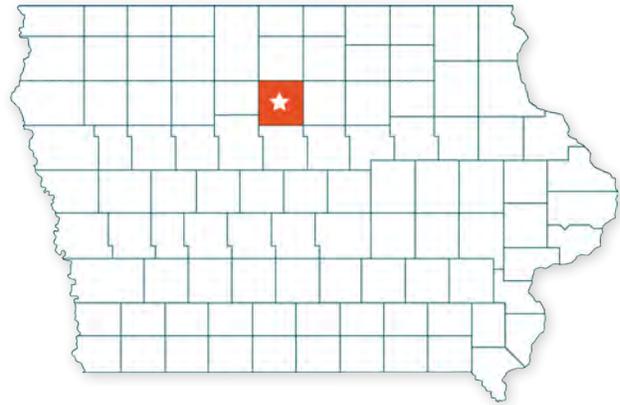
## Community Assessments

Both the random-sample survey and the focus groups conducted in Clarion revealed that the lack of walkability/bikability in town is a major concern among residents. Having a trail is a high priority, as well as providing safe access to parks and other important local destinations.

## Planning and Design Summary

The Clarion steering committee set priorities that addressed the concerns of residents and the design team developed a concept plan consisting of the following components:

- Trail System – Use existing roadway shoulders and the abandoned railway to create a trail that connects all of the parks.
- Recreation – Add sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signage on all sides of the site for the new recreation center.
- Accessibility/Connectivity – Connect all areas of town, improve pedestrian crossings at the railroad tracks, and increase pedestrian safety with better sidewalks and signage.
- Housing/Infrastructure – Identify potential development areas for specific user groups.
- Environment – Implement sustainable stormwater management practices such as biocells and rain gardens.
- Identity/Signage – Develop a cohesive signage scheme incorporating elements of existing signage while enhancing visual appearance and legibility.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Meredith Borchardt*

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

**Interns:** *Riley Dunn and Carol Joella Ustine,  
Jeffrey L. Bruce & Company*



*Performance objectives meeting*

## Steering Committee:

*Paula Abbas*

*Denny Bowman*

*Rev. Mike Gudka*

*Larry Guth*

*Sarah Holmes*

*Tanja Jensen*

*Ted Knutson*

*Clint Middleton*

*Barb Mussman*

*Peggy O'Neill*

*Bob Powers*

*Katie Stecher*

*Susan Toftey*

*Michelle Walters*

*Karen Weld*

*Andy Young*



1

"There was a nice trail that was developed around the [high school] property, and it just never got maintained."



3

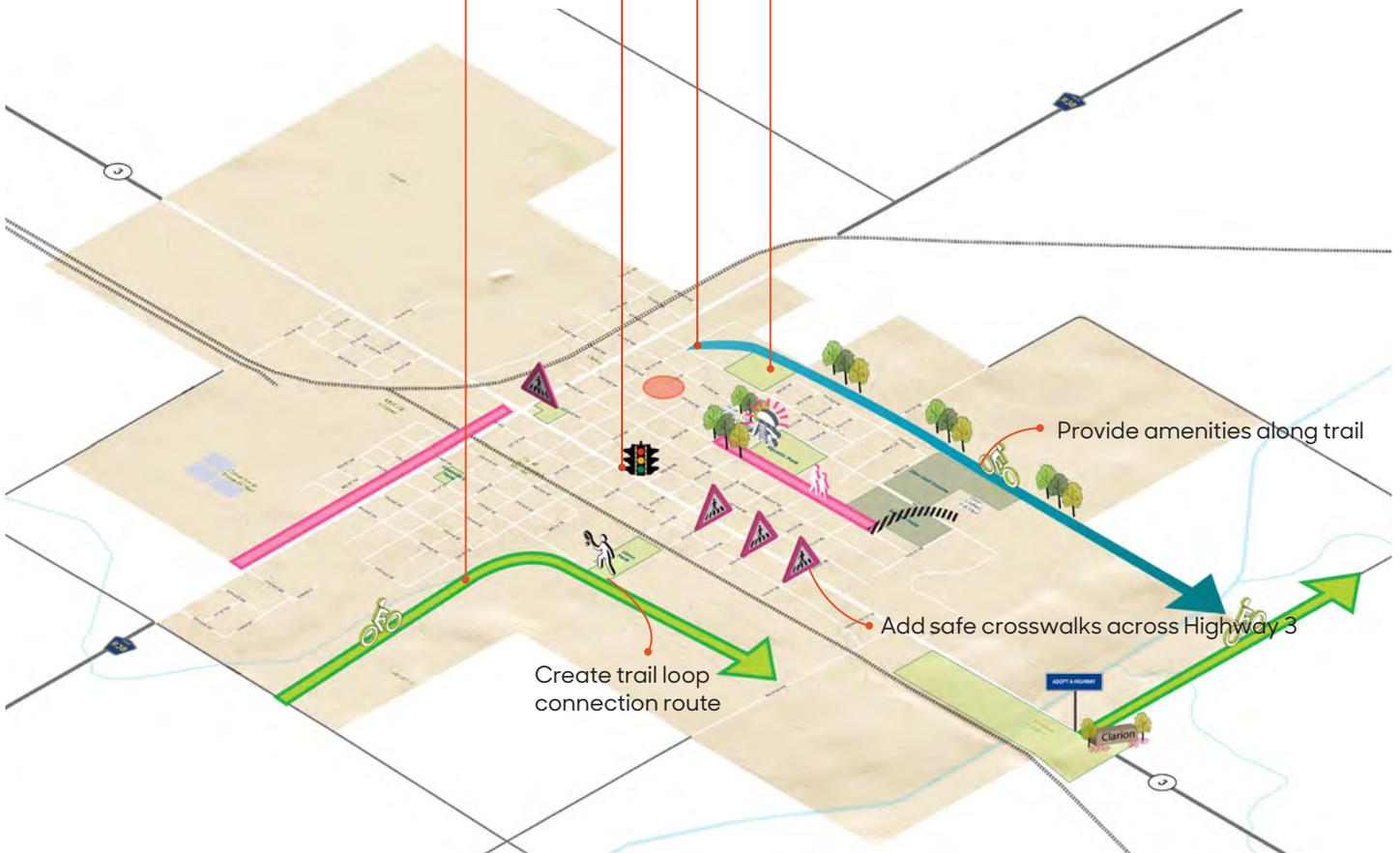
"I think they should make the...lines on the crosswalks [over the highways] better because there [are] a lot of them that...you can't even see."



2

"I would say the biggest thing is connectivity. We've got certain spot... that the youth congregate in that we don't have decent access to."

4



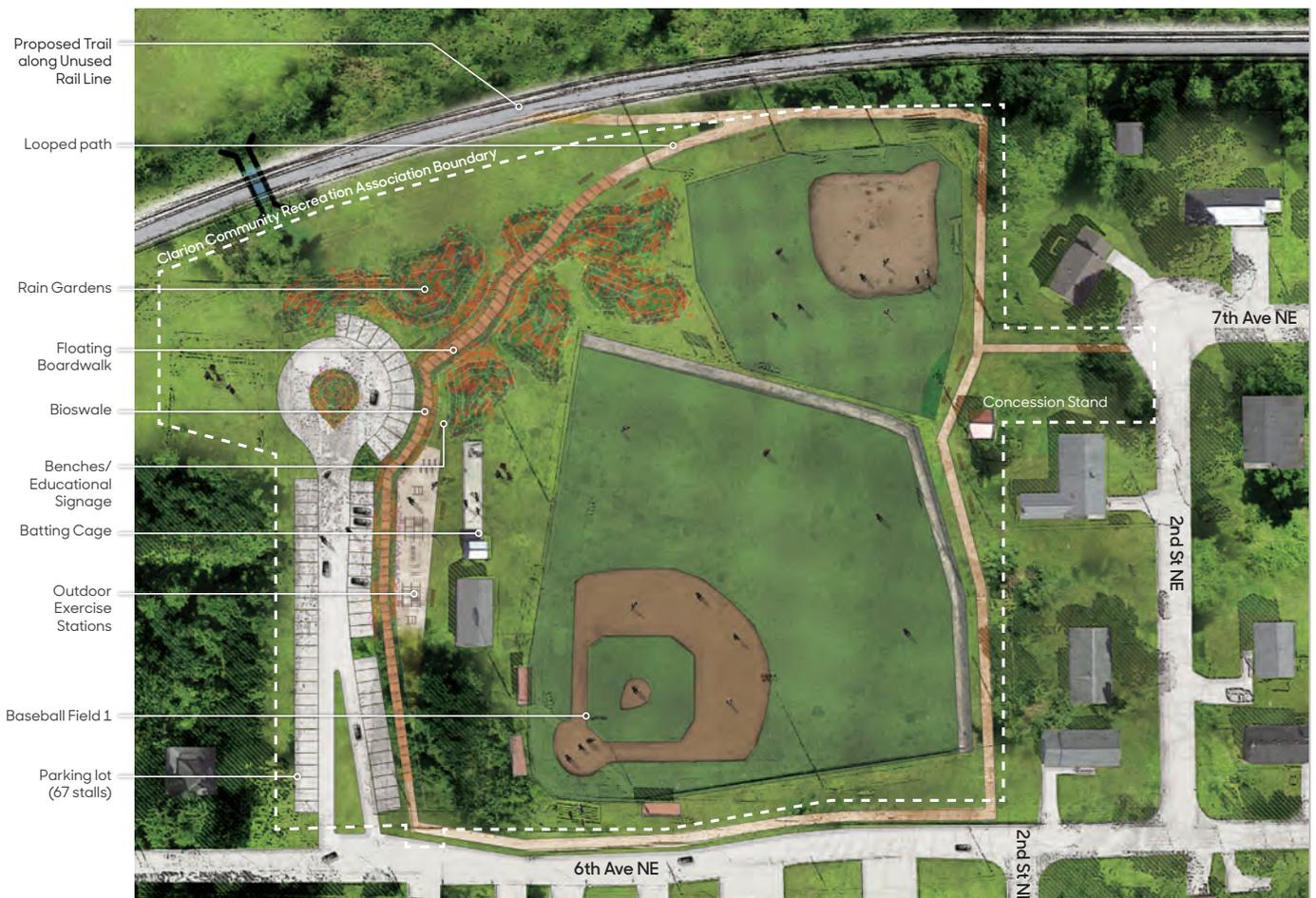
1

As identified at the community assessment and goal setting workshops, many residents desire a walking trail in-and-around Clarion. The proposed community trails are a combination of existing sidewalks, planned future sidewalks, old railroad corridor, new separated trails, and paved shoulders.



2

These rain gardens proposed for Hanson Park are located in such a way that they intercept the stormwater runoff from the culvert, thus aiding to improved water infiltration before it reaches the baseball field.



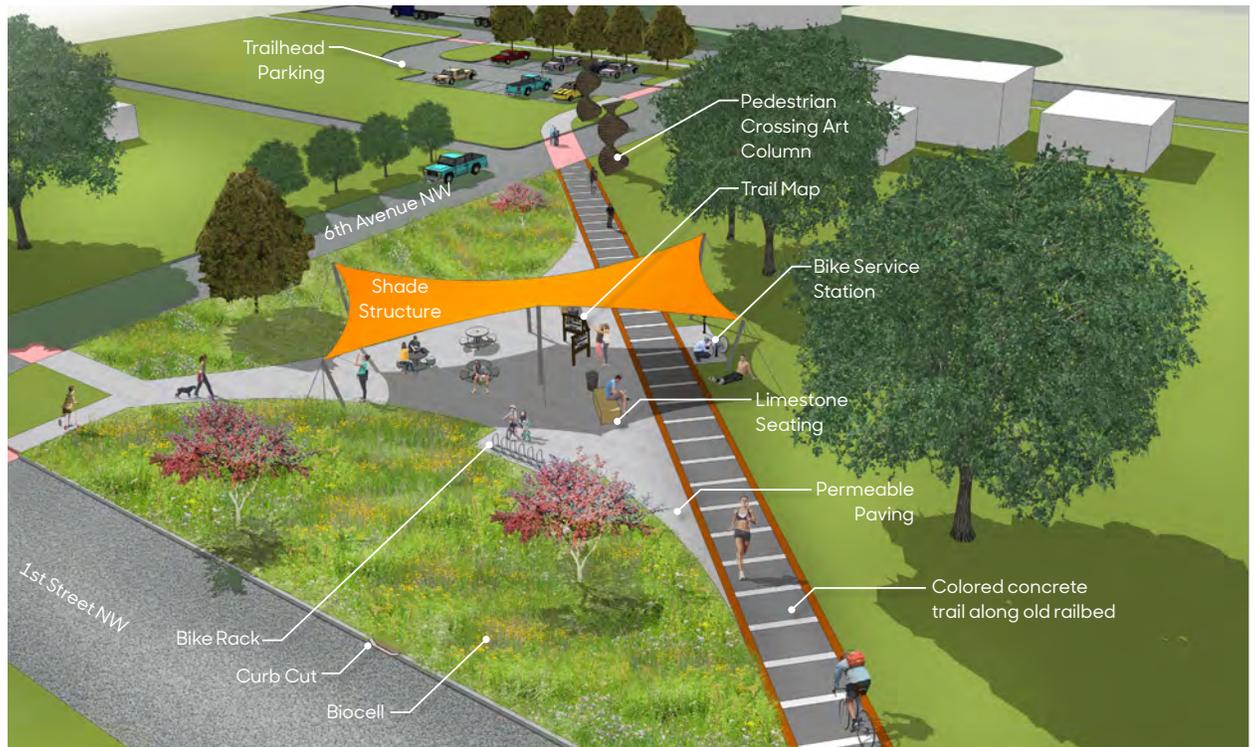
3

Reassessing Clarion's downtown area, especially around the courthouse, increases the comfort of the space. It's important to place value on the pedestrian rather than the vehicle at the heart of the community. Looking at the entire Highway 3 corridor, the primary alteration to the street is repainting the lines.



4

The unused railway that traverses the northern edge of Clarion offers a great opportunity for a walking/bike trail. There are several parcels owned by the local co-op where the trailhead and a parking area are sited. Visitors park on the south side of 6th Avenue and walk across to the trailhead area. Pedestrians coming from the east are able to enter from the southeast corner.



# Granger

Named for railroad man C.T. Granger, Granger (population 1,244) has a history that is intertwined with transportation infrastructure. Up until the 1960s, it was a way point on two key railroad lines in central Iowa. Currently, with two major highways dividing new developments from Granger proper, connectivity is the primary goal for Granger's participation in community visioning.

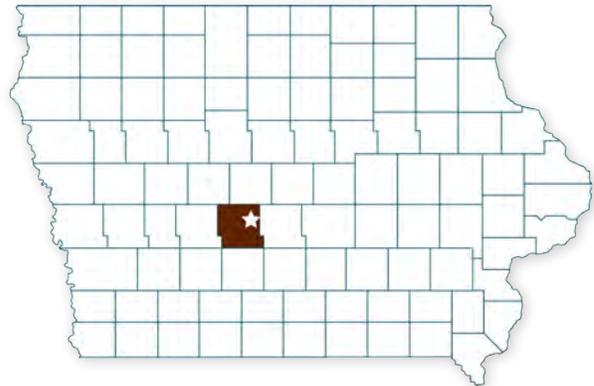
## Community Assessments

The results of the focus-group and random-sample survey assessments show that Highways 141 and 17 are considered barriers, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. The assessments also reinforce the importance of trails and trail connections to residents. People want pedestrian/cyclists connections not only within Granger, but to the wealth of regional trails in the area.

## Planning and Design Summary

Resident input played an important role in the goal-setting process, through which the Granger visioning committee identified the following projects:

- Highways 169 and 17, Sycamore Street, and State Street – Improve pedestrian safety and promote traffic calming with new crosswalks at high-traffic highways and local streets.
- Local Trails – Create a loop trail system along Oxley Creek and Highway 141 to connect downtown, parks, and schools to neighborhoods.
- Regional Trail Connections – Develop separate and on-road bike trails to provide direct access between Granger and Jester Park, the Raccoon River Valley Trail, the High Trestle Trail, Beaver Avenue Trail, and cities in the north Des Moines metro area.
- Downtown/Main Street – Implement enhanced way-finding and improve the aesthetic character of Main Street.
- Community Gateways – Add iconic gateway monuments and park space along Highway 141 to attract passersby and welcome them to Granger.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Patty Reisinger*  
**Landscape Architects:** *Eric Holt and Paige Hubbard, Genus Landscape Architects*  
**Intern:** *Fan-Kai Lin, Genus Landscape Architects*



*Local geography mapping session*

## Steering Committee:

*Briley Bermel*  
*Cathy Fuson*  
*Kerry Loge*  
*Tami Loge*  
*Anita Meiners*  
*Tim Nowatzki*  
*Steve Klocke*  
*Tom Stahowick*  
*Brandon Sweeney*  
*Sara Taylor-Watts*  
*Kristy Trzeciak*  
*Joseph Watznauer*  
*Alice Wicker*  
*Sharon Wiese*



"Right now, we walk on the street, but we're in the middle of traffic when we walk."

1



4

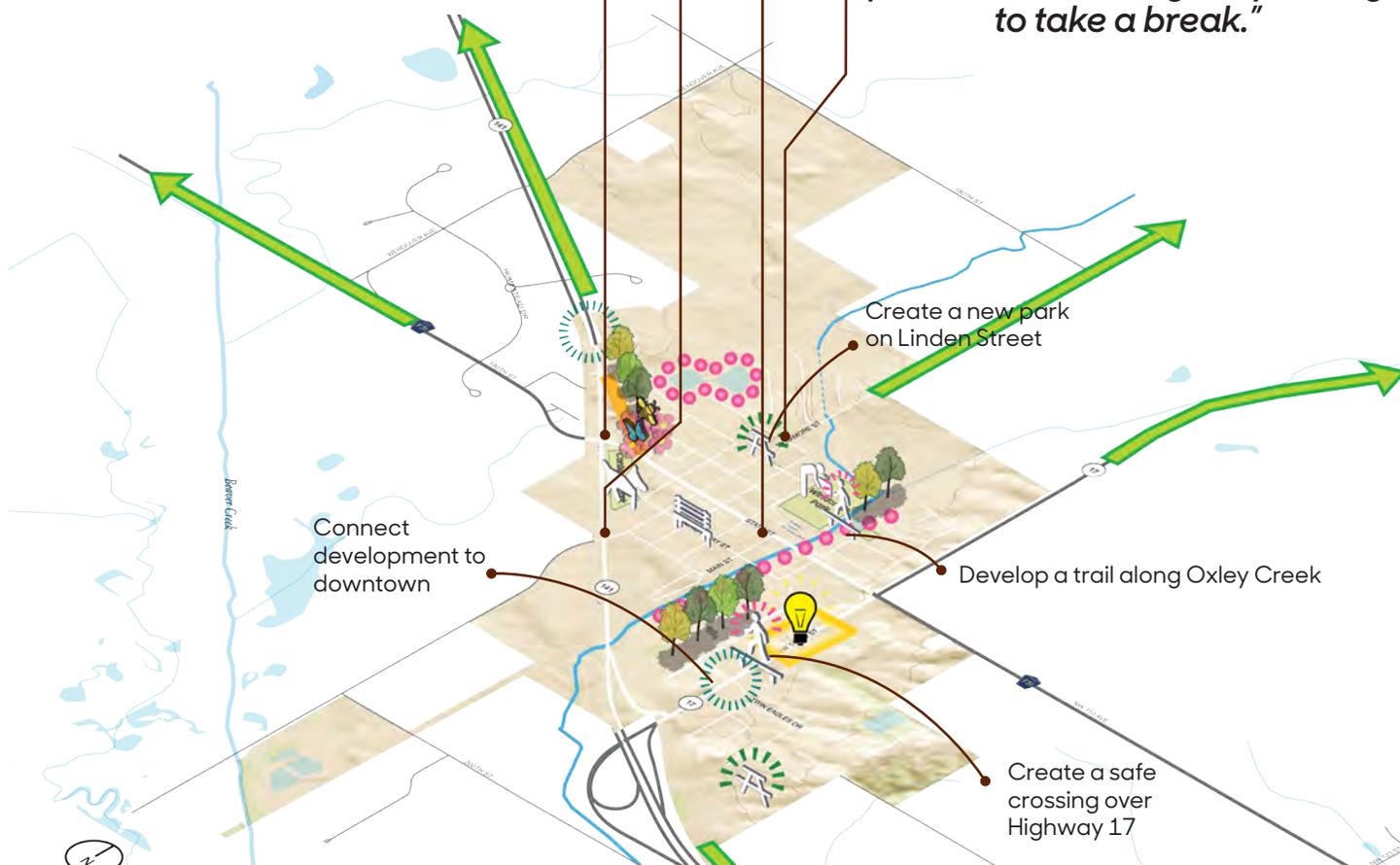
"There's no stop sign on [Highway] 17 [at Oak Creek Parkway]. No stop sign, no stoplight. There's no way for [children] to get across that road safely without really watching for traffic, so all these kids [in Twin Eagle] need a safe route to get into Granger."



2

"Once you put in a trail or something, you've got to have a place to stop and rest—especially that's not only just for walkers or the bikers—if somebody is pushing someone in a wheelchair, you've got to have a bench there for that person that's doing the pushing to take a break."

3



Connect development to downtown

Create a new park on Linden Street

Develop a trail along Oxley Creek

Create a safe crossing over Highway 17

1

The Granger Community Visioning committee has identified a range of projects that can improve aesthetics, connectivity and access, and enhance community identity downtown. New street trees and prairie plantings are proposed for both beautification and traffic calming along Highway 17 and State Street to the creek, where two large wheel monuments become an iconic focal point.



2

The design team proposed introducing a local multipurpose trail system and proposed creek crossing to connect Windcrest Park and the baseball complex. This location has been identified as a key intersection at the heart of Granger’s park land.



3

A gateway monument is proposed at the northwest corner of Centennial Park to draw the attention of highway travelers and announce their arrival to Granger.



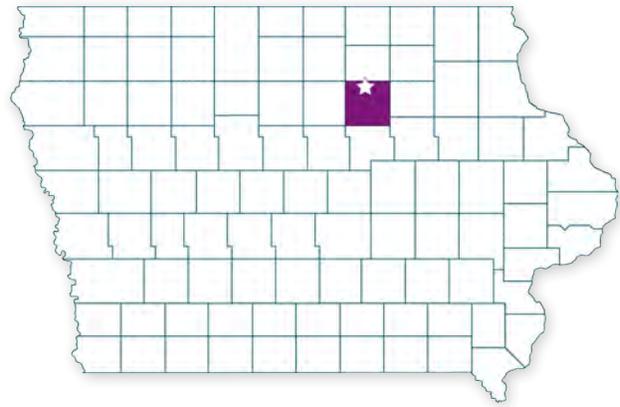
4

The Sycamore Gateway is proposed to improve aesthetics and bolster community identity at this location. This gateway includes native prairie with mowed paths, ornamental plantings and trees, a new Granger welcome sign, Trail Hub Plaza rest area, and a multipurpose trail along the Highway 141 right-of-way.



# Greene

Greene (population 1,130), located in north central Iowa, has been affected by major flooding in recent years, including 2008 and 2016. The community applied to the visioning program in search of ideas for flood mitigation and river enhancements, improved walkability/bikeability in town, and trail development.



## Community Assessments

The transportation assets and barriers assessment revealed that despite flooding issues, the Shell Rock River is an important asset on which residents would like to further capitalize. People also value old Highway 14 as a walking route, but would like more amenities and a longer route. Outdoor recreation opportunities in general are important to all demographic groups in Greene.

Barriers identified during focus groups include poor lighting along the streets near the high school; lack of accessibility in Perrin Park, downtown, and at the school; and poor access to old Highway 14.

## Planning and Design Summary

Based on the assessments and the Greene visioning committee's identified goals, the design team proposed concepts focused on three main areas:

- Safety – Repair and add new sidewalks, improve lighting, and install crosswalks and additional signage in key areas of town.
- Recreation – Connect popular walking/biking routes to create longer routes and more opportunities for exercise, add amenities to old Highway 14, improve accessibility in Perrin Park, and create an ADA-accessible playground in the FEMA buyout lot.
- Tourism – Install way-finding signage to boat ramps and river access points, install community map panels directing visitors to other popular destinations, implement a water trail designation along the Shell Rock River, and create river-themed signage.

**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Meredith Borchardt*

**Landscape Architects:** *Craig Ritland and Samantha Price, Ritland+Kuiper Landscape Architects*

**Intern:** *Peter Reyland, Ritland+Kuiper Landscape Architects*



*Design workshop during Greene's River Days*

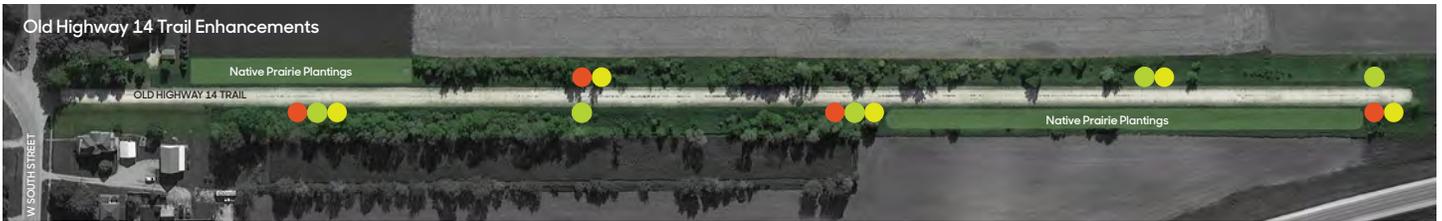
## Steering Committee:

<i>Emily Ascher</i>	<i>James O'Brien</i>
<i>Jami Backer</i>	<i>Phil Pitzenberger</i>
<i>Ben Backer</i>	<i>Andrea Ramker</i>
<i>Pat Derdzinski</i>	<i>Carol Schroeder</i>
<i>Sue Ebensberger</i>	<i>Alexis Sterling</i>
<i>Sarah Goodrich</i>	<i>Megan Swick</i>
<i>Lauren Hawker</i>	
<i>Miranda Joebgen</i>	
<i>Jayne Knapp</i>	
<i>Angel Malfaro</i>	
<i>Alex Mathers</i>	



1

The enhancements proposed for old Highway 14 address residents' desire for amenities, including exercise stations, benches, and lighting.



- Exercise Station
- Bench
- Solar Pathway Light

2

Proposed improvements for the Perrin park include an accessible trail, a pipe through the dike, a new parking lot across the street, and a horseshoe court nearby on a FEMA buy-out property.

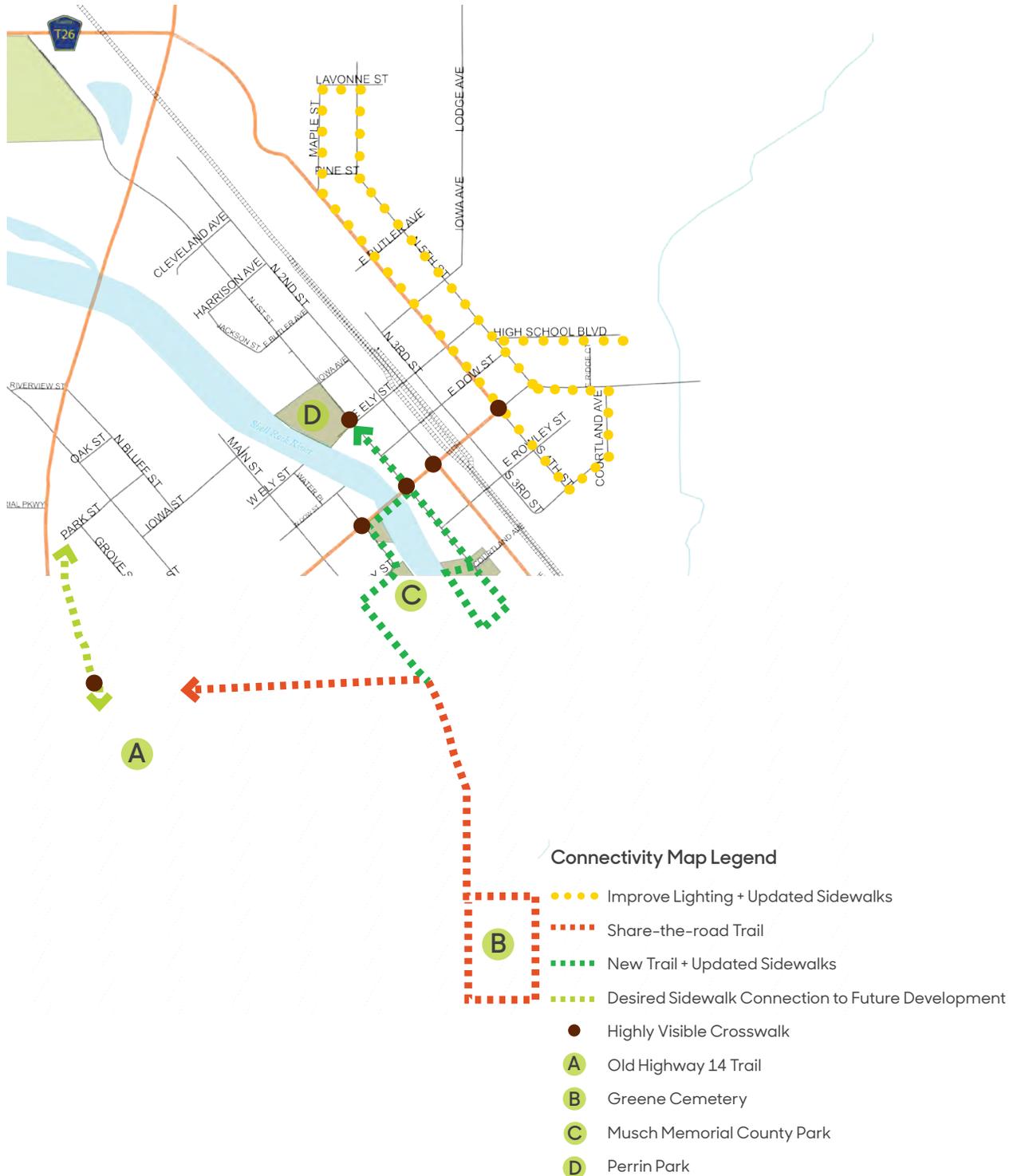


**Legend**

1. ADA compliant walking trail with benches
2. Culvert through dike with a back-up flap valve gate
3. Vehicle and boat trailer parking area
4. Perrin Park entrance sign and tree plantings
5. Highly visible crosswalks
6. Updated sidewalk
7. Horseshoe courts and tree plantings

3

Connectivity improvements include a combination of share-the-road trails, new trails, and updated sidewalks. This plan also adds additional lighting and updated sidewalks to the "Two-mile Loop" walking path near the high school, a need identified by focus-group participants.



# Humboldt

Humboldt (population 4,690) is located at the intersection of Highways 169 and 3 in Humboldt County, sharing its eastern border with the county seat, Dakota City. Developing a comprehensive community trail plan to allow for safer pedestrian and cyclist access is a priority among Humboldt residents. The community is also interested in creating a downtown retailscape plan for the central business district.

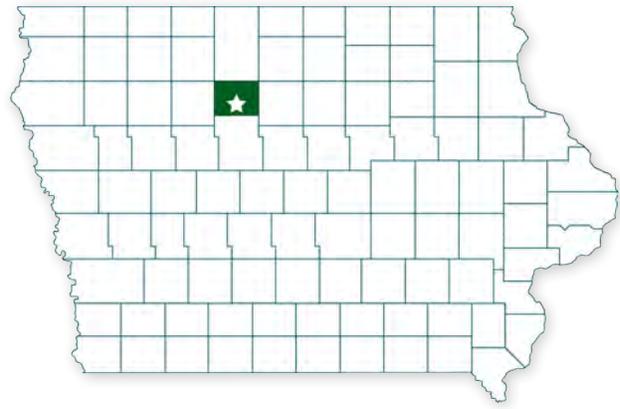
## Community Assessments

Both focus-group participants and survey respondents indicated that they would like more pedestrian connectivity and improved accessibility for older adults in Humboldt. Focus-group participants of all demographic types desire a better, more connected sidewalk system throughout town. Among survey participants, safer routes to school is a priority. Residents of all ages value the recreation opportunities available in Humboldt, particularly the trails.

## Planning and Design Summary

After the Humboldt visioning committee identified goals, the design team led a workshop, during which preliminary concepts were created with help from residents. The concepts explored during the workshop included the following:

- Pedestrian Connections – Enhance pedestrian connections to link existing trails to each other and to various amenities within the community.
- Sumner Avenue Streetscape – Create a conceptual master plan for Sumner Avenue downtown to improve accessibility, amenities, and green infrastructure.
- Way-finding Signage – Develop a family of way-finding signage to be used along trails and roadways.
- Dam Mitigation – Mitigate the dam to allow for canoe, kayak, and fish passage.



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



*Transportation assets and barriers focus group*

## Steering Committee:

*Bret Davis*  
*Travis Fuller*  
*Travis Goedken*  
*Clifton Kalafatich*  
*Todd Lee*  
*TC Loving*  
*Jenna Mulford*  
*Alissa O'Connor*  
*Jess Poutre*  
*Dan Scholl*  
*Kent Thompson*  
*Clayton Vorland*  
*Kirk Whittlesey*



*"If there were a way to walk, bike, or whatever from Sheldon Park and get to anywhere you wanted to be in the city, I think it [would] open up our city so much more."*

**1**



*"I live right in Sheldon Park, and I canoe and kayak both rivers a lot."*

**4**



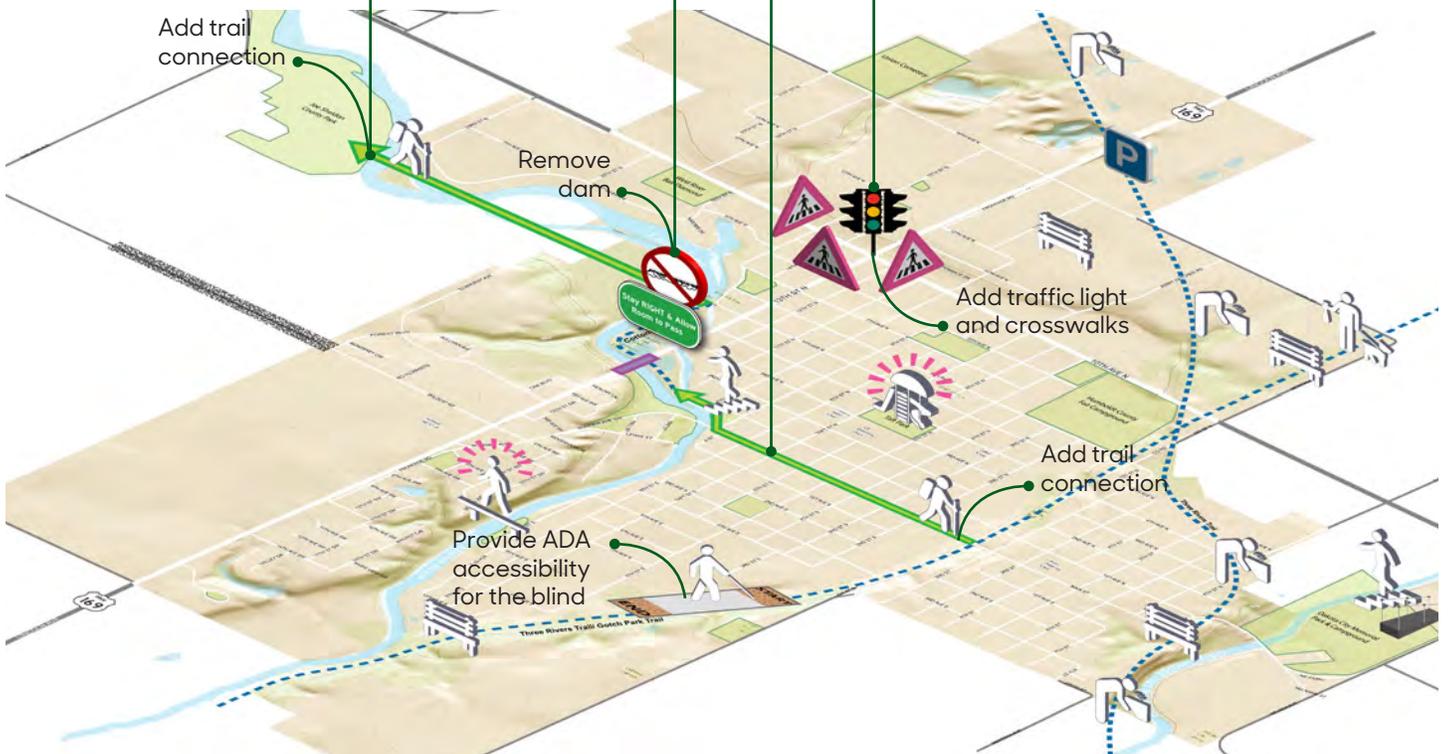
**2**

*"I can drive and then I have to get out my walker and then I'll have to go up a curb, which is not so fun around here."*



**3**

*"There [are] a lot of unmarked intersections, which is a little bit weird, but [you] just have to be a little more cautious."*



1

Developing a connected trail system will be an impactful first step for safe connections and increased recreation opportunities. Humboldt residents will benefit from a stronger link between several local attractions, downtown businesses, and public spaces.



2

Humboldt's downtown improvements include bump-outs, street trees, biocells, lighting, signage, site furnishings, and protected bike lanes—all factors that help create a safer, more enjoyable experience for all users downtown.



3

Four types of way-finding features have been designed to help guide people to the key areas in town, such as the Three Rivers Trail, Gotch Park Trail, Joe Reasoner Dam, various parks, and downtown Humboldt. The signs are made of limestone, concrete, and metal materials to create a cohesive theme.



4

The existing Joe Reasoner Dam is a barrier to not only recreation, but also to fish heading north up the river. A series of navigable drops, known as rock rapids, have been proposed to mitigate the dam and allow for these activities to take place.



# Lester

Lester (population 293) is situated in the northwest corner of the state along State Highway 9. The active rail line creates valued jobs at the grain elevator, but at the same time divides the town into two parts. The new housing development and park are cut off from the rest of town by County Road K80.

Creating a walking trail and making the town more pedestrian/cyclist friendly were the primary goals of the community for applying to the visioning program.

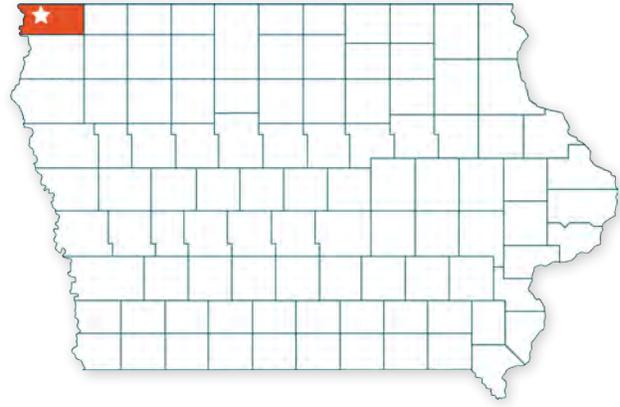
## Community Assessments

Better connectivity for pedestrians and cyclists emerged as a major theme during the transportation assets and barriers assessment. Residents of all demographic types would an improved sidewalk system, and many participants indicated the desire for a community trail.

## Planning and Design Summary

The design team created a concept plan that addresses residents' concerns regarding connectivity and safety, while supporting Lester's potential growth into a bedroom community to Sioux Falls.

- Connectivity and Walkability – Repair sidewalks and connect popular routes to provide access to housing and exercise venues.
- Recreation Trail – Create a loop trail integrated with existing rights-of-way and natural areas.
- Safety – Install a safe railroad crossing on Clinton Street, and improve safety at the Clinton and Main Street intersection.
- Enhancements – Add amenities such as benches, updated lighting, signage, and native vegetation.
- Signage – Install gateway signage at community entrances to alert drivers; add way-finding signage to guide visitors to important destinations.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Jeff Jensen*

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

**Intern:** *Peter Reyland, Ritland+Kuiper Landscape Architects*



*Local geography mapping session*

## Steering Committee:

<i>LaToya Ageson</i>	<i>Riley Knobloch</i>
<i>Cathy Dorneweerd</i>	<i>Amy Martin</i>
<i>Cody Dorneweerd</i>	<i>Harold Meester</i>
<i>Curtis Dorneweerd</i>	<i>Scott Metzger</i>
<i>Darcy Gerber</i>	<i>Bev Mogler</i>
<i>Kate Gerber</i>	<i>Brian Mogler</i>
<i>Kjert Gramsted</i>	<i>Libby Van Egdome</i>
<i>Korbyn Gramsted</i>	<i>Lauren VandeKamp</i>
<i>Jeff Hoogeveen</i>	
<i>Mia Hoogeveen</i>	
<i>Amber Kellenberger</i>	



"The sidewalk [on Main Street] needs to get redone."



"My concern for the kids is they can't go across Main Street because of the traffic."

1



"One thing that would be amazing is just to have a widened path that could be made a circle or half a circle around town...so that adults or kids [could] walk, bike, things like that; that would be really cool."

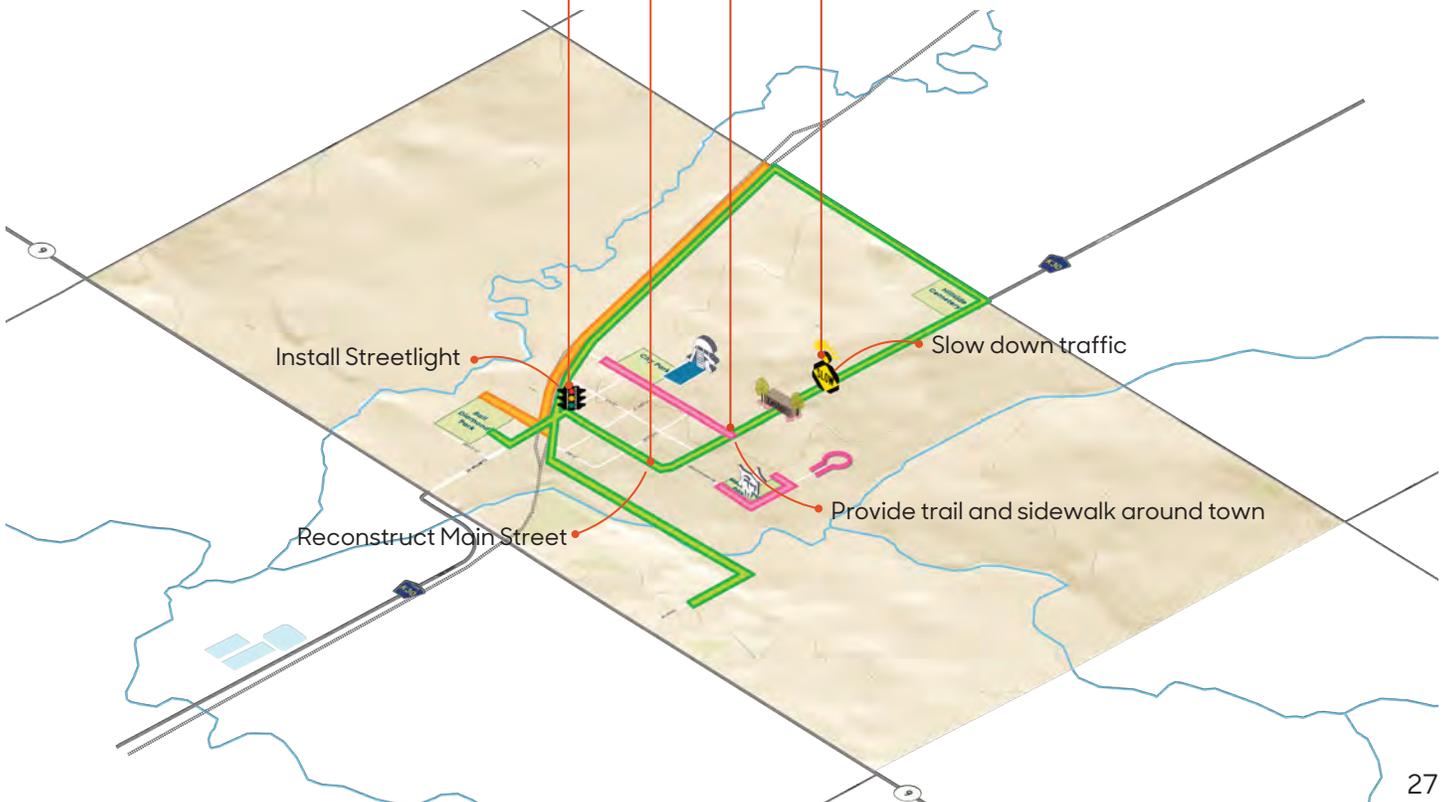
2

3

4



"[Kids who live] in Meadowview have to cross over [County Road K30] if they want to get to a park [on the west side of town]."





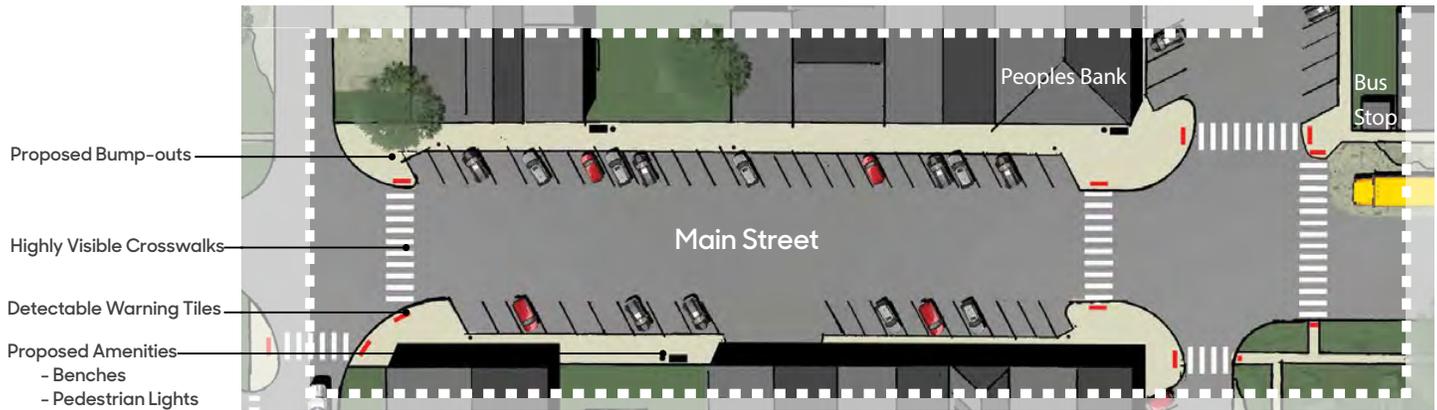
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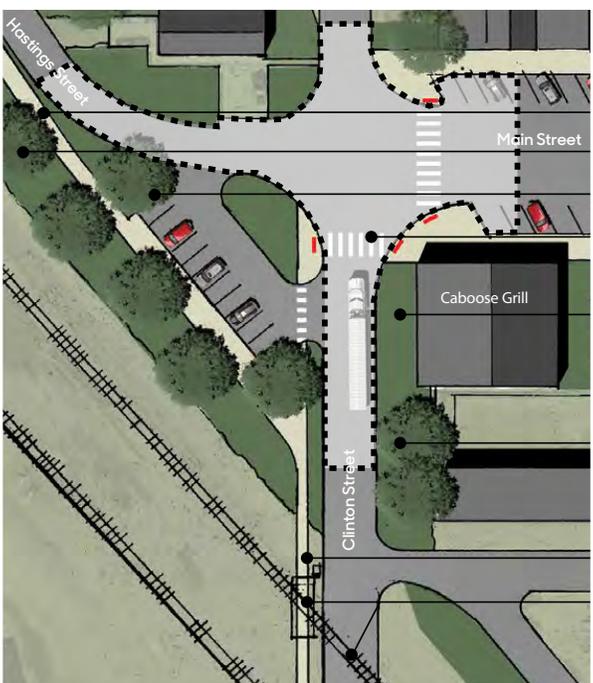
This plan shows proposed loop trails to be integrated with existing road rights-of-way and connected to sidewalk.

- 10' OFF-ROAD RECREATION TRAIL
- 6' ON-ROAD PAVED SIDEWALK
- 4'+ OFF-ROAD SIDEWALK
- SHARE-THE-ROAD
- PROPOSED ROAD
- EXISTING ROAD
- EXISTING RAILROAD
- PROPOSED PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS
- PHASE ONE RESIDENTIAL LOTS
- FUTURE GREEN SPACE

2

The proposed Main Street plan is ADA accessible and includes site amenities such as benches, pedestrian lighting, trash receptacles and planters.





3

Using the gravel lot adjacent to Hastings for parking would alleviate the need to park on the west side of Caboose Grill. Proposed bump-outs make the area more pedestrian friendly by decreasing the length people must walk across the street and increasing motorists' awareness.

4

Signage on Dove Avenue would alert traffic coming from the north. "Village of Lester," which holds historic significance for the community, was the favorite.



# Massena

Massena (population 355,) is located along Highways 92 and 148 in Cass County. The community takes pride in its agricultural heritage, which is still very much a part of the town's economy. The goals of the Massena visioning committee are focused on Main Street, community parks, trails and signage, and stormwater management.

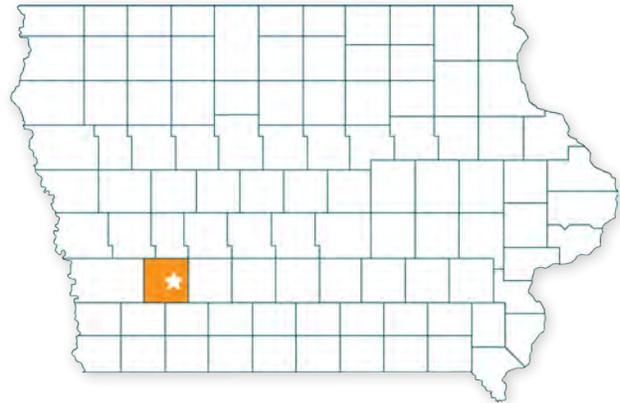
## Community Assessments

The assessment process revealed that all demographic groups want a safe and accessible walking trail with amenities. Issues that residents identified in focus-group discussions include flooding in some areas, broken or nonexistent sidewalks, and speeding traffic.

## Planning and Design Summary

The concept plan for Massena is based on priorities identified by residents, as well as guidance from the visioning steering committee, and includes six design proposals:

- Main Street – Install bump-outs at intersections and midblock crossings with plantings and overstory trees; install pedestrian-scale lighting and replace planters, benches, and trash receptacles.
- Heritage Park – Add interpretive panels, seating, and walkways.
- City Park – Reconfigure programmed elements and regrade portions of the park to improve accessibility, relocate the basketball courts, and create new green spaces .
- Trails – Create a dedicated trail that connects important destinations in town.
- Signage – Create sign panels for existing signage that highlight Massena's motto, "home of friendly people," and that can be used for other forms of branding such as banners, websites, and trail signage.
- Stormwater Management – Implement grass swales, bioswales, and check dams in key locations to slow water and decrease erosion.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Brad Riphagen*  
**Landscape Architect:** *Jen Cross, RDG Planning & Design*  
**Intern:** *Nate Byro, RDG Planning & Design*



*Design workshop*

## Steering Committee:

*Coni Curry*  
*John Curry*  
*Beulah Follmann*  
*Dean Hosfelt*  
*Bill Langfelt*  
*Kevin McCunn*  
*Phil Przychodzin*  
*Linda Rienke*  
*TJ Venteicher*  
*Chase Wheatley*  
*Peg Wheatley*  
*Judy Wolford*



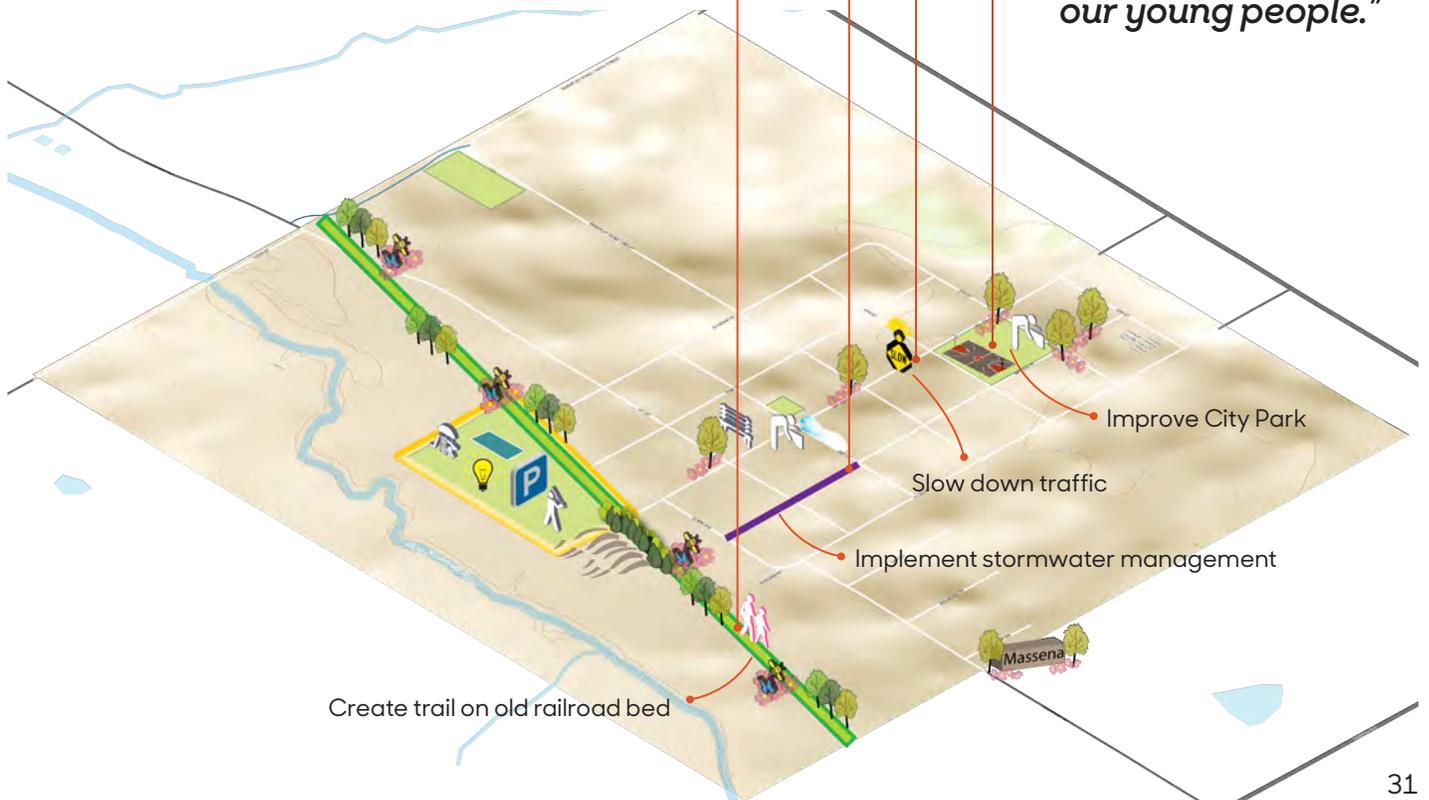
**3**  
"The sidewalks on Main Street, they're bad."



**1**  
"If we could do something with a nature trail on those railroad tracks, clean it up, that would be cool."

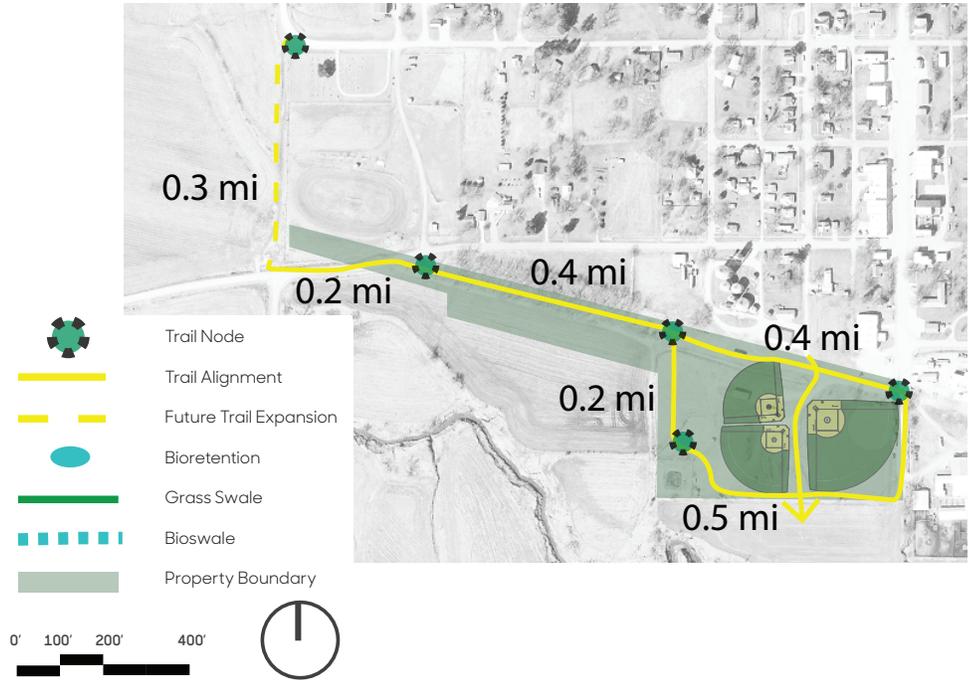


**4**  
"I see countless kids practically 18 hours a day...in the park playing on that basketball court, which brings up the significant need we have for recreation for our young people."



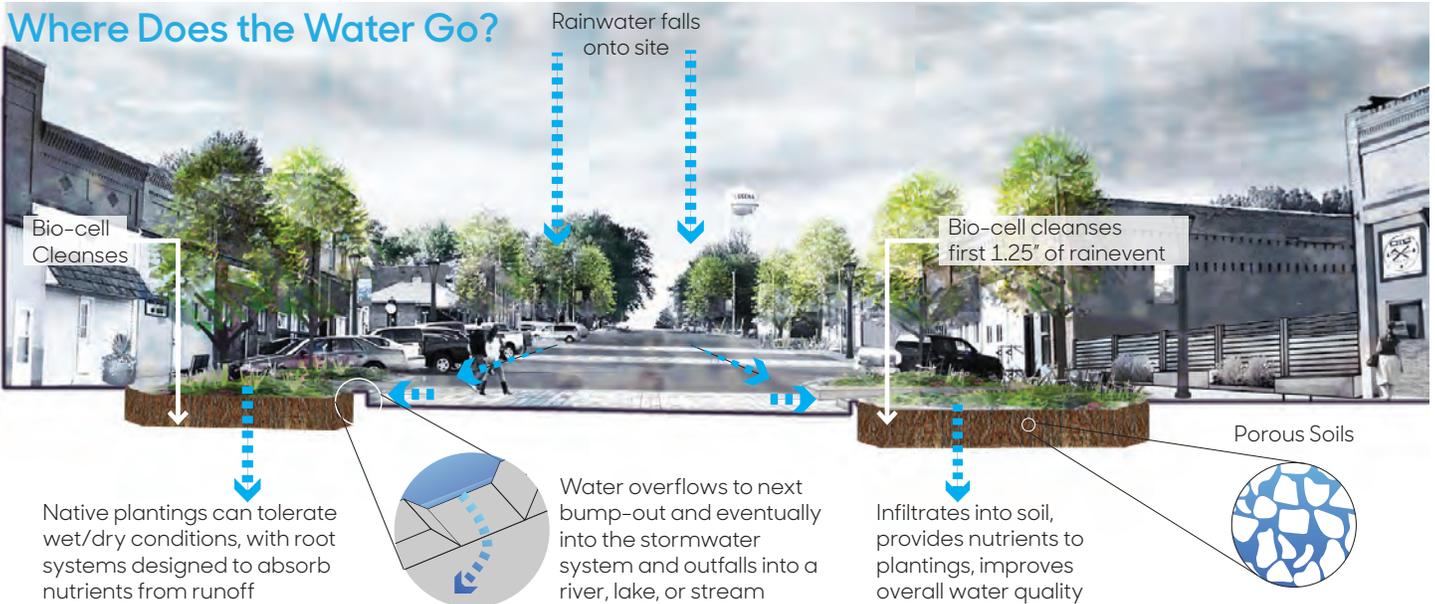
1

This design addresses residents' desire for a safe place to walk and bike with a fitness trail plan that incorporates the existing railroad bed and connects the northwest part of the community with the ball fields. The trail features several nodes to provide venues for resting or using fitness equipment relocated from City Park.



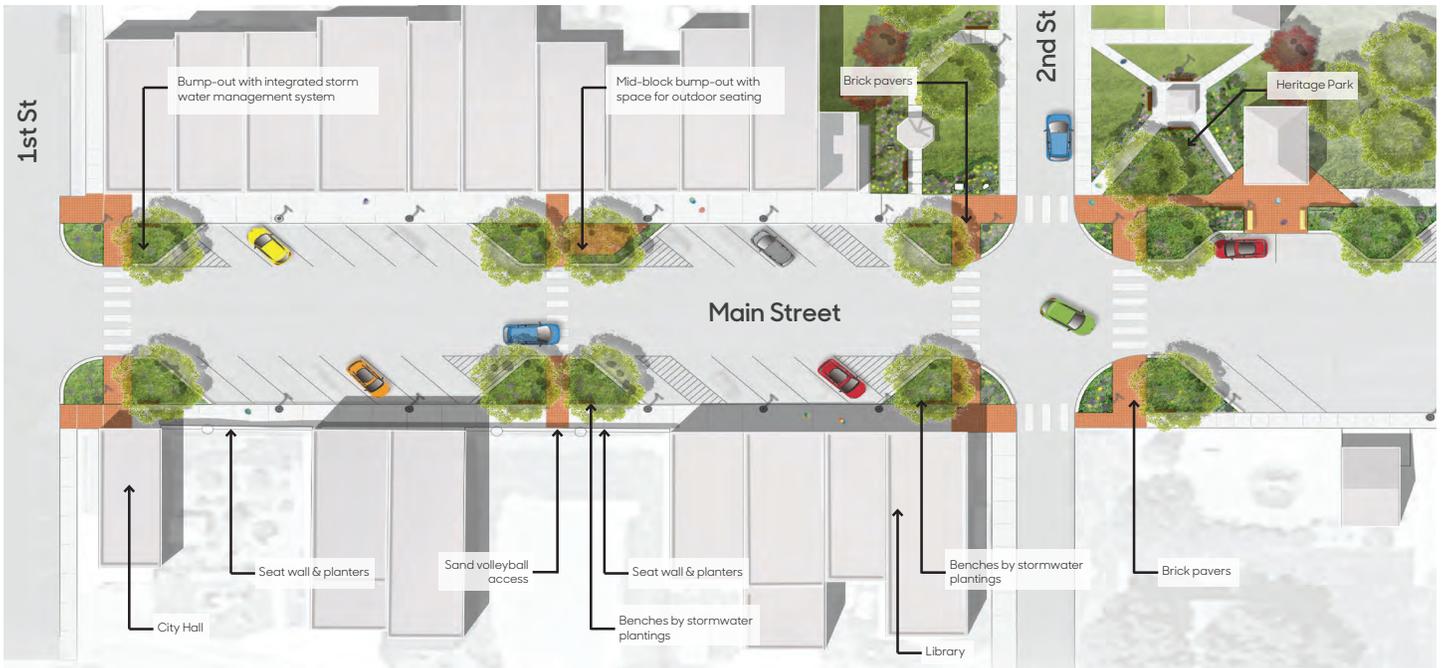
2

Slowing water and implementing vegetated grass swales, bioswales, and check dams in key locations will decrease the extensive erosion occurring in Massena. Basic stormwater modeling and watersheds have been identified to determine that this strategy would be sufficient to handle typical stormwater events.



3

In addition to replacing existing sidewalks, the streetscape plan for Main Street includes vegetated bump-outs at intersections and midblock crossings. The bump-outs create shorter crossing distances for pedestrians, while the vegetation acts to “calm” traffic and manage stormwater.



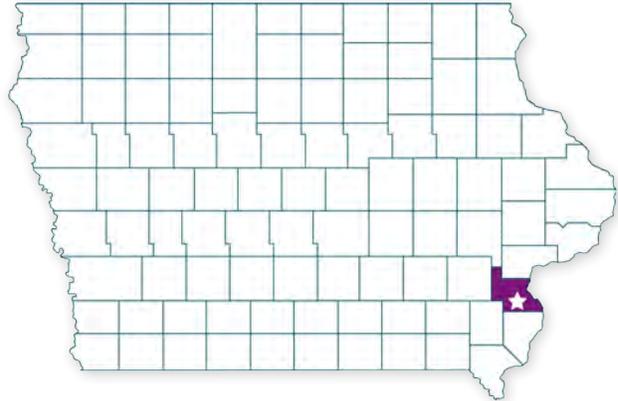
4

City Park is an important asset to Massena residents, but is in need of improvements. The concept plan for the park calls for reconfiguring existing programmed uses, modifying the existing drainage ditches, and redefining programmed space to function in concert with current community usage. Portions of the park would be regraded to make certain areas more universally accessible.



# Morning Sun

Morning Sun (population 836) is located along State Highway 78 in southern Louisa County in southeast Iowa. Only 4 miles from US 61, the town has the potential to be a bedroom community to Burlington, Muscatine, and Mount Pleasant. With new businesses locating along Highway 78, a top priority is to make those establishments more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians.



## Community Assessments

Morning Sun residents value their outdoor recreation venues and would like to have more. Focus-group participants pointed out the lack of connection between downtown and the Hoover Nature Trail, as well as the need for more amenities along the trail. The lack of a good sidewalk system is a perceived barrier among residents.

**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Emily Swihart*

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

**Intern:** *Richard Garcia, Flenker Land Architecture Consultants, LLC*

## Planning and Design Summary

Based on the abovementioned concerns, the proposed concept plan includes a community trail system consisting of shared road and separate trail segments, as well as three new parks that offer that offer venues for inclusive play.

- Pedestrian Connectivity – Repair existing and add new sidewalk and install curb ramps to meet ADA standards.
- Green space – Create City Park along Division Street, Hoover Park along the trail, and South Park adjacent to the retirement home.
- Highway 78 Corridor – Plant native vegetation in roadside ditches and overstory trees to separate the highway from the proposed trail, install way-finding signage where needed.
- Primary Corridors – Install bioswales along primary roadways to mitigate flooding; plant trees along the road corridors to create shade, improve aesthetics, and improve air quality.
- Downtown Streetscape – Install bump-outs and curb ramps at intersections, create ADA-compliant handicapped parking, plant street trees, and add amenities such as decorative lighting and benches.



*Transportation inventory and analysis*

## Steering Committee:

*Devon Bell  
Paula Buckman  
Joan Delzell-Bausch  
Doug Elam  
Alan Giese  
Kyle Giese  
Rob Hobbs  
Kim Robb  
Kelse Truitt  
Dallas Tuttle  
Terry Wallace*



"As someone who actually spends a lot of time walking around town... we don't have sidewalks in a lot of high-traffic areas."

2



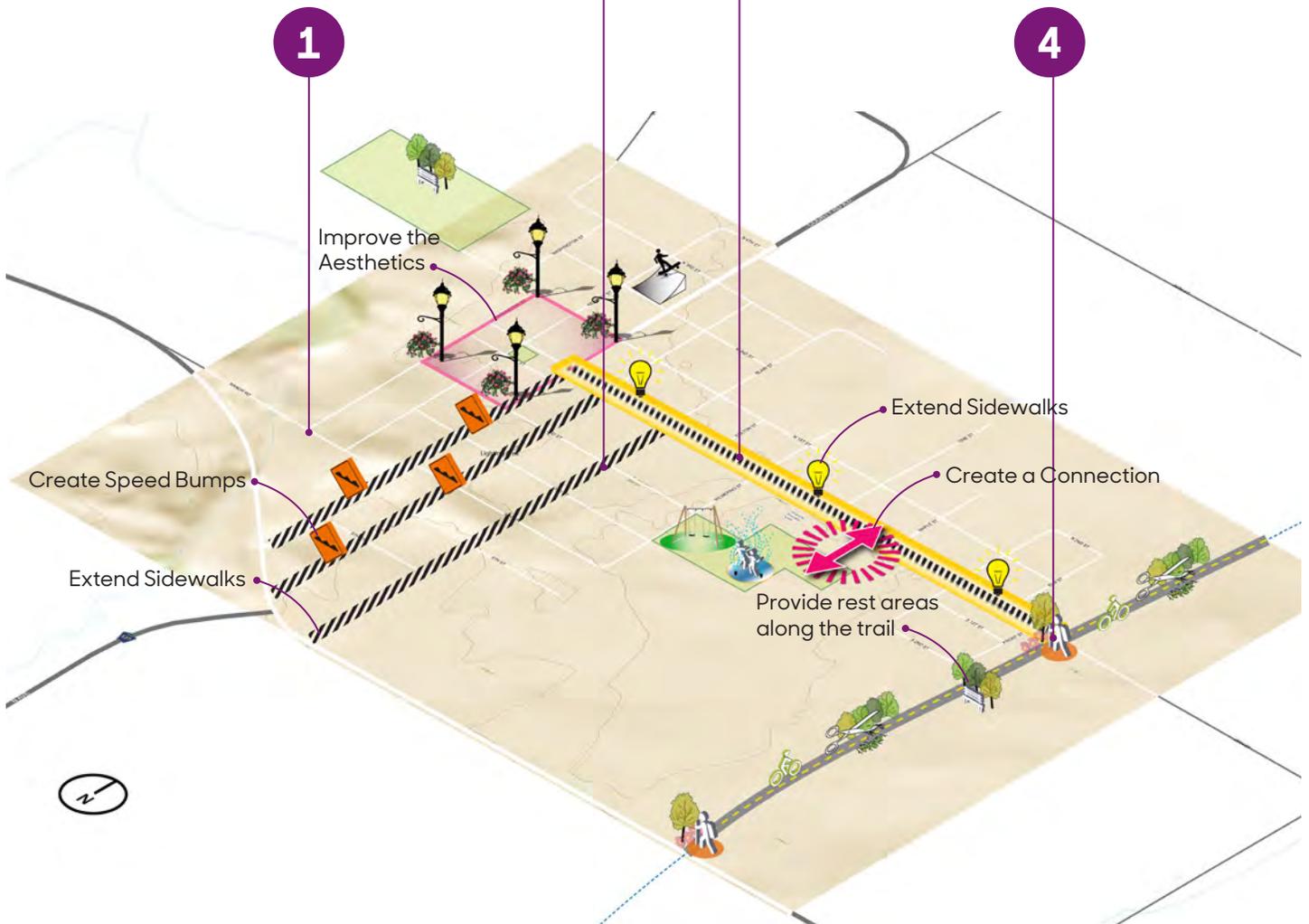
"Main and Church [Streets] are probably the busiest streets... and they're also the streets that everybody's walking on."



"I like to walk [the trail] a lot, and I would like to see [it made] a little more walker friendly..."

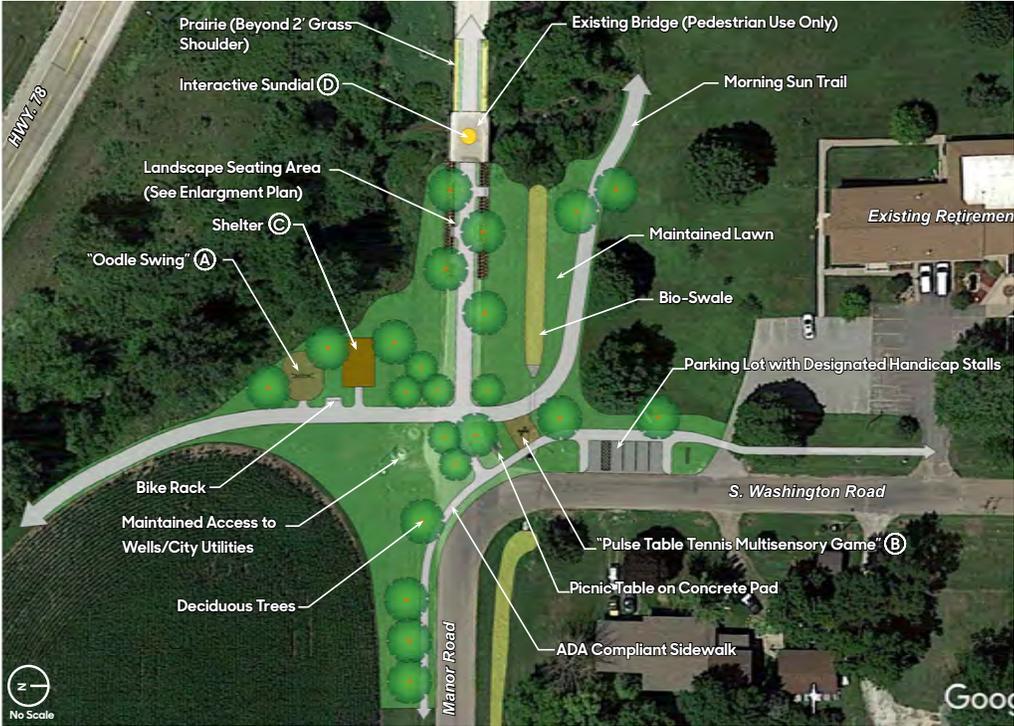
1

4



1

The area south of the retirement home at Manor Road and Washington Street presents an opportunity for the city to create a public green space and explore opportunities for a looped, recreational trail system around the city: South Park.



2

The South Washington Street concept below illustrates how bioswales, a 5-foot-wide ADA-compliant (American with Disabilities Act) sidewalk, and a decorative retaining wall can change the aesthetics of the landscape while addressing important issues, including stormwater quality and infiltration, pedestrian accessibility, grade transitions, and habitat improvement.



3

The changes in the downtown area include landscaped bump-outs, murals, decorative lighting, delineated crosswalks, access control, way-finding signage, ADA-compliant sidewalks and street crossings, and street trees. Roadways are better defined by replacing excess pavement/gravel with maintained grass.



4



Hoover Park has the potential to be transformed into a well used and sustainable park. It can serve as a much needed rest area for trail users, as well as a destination for interpretive learning, observing nature, relaxing, and reflecting.

# Scranton

Situated along the Lincoln Highway, Scranton (population 530) has a rich history, including the oldest working water tower in Iowa. The community would like to capitalize on its and the highway's historic roots, while at the same time becoming less vehicle-oriented and more pedestrian friendly.

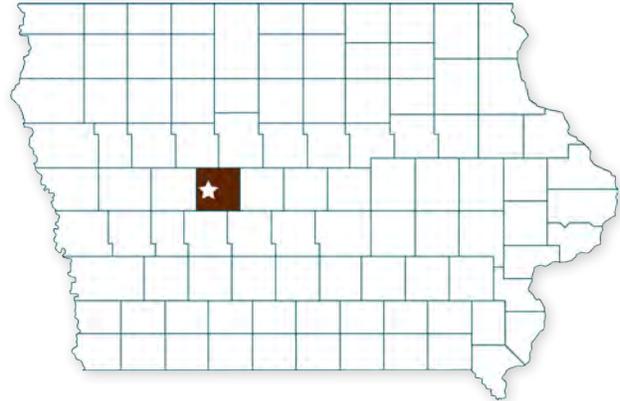
## Community Assessments

Scranton residents value the sense of community in their town and appreciate their community gathering spaces. Focus-group participants discussed improving the park system in town and creating more connections via trails and sidewalks. Perceived barriers among residents include high-speed traffic on Highway 25 and State Street.

## Planning and Design Summary

After meetings with the steering committee and other Scranton residents, the design team proposed several concepts based on goals identified. Below is an outline of the proposed concepts:

- Trail and Sidewalk Systems – Enhance sidewalks and make trail connections to Scranton's four parks; add signage to warn motorists of pedestrians/cyclists at Highway 25 crossings.
- Parks and Recreation – Improve aging portions of the park system and add new elements to enhance the public space and encourage various types of recreation.
- Main Street/Downtown Revitalization – Add vegetated bump-outs at intersections and midblock crossings, install pedestrian-scale lighting, and plant street trees.
- Scranton Water Tower – Create a park in the empty lot at the tower's base to highlight the tower while providing a place for people to rest and relax.
- Way-finding and Signage – Develop a cohesive signage scheme incorporating elements of existing signage while enhancing visual appearance and legibility.



**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Brad Riphagen*  
**Landscape Architects:** *David Stokes and Eric Doll, Jeffrey L. Bruce & Company*  
**Interns:** *Riley Dunn and Carole Joella Ustine, Jeffrey L. Bruce & Company*



*Performance objectives meeting*

## Steering Committee:

*Doug Duff*  
*Carol Eason*  
*Melinda Hinners*  
*Whitney Hoyle*  
*Julie McAleer*  
*Ethel Subbert*  
*Bill Taggart*  
*Deb Taggart*  
*Randy Winkelman*



*"We just usually ride [bikes] around town."*



*"I would love a designated trail or walking area."*



*"[Highway 25] is a scary highway because it's a two-way, those trucks screaming through there. Even cars."*

2

5

3

4

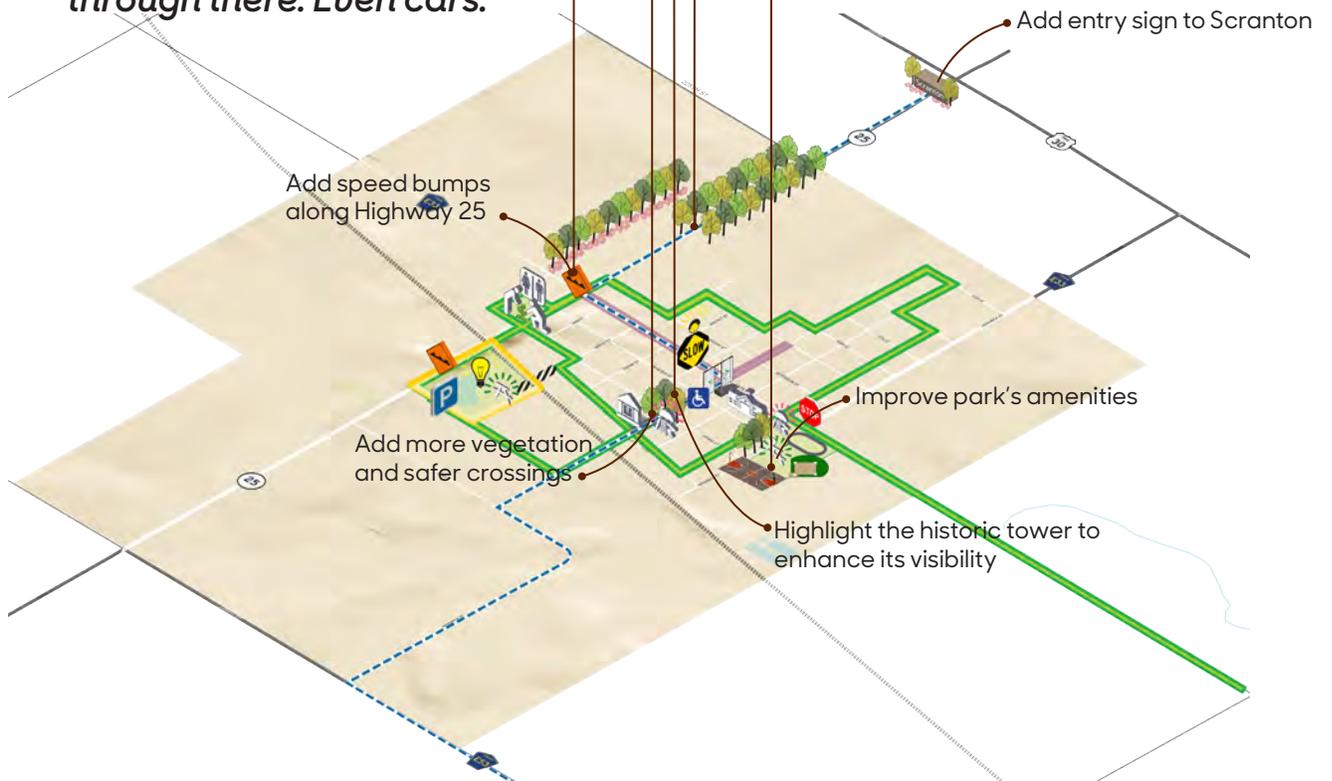
1



*"I know whenever Scranton [Manufacturing] lets out whatever shift it is, they go straight down State Street and they don't slow down. It's car after car after car like a parade."*



*"As far as the parks go, I think we have beautiful parks. I think they need some work."*



1

Improvements to the aged portions of the park system, along with new elements help to further enhance the public space and encourage various types of recreation.



2

The water tower gives Scranton a unique historical connection and a destination for visitors. Highlighting this feature will enhance its visibility and bring more people into town.



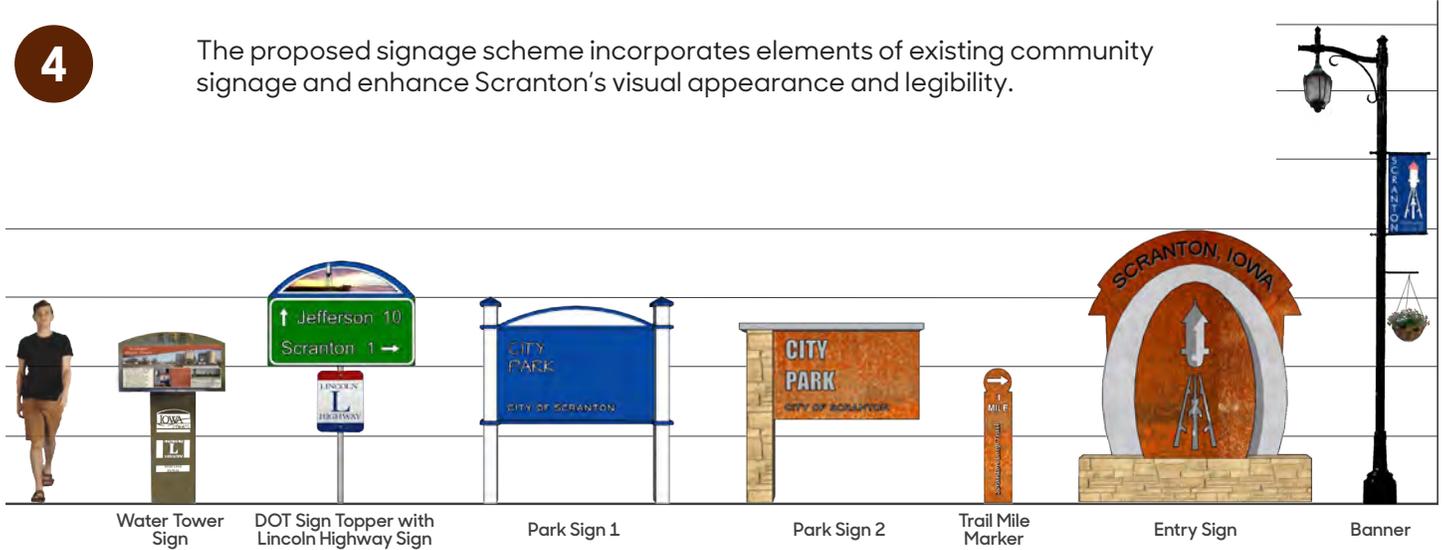
3

The design proposal for improvements to the trail and sidewalk networks in town addresses residents' desire to have safer options when getting around Scranton and connecting to each of the four parks.



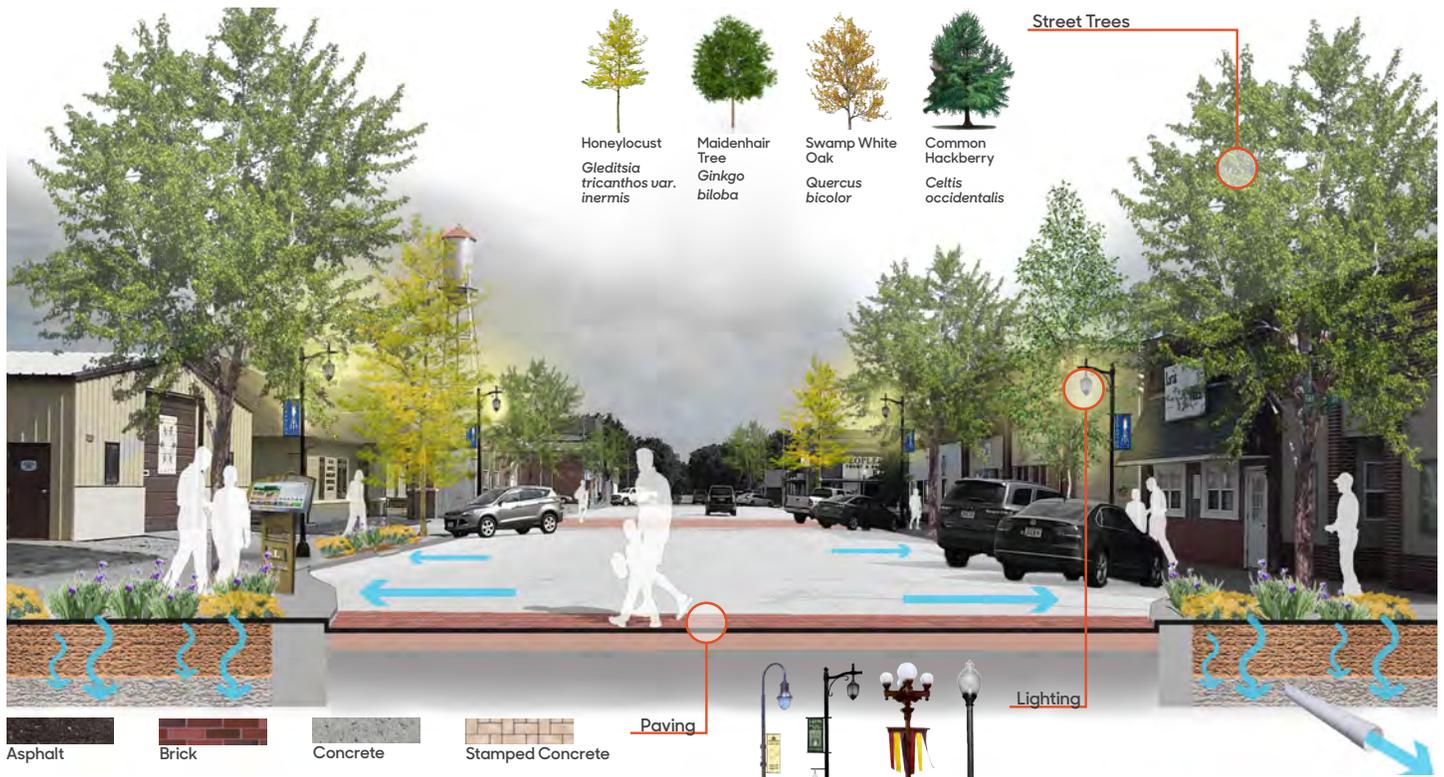
4

The proposed signage scheme incorporates elements of existing community signage and enhance Scranton's visual appearance and legibility.



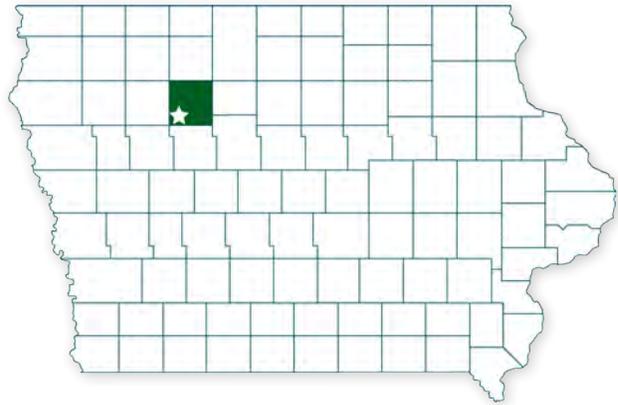
5

State Street and the downtown core are deeply connected with the historic Lincoln Highway. Scranton can impress visitors and residents with new street configurations, landscaping, and site furnishings to further enhance the Main Street appeal while addressing stormwater issues.



# Varina

Originally a railroad town, Varina (population 70) is a bedroom community in northwest Iowa bordered by County Roads C49 on the north and N21 on the east. One of the smaller communities to participate in the visioning program, Varina requested assistance in creating a community identity and improving its downtown and city park.



## Community Assessments

All focus-group demographics appreciate the safe environment Varina offers. The sense of community is also considered an asset. Broken and disconnected sidewalks are major barriers to pedestrians and cyclists in the community. Some residents would like a loop trail so that people don't have to walk and bike in the streets.

## Planning and Design Summary

Based on the needs and desires identified during focus groups with 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:

- Trail System – Create a community trail system with the potential to connect to the county trail system in the future.
- Parks and Recreation – Refurbish the currently defunct baseball field, adding a concession stand, soccer field, organized parking, and a memorial.
- Sidewalk System – Replace sidewalks on Main Street and add vegetated bump-outs at intersections and at midblock crossings; install new sidewalks in areas that currently have none.
- Way-finding and Signage – Develop a cohesive signage scheme that incorporates elements of existing signage while enhancing visual appearance and legibility.
- Economic Development– Encourage the start-up of local businesses to help Varina gain outside attention for further economic development.

**Trees Forever Facilitator:** *Jeff Jensen*

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

**Interns:** *Riley Dunn and Carole Joella Ustine, Jeffrey L. Bruce & Company*



*Performance objectives meeting*

## Steering Committee:

*Heather Anderson*

*Chris Archer*

*Emily Archer*

*Stephanie Archer*

*Kim Dewey*

*Ron Dewey*

*Dick Farrell*

*Nancy Kelly*



"The park is a good draw...to bring our kids together. It's a safe place for them to play. It's quiet."



1

"There [aren't] many sidewalks that are really accessible to use...a lot of them are crumbled or bent or have been raised up..."

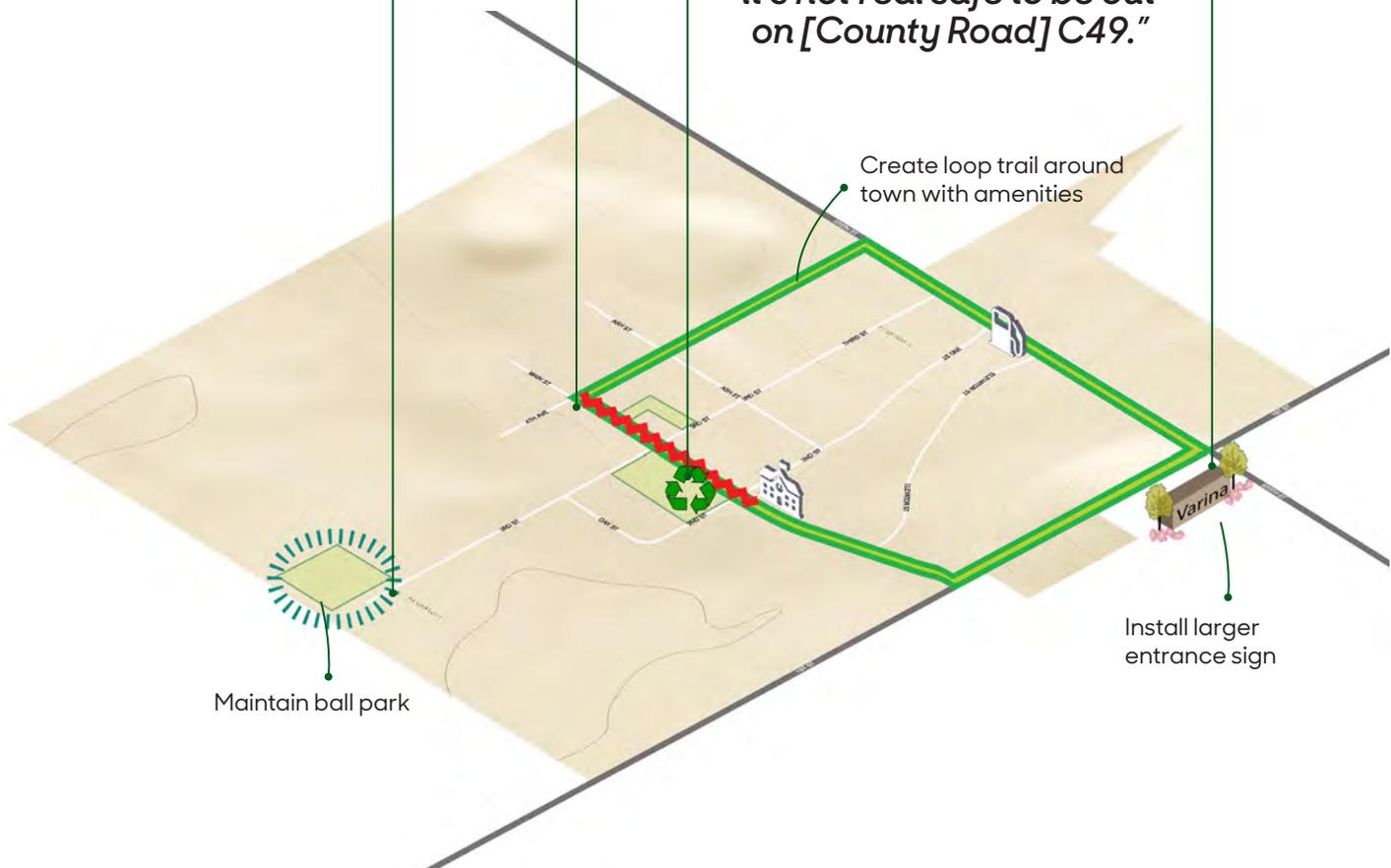
3



2

"We would probably ride bikes in town more...if we could safely. Some days it's not real safe to be out on [County Road] C49."

4



Create loop trail around town with amenities

Maintain ball park

Install larger entrance sign

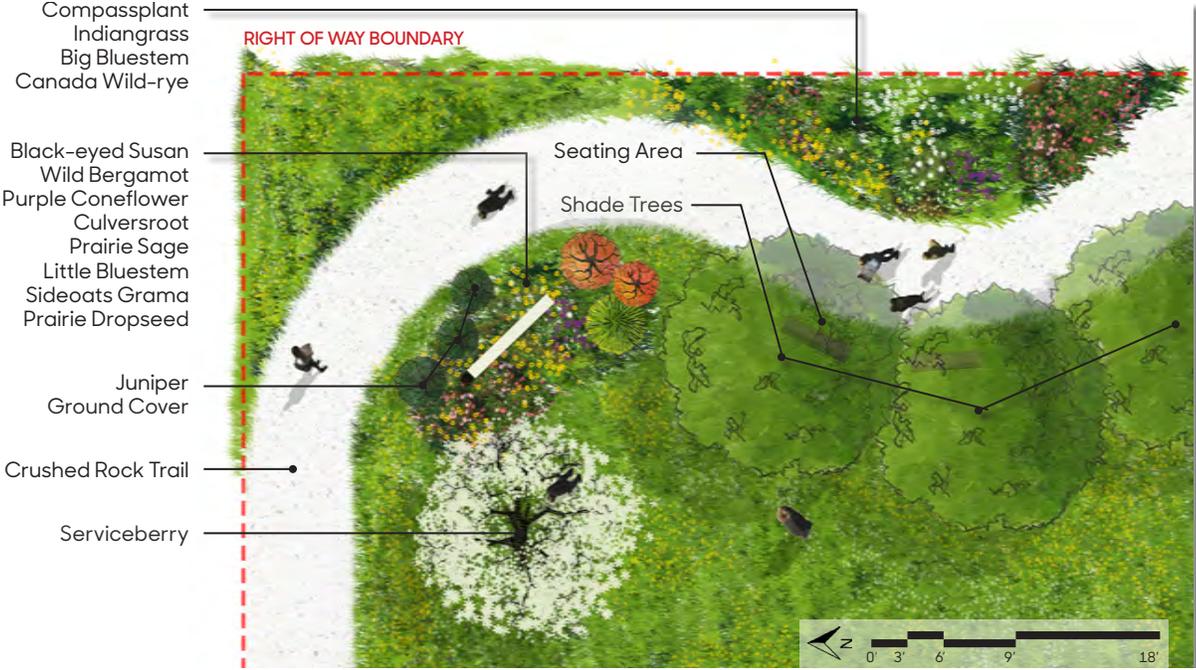
1

There are no existing sidewalks on most streets in town, and most of the existing sidewalks are cracked or covered with soil or grass. Sidewalks need to be replaced on Main Street to provide better access to the public buildings and spaces (library, post office, fire department, and city park).



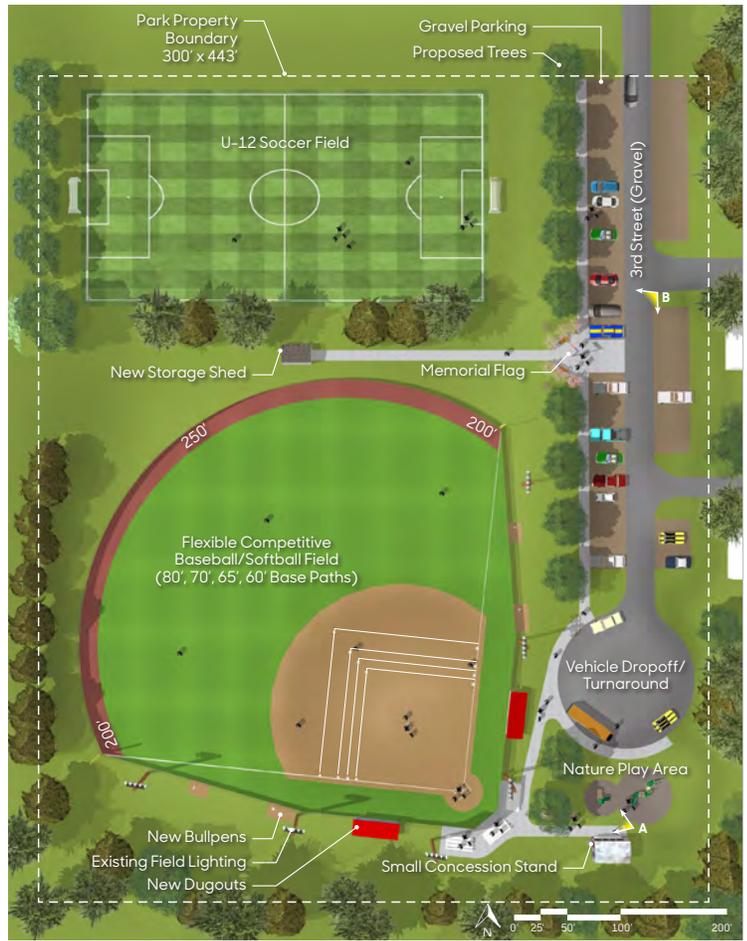
2

The primary entrance sign is located at the corner of County Roads C49 and N21/1st Street. Utilizing this area for signage highlights the proposed loop trail and entices passersby to inquire about Varina and stop in town.



3

During the focus groups, residents expressed the desire to re-establish athletic facilities in town. Currently, Varina is in communications with regional school officials to validate the potential to rebuild a baseball field in town. This baseball field has a "skinned" infield to accommodate nearly every age group.



4

This trail system offers opportunities for running, walking, skating, cycling and a possible connection with the future Pocahontas County trail system.



Benches



Drinking Fountains



Planters



Trash Cans





# Building Projects



# Acknowledgments

## Research Design

### **Julia Badenhope**

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

### **Sandra Oberbroeckling**

Project Manager, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program  
Extension Program Specialist, Extension and Community and Economic Development

## Field Documentation

### **Madison Dierks**

Landscape Architecture Intern

### **Katherine Gould**

Landscape Architecture Intern

### **Henry Herman**

Landscape Architecture Intern

## Analysis, Editing, and Layout

### **Sandra Oberbroeckling**

Project Manager, Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program  
Extension Program Specialist, Extension and Community and Economic Development

# 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 Clarksville, Parkersburg, and Tripoli.

## 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 Clarksville, Parkersburg, and Tripoli.

# Clarksville

*Population: 1,425*

*Community Visioning Year: 2010*

*Projects Completed: 10*

*Trees Forever Facilitator: Patty (Petersen) Reisinger*

*Landscape Architects: David Yocca, Jason Navota, Lybra Lindke*

*Intern: Chris Riggert*

The Clarksville case study demonstrates how the local steering committee convinced an initially reluctant community to embrace the visioning process. Although Clarksville collaborated with the Butler County Conservation Board to develop the Rolling Prairie Recreation Trail and has an established Trees Forever group and a recently-formed committee to promote healthy lifestyles, residents had what visioning committee member Jeff Kolb described as "the mentality that this is just Clarksville."

Despite this obstacle, the community has gone on to complete three projects and participate with Butler County in the Trees Forever Trails Visioning program.

The visioning committee successfully engaged the skeptical public with communication techniques that relied heavily on social learning. Along with making sure that the process received regular coverage in area newspapers, the committee arranged for Trees Forever field coordinator Patty (Petersen) Reisinger to talk to the local PEO group about Community Visioning before the process started, in order to send a cue to residents that "something big was going to happen."

Throughout the process, committee members personally invited residents and other local groups to attend meetings and workshops to pull in opinions from a variety of people. In addition to obtaining more input, this strategy increased the likelihood that residents would buy in to the concept plan and would be willing to donate their time and/or financial resources (*Sigma*, p. 18).

According to *Sigma*, "One way that people come to know and trust each other and learn to work together is through socializing at gathering places in town" (p. 12). The Clarksville visioning committee chose to hold the final presentation of the concept plan during the first annual Fun Day, a communitywide event held in a public park. The committee has also held fund-raisers in conjunction with community events, such as having a baked potato bar at local high school basketball games.

During the follow-up interview with Trees Forever, the Clarksville visioning committee noted that because of visioning, the



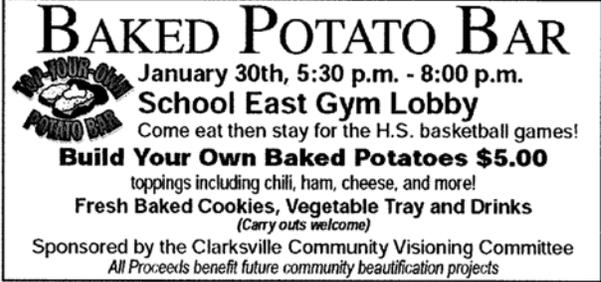
*Personal invitations to residents to attend Community Visioning focus groups ensured that residents came to the workshop.*

community is more aware of funding opportunities, which is evidenced by its success in acquiring the funds needed to build projects. Through local fund-raising efforts and a REAP grant from the Iowa DNR, Clarksville raised approximately \$150,000 to implement a park plan and install lights at the softball fields. Another volunteer group has raised \$42,000 of a \$70,000 project for a splash pad in another park.

Committee members attributed the group's sustainability to the fact that the visioning committee is a "doing" group that has accomplished some of its goals. "Success breeds success," one committee member said at the follow-up interview.

In addition, residents have become more invested in the community. For example, during a site visit, while documenting the recently opened Reading Park, student interns encountered Cindy Wedeking, one of the Clarksville librarians, who came to the park to water the annual planters. She explained that she and the other librarian take turns watering the planters.

The conversation with the Wedeking revealed that Reading Park has become a popular community gathering place. The community holds concerts in a recreated band shell located in the park, drawing as many as 1,200 attendees on one occasion. An amenity such as Reading Park has a significant influence on "[p]eople's affection for and commitment to their community..." (Sigma, p. 15).



**BAKED POTATO BAR**  
January 30th, 5:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.  
**School East Gym Lobby**  
Come eat then stay for the H.S. basketball games!  
**Build Your Own Baked Potatoes \$5.00**  
toppings including chili, ham, cheese, and more!  
**Fresh Baked Cookies, Vegetable Tray and Drinks**  
(Carry outs welcome)  
Sponsored by the Clarksville Community Visioning Committee  
All Proceeds benefit future community beautification projects

*The Clarksville visioning committee scheduled a fund-raiser in conjunction with local high school basketball games. Source: Clarksville Star, January 26, 2011.*

The Clarksville entrance sign is another new "point of pride" in the community. The project was funded by a Butler County Foundation grant and constructed by volunteers, one of whom expressed the opinion that Clarksville "didn't need such a

## Sources

*Clarksville Visioning Application*

*Conversation with Cindy Wedeking,  
Clarksville Librarian, July 2016*

*Field notes by Meredith Borchardt, June  
2016*

*Field Notes by Madison Dierks, Katherine  
Gould, and Henry Herman, July 2016*

*Follow-up Interview by Meredith Borchardt  
with the Clarksville Visioning Committee  
in August 2016*

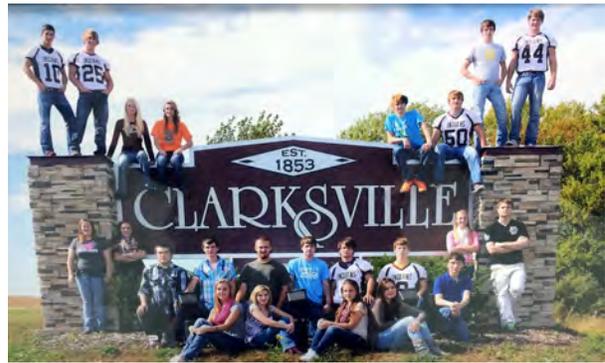
*Press clippings from the Clarksville Star, the  
Allison Butler County Tribune-Journal,  
and the Waverly Democrat*



*Above: Clarksville librarian Cindy Wedeking waters the planters in Reading Park.*

*Top right: Volunteers construct the Clarksville entrance sign at Highways 3 and 188.*

*Left: In 2014, seniors requested that their class picture be taken at the entrance sign.*



fancy sign.” However, upon hearing positive feedback about the project, that individual “changed his thinking,” according to steering committee members. Community pride was also demonstrated by students in the 2014 senior class, who opted to have their class photo taken at the sign.

## **Project Implementation**

The Clarksville visioning committee began the implementation process with a sign at the south entrance to the community at the intersection of Highways 3 and 188. Although small in scope relative to the other

project proposals, this entrance sign had an immediate impact on the community by making it visible to travelers when it had once been hidden. The entrance sign project was followed by a cleanup day at the south entrance, in which a number of local youth participated.

Subsequent projects that Clarksville has completed are Reading Park and a crosswalk between Reading Park and the Clarksville Public Library. As noted in the aforementioned conversation with a Clarksville librarian, the Reading Park project was a popular improvement to Clarksville.



*Top: A new ADA-accessible crosswalk connect the Clarksville Library to Reading Park.*

*Bottom: The Reading Park band shell is a popular venue for community concerts.*

Two projects not proposed in the visioning process but that the committee believes are direct results of Clarksville's participation in Community Visioning include "Light Up the Field," in which lights were installed at the softball fields, and the ongoing effort to raise funds to add a splash pad to Volunteer Park.

# Parkersburg

*Population: 1,425*

*Community Visioning Years: 1999 and 2009*

*Projects Completed: 10*

*Trees Forever Facilitator: Patty (Petersen)  
Reisinger*

*Landscape Architect: Meg Flenker*

*Interns (2009): Emily Swihart and Lily Love-  
Toppar*

Parkersburg has participated in the Community Visioning program twice, completing the process for the first time in 1999 and again in 2009. As a result of going through the program in 1999, trees had been planted along the then US Highway 20 corridor, enhancements to Depot Prairie Park were partially complete, and the downtown streetscape project was well under way.

Two major changes impacted the Parkersburg between 1999 and 2009. In 2003, US Highway 20 was relocated five miles south of town, reducing daily traffic volumes on State Highway 14/17 (the old US 20 corridor) from 6,300 to 3,800.

Five years later, on May 25, 2008, an EF5 tornado ripped through the southern half of the town, destroying numerous houses and businesses, two banks, and the high school. The storm essentially obliterated the earlier tree plantings along the Highway 14/57 corridor.

Following the initial clean up, the city council formed the Long-term Tornado Recovery Committee. This committee worked with the city and Parkersburg Economic Development to develop a

strategic recovery plan, of which the 2009 Parkersburg visioning committee was a component. As part of the disaster-recovery plan, the visioning committee had a framework within which to set goals and prioritize projects.

The Parkersburg visioning committee understood the importance of community buy in and the need to build relationships and trust with residents (*Sigma*, p. 10). The committee made an effort to engage the public by holding open houses and serving food, having presentations at the farmers market, and holding the public presentation of the concept plan in conjunction with the Veterans Breakfast and the Classic Car Show. Fifty residents attended the public presentation. Once the concept plan was finished, the committee posted the presentation boards at city hall. However, the local press did not cover key meetings in the process such as the design workshop and the public presentation.

This lack of coverage may have contributed to some complaints by residents. During the follow-up interview with Trees Forever, committee members said that some residents weren't aware of the visioning process in Parkersburg

***"You've got to have a core group of people who really form relationships and move the projects and aspirations forward."***

—Chris Luhring, Parkersburg  
City Administrator

and questioned some of the decisions made after projects were completed. The interview participants noted the importance of having meeting minutes and the feasibility study.

Despite this issue, the community was able to complete 10 projects and has identified three additional projects—a ball field complex, a swimming pool, and improvements to Schwartz Park. Because so many trees were lost, the community also participated in a Recover, Replant and Restore program conducted by Trees Forever.



*Residents identify priority areas on a map of Parkersburg for landscape architect Meg Flenker.*

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

City administrator Chris Luhring attributes the group's continued success to the planning process. "You never get money without having a goal," said Luhring. "You have to be able to articulate your goals to get money, so you can't get money unless you do visioning."

Participants in the follow-up interview voiced a similar opinion: "Things fell together because we went about it the right way and took the time to plan."

Luhring also mentioned the passion of committee members and many residents. "People recognize those with a passion to get things done and passion is contagious."

## Sources

*Field Notes by Madison Dierks, Katherine Gould, and Henry Herman, July 2016*

*Follow-up Interview by Meredith Borchardt with the Parkersburg Visioning Committee in February 2014*

*Interview with Chris Luhring, Parkersburg City Administrator*

*Parkersburg 2009 Visioning Application*

*Press clippings from the Parkersburg Eclipse-News Review, the South Hardin Signal Review, the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier, and the Muscatine Journal*

*Site visit by Sandra Oberbroeckling in summer 2006*



The landscape design for the Highway 14/57 corridor through Parkersburg includes curb ramps, crosswalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and vegetation.

## Project Implementation

Parkersburg was unique among visioning communities it had access to federal disaster funds because of the tornado. As a result, the design proposals were much more aggressive than what would be typically proposed for a small, rural community.

At the same time, committee members valued landscape architect Meg Flenker's sense of the types of projects that would be feasible for the community. The proposed designs, even those as complex as the Highway 14/57 corridor landscaping design, were well within the realm of possibility.

The community received funding from FEMA and the Iowa Department of Transportation to upgrade the highway

corridor and fix streets, sewers, and water lines damaged during the tornado. In the end, the city only paid 7% of the total cost of the highway project, which took approximately two years to complete.

The impact of the new highway corridor is significant, according to visioning committee members. They believe that having a trail along the Highway 14/57 corridor has improved the quality of life in Parkersburg by providing residents a safe place to walk and cycle, as well as connecting different parts of the community for all travelers. These added amenities contribute to residents' attachment to their community and how much they value the place in which they live (*Sigma*, p. 15).



*Amenities such as seating, vegetation, and lighting along the recreation trail have a positive impact on residents' community attachment.*



*The downtown streetscape was a visioning proposal from 1999 and was not damaged by the 2008 tornado.*

# Tripoli

Population: 1,313

Community Visioning Year: 2012

Projects Completed: 6

Trees Forever Facilitator: Meredith Borchardt

Landscape Architects: Craig Ritland and

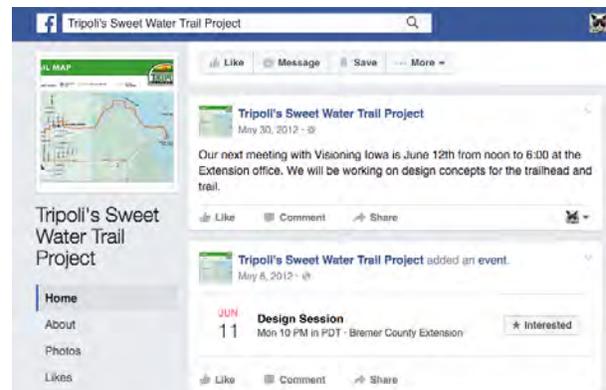
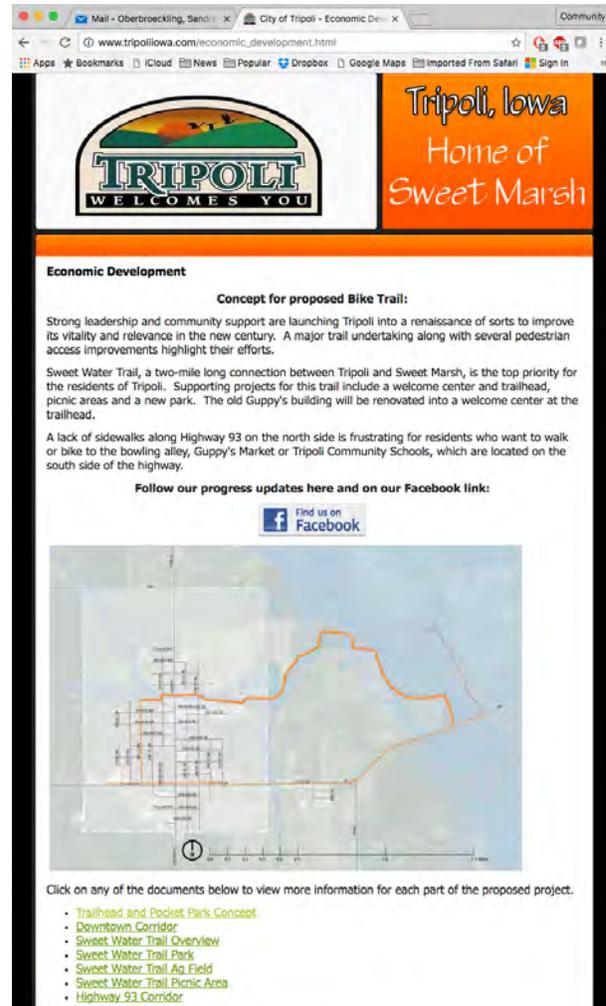
Samantha Price

Intern: Shu Liu

The Tripoli visioning process substantiates the impact of effective communication on the successful implementation of transportation enhancement projects. Tripoli participated in Community Visioning in 2012 and in only four years has completed six projects focused primarily on developing a trail to the Sweet Water Marsh.

The Tripoli visioning committee engaged residents in a variety of ways, both physically and virtually. The committee announced meetings and workshops on Sweet Water Trail Project Facebook page and later, during project implementation, members posted photos of projects before, during, and after completion. The concept designs are posted on the City of Tripoli's economic development website. During a follow-up interview with Trees Forever, the committee members mentioned that using social media helped connect youth and former residents with the project.

More traditional methods for engaging the public included press releases to the local media, fliers, presentations to community organizations, and word of mouth. The mayor wrote about the visioning process a number of times in his monthly column appearing in the local newspaper.



Through the city's website and social media, the Tripoli visioning committee was able to reach a wider audience and engage more residents.

**"About 90 people have donated time, services, labor, etc., to develop the new welcome center."**

—Jay Ranard  
Tripoli Mayor

Near the end of the planning process, the visioning committee began taking the projects to the people. The group created a float for the Tripoli Days parade and displayed the presentation boards during the Sportsman Club's fish fry. After implementation had started, the community hosted a breakfast at City Hall at which the presentation boards were on display. By communicating via social networks, the group gained the trust of residents, making them more likely to buy in to the concept plan and to donate their time and/or financial resources (*Sigma*, p. 18).

The Tripoli case study also demonstrates the impact of compatible design proposals on project implementation. Jay Ranard, Tripoli mayor, described the concept sketches as "powerful." Throughout the project and into implementation, visioning committee has relied heavily on the presentation boards; the completed projects strongly resemble the proposed designs.

## **Project Implementation**

Most of the work on projects in Tripoli was done with volunteer labor and donated equipment, indicating that residents feel strongly attached to the place they live. According Raynard, approximately 90 people volunteered their time and services



*Volunteers helped with planting at the welcome center.*

## **Sources**

*City of Tripoli Economic Development Website*

*Field Notes by Madison Dierks, Katherine Gould, and Henry Herman, July 2016*

*Follow-up Interview by Meredith Borchardt and Patty (Petersen) Reisinger with Tripoli Mayor Jay Raynard in February 2014*

*Press Clippings from the Tripoli Leader*

*Tripoli Sweet Water Trail Project Facebook Page*

*Tripoli Visioning Application*



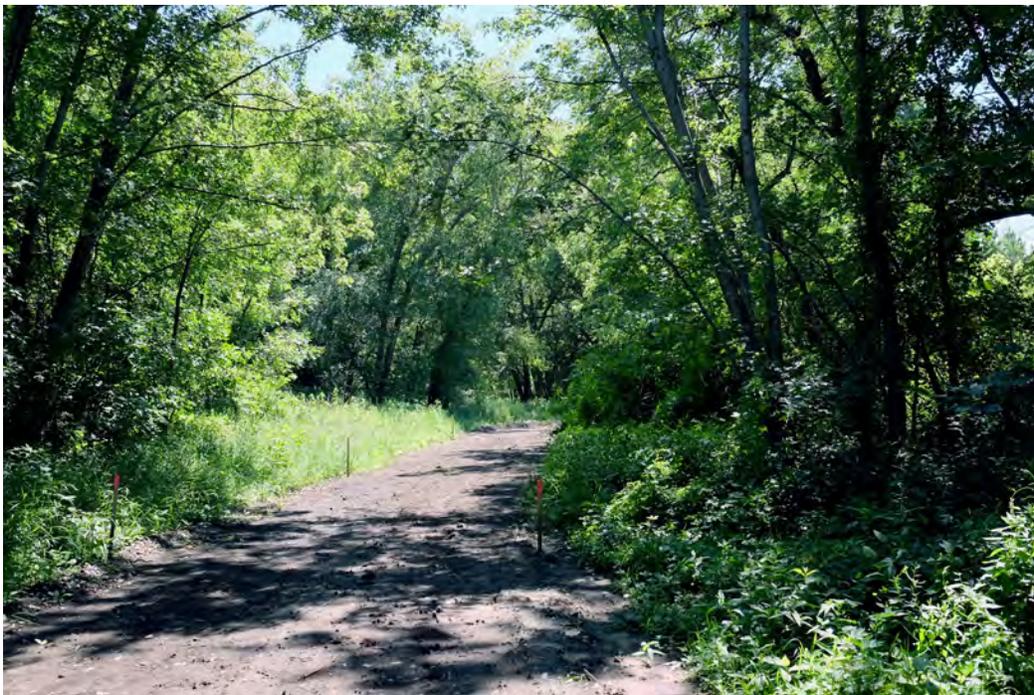
*The Sweet Water Trail trailhead and welcome center was built completely by volunteers of all ages.*

to complete the welcome center located at the Sweet Water Trail trailhead. Raynard noted the increased optimism and enhanced social connections among residents since completing the projects. This observation is reinforced by the results of the Sigma study, which illustrated the significance of social ties (p. 11), as well as amenities (p. 15), to community attachment.

In addition to the welcome center, Tripoli has gone on to develop a pocket park on Main Street, restore and plant native vegetation along the Sweet Water Creek streambank, install a bridge over the creek, and add more sidewalks in town. The ribbon-cutting ceremony for Sweet Water Trail was held on August 6, 2016.



*Local youth assemble picnic tables for the gazebo park adjacent to the welcome center.*



*Top: The gazebo park is located adjacent to the welcome center and along the Sweet Water Trail.*

*Bottom: Now partially paved, the Sweet Water Trail will eventually connect to the Sweet Marsh Wildlife Management Area, making it more accessible to cyclists and pedestrians.*

# 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 2004, 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 to 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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