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Land Use

This Chapter outlines land use goals, objectives, and strategies, defines land use designations, and describes the desired future land uses for Story County.

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Land Use Planning

Planning for future land uses allows Story County to determine the best locations for future growth and development within the county. Good land use planning involves community engagement, wise natural resource management, and accurate projections in relation to where and how growth will and should occur. Furthermore, it is important to establish unique characteristics of the area, themes to implement, and types of land use strategies to help build upon that character. The following goals and strategies help guide the decision-making process as Story County continues to grow and prosper.

The Legal Authority for Zoning

Story County, Iowa, is authorized to regulate land use and development through its right to zone in accordance with a comprehensive plan under the Code of Iowa Chapter 335.5. Additionally, there is authority granted to counties to conduct land use planning under Chapter 352 of the Code addressing agricultural preservation and the right to farm. Within the context of this authority, the Story County Board of Supervisors and Planning and Zoning Commission created the Cornerstone to Capstone Plan to guide land use and development activities in unincorporated Story County.

Goals and Strategies

Land Use Goal 1

Conduct a comprehensive review of Land Development Regulations, including rezonings, as necessary, to implement C2C and future land use map.

Strategies

- Classify the following designations on the Future Land Use Map: Agricultural Conservation Area, Natural Resource Area, Rural Residential Area, Rural Village Area, Urban Expansion Area, and Commercial-Industrial Area.
- Through ongoing communications with Story County's communities, annually review the Future Land Use Map to ensure designations remain relevant and serve to guide growth and development.
- Adopt or amend implementation measures necessary to fully implement the goals and strategies of the Future Land Use Map and the Cornerstone to Capstone (C2C) Plan.





Land Use Goal 2

Preserve, protect, and plan around the physical characteristics of the land, including floodplains, steep slopes, wetlands, rich soils, and rare geologic or environmental characteristics.

Strategies

- Designate natural resources, including inventoried Sensitive Areas as Natural Resource Areas on the Future Land Use Map. As new areas are inventoried, amend the Future Land Use Map accordingly.
- Establish strategies to ensure preservation and protection of the aggregate resources and deposits such as gravel and sand located in Story County from encroachment by incompatible uses.
- Continue to implement a strong floodplain management program that incorporates regulations, mapping, permitting requirements, and participation in the Community Rating System to accommodate flood water and mitigate risks achieving the following:
 - Educates residents about flood hazards.
 - Provides information about flood insurance.
 - Implements policies and measures that protect people and property from flood hazards.
 - Requires responsible building practices.
 - Protects the natural floodplain functions.



Land Use Goal 3

Establish Minimum Levels of Service (MLS) requirements and Establish location guidelines for proposed subdivisions.

Strategies

- Encourage new urban density development within city boundaries or within appropriately planned locations as designated on the Future Land Use Map.
- Locate commercial and industrial uses in urban areas except where uses have specific requirements which justify a potential location in rural areas.
- Establish Minimum Levels of Service (MLS) requirements to ensure that adequate public facilities and services are available, or can be provided, to new development.
- Encourage future land uses that efficiently match the capacity of the existing transportation system.



GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND STRATEGIES

Land Use Goal 4

Evaluate short and long-term financial impacts to the County budget when considering development proposals.

Strategies

- Review proposed subdivisions in Rural Residential Areas on a case-by-case basis.
- Establish location guidelines for Story County to follow in the review process for new subdivisions within Rural Residential Area or Urban Expansion Area.

Land Use Goal 5

Establish open space buffers or greenways that provide connectivity from one city to the next.

Current efforts underway include the acquisition of Jordan Wildlife Area along the South Skunk River south of Ames.

Strategies

- When adjacent to agricultural areas or natural resources, minimize development impacts through transitional uses, edge treatments, and other appropriate measures.
- As part of ongoing communications with communities, define appropriate community separation strategies that help the community to sustain its identity.
- To create linkages within Story County, coordinate trails and transportation improvements identified through the C2C Plan with development proposals located in close proximity to communities.

Land Use Goal 6

Continue to protect and preserve Story County's agricultural resources for current and future generations.

Strategies

- Promote the use of conservation practices to protect agricultural land and water quality.
- Promote the long term value of agriculture through voluntary, incentive-based programs and strategies, and identify partners to facilitate the creation and use of such programs.
- Conduct best management practice test studies and experiments on water quality improvement projects.
- Continue to foster land strategies and regulations that conserve the productivity and availability of high value agricultural lands for the production of food and fiber.
- Seek to reduce conflicts that may arise between development and agricultural practices.

Minimum Level of Service (MLS)

Story County residents rely on facilities and services to define and maintain their quality of life, health, and well-being. Public facilities and services are often taken for granted. Yet, without coordination and conscientious planning for future growth, facilities and services may be interrupted or inadequate. Existing facilities and services must be able to support new development or provisions for improvements must be made where deficiencies exist.

Minimum levels of service (MLS) requirements regarding public facilities and services will help ensure that Story County strives to maintain the quality of life for existing and future development. Levels of service standards are usually quantifiable measures of the amount of provided public facilities or services and measure the quality of some public facilities. Levels of service standards are measures of the quality of life of Story County. The standards should be based on the vision for our future and our values.

Following adoption of the C2C Plan, as part of the Plan's implementation strategies, minimum levels of service requirements will be identified and adopted as a component of Story County's development review process.



Land Use Goal 7

Identify and preserve areas of historical and cultural significance.

Strategies

- Develop a preservation plan that includes an inventory of potentially culturally and/or historically-significant properties and establishes strategies for their use and preservation.
- Encourage the preservation and renovation of existing structures, neighborhoods, or districts that may qualify as designated historic landmarks.



Land Use Goal 8

Ensure that land use transitions are gradual or designed to reduce potential incompatibilities among land uses.

Strategies

- Establish design and development standards to enhance collaboration between development, agriculture, and natural and recreation resources.
- Design new residential development to maintain the rural character and protect sensitive environmental features and agricultural uses.
- Ensure new development is setback an adequate distance from existing and proposed major utility transmission lines and pipelines.



Future Land Use Map and Designations

To facilitate the orderly development, use, and preservation of land in unincorporated Story County, the County established a Future Land Use Map with a set of land use designations and strategies specific to each designation. These designations relate to certain zoning districts. The definition and identification of future land use designations shown on the Future Land Use Map are:

Agricultural Conservation Area:

These areas encompass large areas of highly valuable farmland, with farming and agricultural production as the primary activity.

Natural Resource Area:

Natural areas, floodplains, green spaces, and parks help create open space linkages between the countryside and communities and make up this designation. The Future Land Use Map identifies certain natural features in the county in order to preserve unique habitats, natural or sensitive areas, as well as open and recreational spaces.

Rural Residential Area:

The Rural Residential Area designation offers the rural housing market segment choices in the unincorporated areas of the county. They are characterized by residential land uses adapted for a rural or agricultural setting at low, non-urban densities. Urban level services are not provided in these areas, and these are not priority areas for infrastructure development.

Rural Village Area:

Existing areas characterized by a variety of land uses in one location are designated as Rural Village Area. These areas have unique land use patterns that provide valued and established services for citizens in Story County. Roads in these areas are generally platted as right-of-way and maintained by Story County. The uses are served by private wastewater treatment systems (septic) and private water sources – wells and rural water systems. As shown on the Future Land Use Map, these areas contain the rural villages of Iowa Center, Shipley, and Fernald.

Commercial-Industrial Area:

The Commercial-Industrial Area designation supports the long-term planning objective of accommodating future demand for types of commercial and industrial growth

that may be best located in a rural setting outside of an urbanized area.

Urban Expansion Area:

The Urban Expansion Area designation reflects those areas identified by certain communities as future growth areas. Development proposed in these areas should be encouraged to be annexed into the neighboring city in order for an urban level of service to be provided. Proposed land use and regulations should comply with that city's plans and standards as appropriate.



Zoning Compatibility Matrix

(ZONING DISTRICTS FOR UNINCORPORATED AREAS)

FUTURE LAND USE DESIGNATIONS	A-1	A-2	A-R	R-1	R-2	RMH	C-LI	HI	GB-C	R-M	R-C
AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION AREA	●	●	●								
NATURAL RESOURCE AREA									●		●
RURAL RESIDENTIAL AREA			●	●	●	●					●
RURAL VILLAGE AREA			●	●	●	●	●			●	
COMMERCIAL-INDUSTRIAL AREA		●					●	●		●	
URBAN EXPANSION AREA				●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Establishment of Zoning Districts

1. In order to carry out the purpose and intent of the Ordinance, the unincorporated area of Story County, Iowa, is hereby divided into the following base district classifications:

- A-1 Agricultural District
- A-2 Argibusiness District
- A-R Agricultural Residential District
- R-1 Transitional Residential District
- R-2 Urban Residential District
- RMH Residential Manufactured Housing District
- C-LI Commercial/Light Industrial District
- HI Heavy Industrial
- GB-C Greenbelt-Conservation District

2. In addition to the base districts identified above, the following overlay districts are established.

- R-M Residential/Mixed-Use (Overlay) District
- R-C Residential/Conservation Design (Overlay) District

Excerpted from the Story County, Iowa Code of Ordinances, Chapter 86.

AGRICULTURAL CONSERVATION AREA

Agricultural Conservation Area





Agricultural Conservation Area

Farming and agricultural production is the primary component of the Agricultural Conservation Area. More than 90% of the unincorporated land area of Story County is used for agricultural purposes. Nearly 80% of the land is classified as “high value” agricultural land, according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) definitions. In regard to soil productivity, topography, rural character, availability of agricultural support services, and isolation from incompatible land uses, the majority of unincorporated Story County is prime land for agricultural activities.

Preservation and enhancement of valuable agricultural land has continually remained a top priority in Story County. Existing State and Federal policies recognize that prime agricultural land is a resource to be protected. Farms are significant historic and economic elements in Story County and play a large role in the quality of life to many county residents.

The following principles help guide future land use decisions regarding the Agricultural Conservation Area:

Principle 1:

Conserving agricultural land, as well as agricultural practices, is a fundamental principle in Story County. Areas are identified, conserved, and enhanced within the county for farming practices and agricultural production.

Principle 2:

Continue to work towards strategies that promote alternative agricultural methods that work in harmony with conventional operations. A variety of farm types is a good thing.

Principle 3:

Encourage high-value agricultural lands to remain as agricultural and discourage non-agricultural development of such lands. Direct future non-agricultural development toward the designated Urban Expansion, Rural Residential, Rural Village, and Commercial-Industrial Area designations on the Future Land Use Map.

Principle 4:

Design areas identified for development to limit conflicts between agricultural uses and rural residences and other types of land uses. Through development practices preserve and protect prime agricultural lands and the ability to engage in agricultural activities.

Principle 5:

Promote the continued health of agriculture through an ongoing planning process to identify partnerships and develop voluntary, incentive-based programs and strategies.

NATURAL RESOURCE AREA





Natural Resource Area

Certain aspects of the county, including clean air, water, open spaces, native prairie, mature trees and fertile soil all contribute to the quality of life in Story County. Areas designated as Natural Resource Area illustrate natural resource elements which present limitations to development and/or contain sensitive environmental conditions requiring special design and development standards when development is proposed. Chapter Four of this Plan defines goals and objectives to guide Story County with the identification and enhancement of natural resources and recreational opportunities within the county. As natural resources are identified as defined through Chapter 4, Story County will take steps necessary to amend the Natural Resource Area designation on the Future Land Use Map accordingly.

To help preserve Story County's natural resources, the following principles have been developed for the Natural Resource Area designation:

Principle 1:

Generally discourage development within these areas. In unique circumstances where appropriate development types may enhance the area, recognize and encourage such approaches.

Principle 2:

Mitigate impacts of proposed development contiguous to areas identified as Natural Resource Area.

Principle 3:

Consider areas identified as Natural Resource Area for inclusion in the Greenbelt-Conservation District of the Land Development Regulations and/or take necessary steps to ensure resource conservation through other mechanisms.

Principle 4:

Develop site planning and performance standards to apply to properties designated as Natural Resource Area not included in the Greenbelt-Conservation District and in which limited development may occur.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL AREA





Rural Residential Area

The Rural Residential Area offers rural housing market choices in unincorporated areas of Story County, typically with larger lot sizes than available within city limits. The existing residential land uses that are found in rural Story County provide a desirable housing market worthy of both protection and cultivation.

In certain circumstances, some rural residential developments will not have full range of public utilities or may be limited such as lacking public sector sewer, natural gas and paved roads. Types of services such as water, wastewater, roads, utilities and others normally provided for development when it occurs inside a city are likely not available or, at the minimum, not available at “urban” levels in the Rural Residential Area. Story County does not identify these areas for infrastructure development and/or improvement.

The following principles have been developed for the Rural Residential Area designation:

Principle 1:

Ensure that new development is sensitive to the predominantly rural nature of the areas.

Principle 2:

Encourage clustering of residential sites to limit the short-term and long-term costs associated with infrastructure improvements and the distribution of public services.

Principle 3:

Review design and development standards to ensure that conflicts between proposed development and agricultural and natural resources are minimized. Design new residential development to maintain the open character of rural areas and to protect and maintain agricultural uses and sensitive environmental features.

Principle 4:

When development is adjacent to agricultural uses, provide adequate buffers to minimize conflicts.

Principle 5:

Locate proposed subdivisions on a case-by-case basis. Establish and use location guidelines in the review process for new rural subdivisions.

Principle 6:

Encourage proposed development to take access off existing paved roads unless it can be demonstrated that Minimum Levels of Service requirements may be met or development can mitigate impacts.

Principle 7:

Mitigate and manage stormwater run-off, soil erosion, and wastewater discharge according to IDNR and Story County standards.

RURAL VILLAGE AREA





Rural Village Area

Rural Village Areas are existing developed areas within unincorporated Story County characterized by a variety of land uses existing in one location. At the time Story County was platted, these areas were platted at urban-level densities, similar to incorporated towns with blocks and lots. These areas have some existing residential platted lots, some lots with homes from older housing stock, while other lots are vacant and appropriate for future development. The opportunity exists for Rural Village Areas to become vital places that serve many of the social, economic, and cultural needs of the area's rural residents.

With this mix of uses, these areas provide valued services for adjacent areas. Future development, infrastructure, and services in these areas focus on minimizing impacts outside of these areas and enhancing the support that they provide to nearby residents and businesses.

The following principles have been developed for the Rural Village Area Designation:

Principle 1:

Continue to promote improvements and re-investments.

Principle 2:

Support private efforts to seek grants and other sources of funding for the redevelopment and revitalization.

Principle 3:

Review design and development standards to ensure that conflicts between proposed development and agricultural and natural resources are minimized. Design new residential development to maintain the open character of rural areas and to protect and maintain agricultural uses and sensitive environmental features.

Principle 4:

When development is located adjacent to agricultural uses, provide adequate buffers to minimize conflicts with agricultural practices.

Principle 5:

Encourage proposed development to take access off existing paved roads unless it can be demonstrated that Minimum Levels of Service requirements may be met or development can mitigate impacts.

Principle 6:

Mitigate and manage stormwater run-off, soil erosion, and wastewater discharge according to IDNR and Story County standards.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL AREA





Commercial and Industrial Areas

The Commercial-Industrial Area designation supports the long term planning objective of accommodating future demand for types of commercial and industrial growth that may be best located in a rural setting outside of an urbanized area.

The following principles have been developed for the Commercial and Industrial Area designation:

Principle 1:

Give preference to clustering uses to limit short-term and long-term costs associated with infrastructure improvements and the distribution of public services.

Principle 2:

Support new commercial and industrial development within incorporated areas and areas where infrastructure exists and extensions are logical.

Principle 3:

Where appropriate, support expansion of existing and/or new industrial or commercial development when it can be demonstrated that agricultural and natural resources can be preserved and protected.

Principle 4:

Provide adequate buffers to agricultural uses with new development to minimize conflicts.

Principle 5:

Review design and development standards to ensure that conflicts between proposed development and agricultural and natural resources are minimized. Design new development to maintain the open character of rural areas and to protect and maintain agricultural uses and sensitive environmental features.

Principle 6:

Mitigate and manage stormwater run-off, soil erosion, and wastewater discharge according to IDNR and Story County standards.

Principle 7:

Encourage proposed development to take access off existing paved roads unless it can be demonstrated that Minimum Levels of Service requirements may be met or development can mitigate impacts.

URBAN EXPANSION AREA





Urban Expansion Area

Story County and all the communities share similar concerns about issues and impacts from development that occurs in areas surrounding the cities, such as:

- Overlapping regulations of different local jurisdictions;
- Inconsistencies among different land use strategies; and
- Impacts of development on rural/agricultural activities.

The Urban Expansion Area helps address issues that may arise in these areas of joint planning and coordination. The Urban Expansion Area designation reflects those areas identified by individual communities through the planning process as future growth areas and/or are mapped by the community with future land uses. Areas outside the Urban Expansion Area, however still within two miles of a community (and their two-mile statutory subdivision review authority pursuant to the Code of Iowa), represent areas that communities do not foresee growing into within the planning horizon of this Plan. As such, these areas are designated on the Future Land Use Map as a designation other than Urban Expansion Area.

Principle 1:

Development in the Urban Expansion Area occurs in accordance with the applicable city's future land use plans and goals.

Principle 2:

Encourage annexation when development is proposed.

Principle 3:

Where the applicable city has determined annexation is not appropriate at that time of a development proposal, coordinate a cooperative review/approval between Story County and the city according to the following standards:

1. Development occurs at an urban density/scale using city development standards where applicable.
2. Use conditional rezoning agreements and annexation agreements to ensure development is built so as to facilitate a seamless transition into the city when the area is annexed.

Principle 4:

Review design and development standards to ensure that conflicts between proposed development and agricultural and natural resources are minimized. Design new residential development to maintain the open character of rural areas and to protect and maintain agricultural uses and sensitive environmental features.

Principle 5:

When development is located adjacent to agricultural uses, provide adequate buffers to minimize conflicts.

Principle 6:

Encourage proposed development to take access off existing paved roads unless it can be demonstrated that Minimum Levels of Service requirements may be met or development can mitigate impacts.

Principle 7:

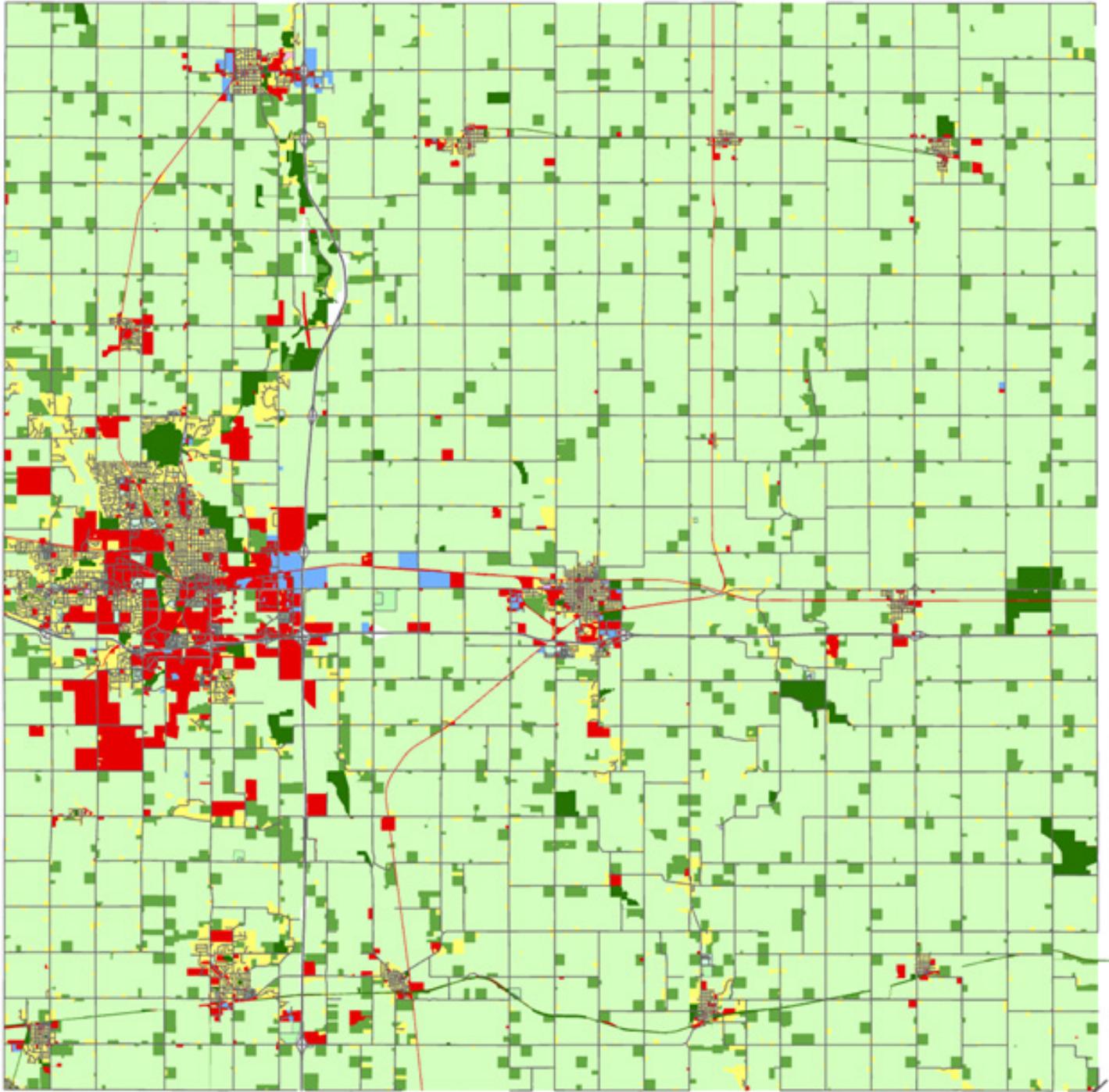
Mitigate and manage stormwater run-off, soil erosion, and wastewater discharge according to IDNR and Story County standards.

Principle 8:

Encourage clustering of residential sites with Urban Expansion Area designation to limit the short-term and long-term costs associated with infrastructure improvements and the distribution of public services.

EXISTING AND FUTURE LAND USE MAPS

Existing Land Use



This map illustrates the type and location of the following land uses in Story County: agricultural, agricultural dwelling, commercial, industrial, parks and open space, residential, railroad, university, civic, and government owned.

This map provides context for the current state of Story County, and will serve as a base to be further analyzed in creating the Future Land Use Map and Plan for Story County.

Legend

- Property Class
- A
- A, AD
- C
- I
- R
- Roads
- Parks

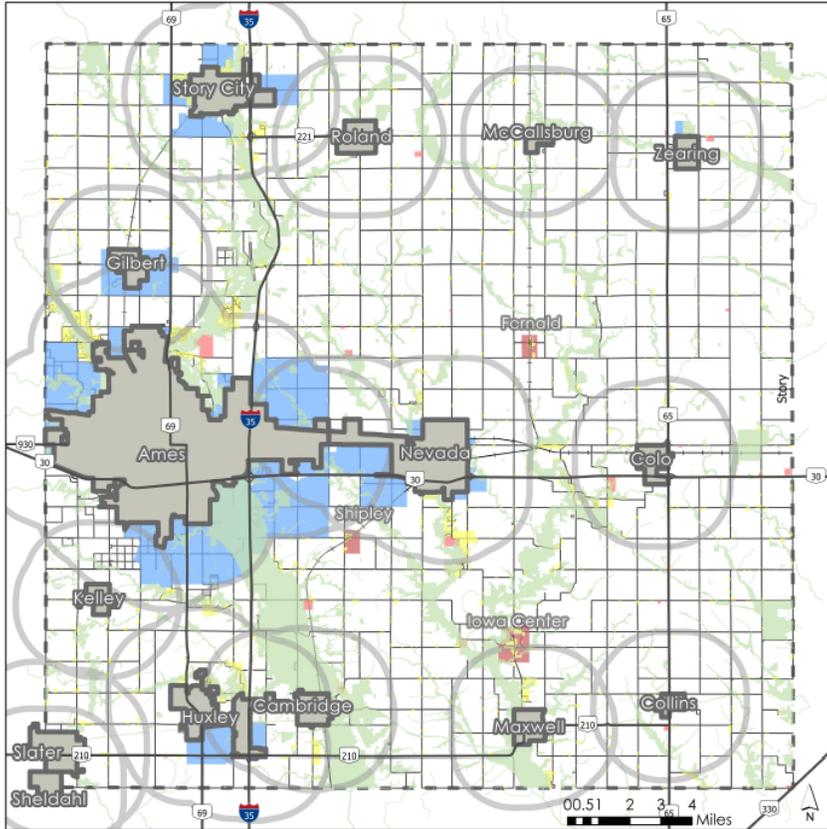
A full sized version of this map is included in Appendix D



Future Land Use

Story County Future Land Use Map

This map identifies the County's preferred land uses by major land use categories and is used as a basis for determining the proper zoning for all properties located within the unincorporated area of the County. Most of the land uses are consistent with how individual properties are currently being used and zoned; however, certain properties may not be consistent with the identified land use category or categories.



Legend

- City Boundaries
- Two Mile Buffer
- Roads
- Railroads
- Government Owned
- County Boundary
- Natural Resource Area
- Agricultural Conservation Area
- Rural Residential Area
- Rural Village Area
- Commercial-Industrial Area
- Urban Expansion Area

Land Use Designation Definitions

Natural Resource Area
Natural Areas, floodplains, green spaces, and parks help create open space linkages between the countryside and communities and make up this designation. The Future Land Use Map identifies certain natural features in the county in order to preserve unique habitats, natural or sensitive areas, as well as open and recreational spaces.

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These areas encompass large areas of highly valuable farmland, with farming and agricultural production as the primary activity.

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Commercial-Industrial Area
The Commercial-Industrial Area designation supports the long-term planning objective of accommodating future demand for types of commercial and industrial growth that may be best located in a rural setting outside of an urbanized area.

Urban Expansion Area
The Urban Expansion Area designation reflects those areas identified by individual communities as future growth areas. Development proposed in these areas are encouraged to be annexed into the neighboring city in order for an urban level of service to be provided. Proposed land use and regulations should comply with that city's plans and standards as appropriate.



A full sized version of this map is included in Appendix D